



June 1, 2020

CDU Students, Faculty and Staff:

I must say that as the parent of an African American son and an African American daughter, the events of this weekend resonate with me in the way they do with many of us. For we realize that our children could just as easily be victims if only because they “look like somebody” as the oft-used refrain goes. I, too, confess that my heart rate increases and my adrenaline levels rise whenever I see a law enforcement officer or vehicle and wonder if I will once again be singled out or stopped, or worse.....for something.

As we reflect on the seminal events of the past week, beginning with the Minneapolis murder of George Floyd, it is important to note that these events are part of a larger context that is what it all-too-often means to be Black and Brown in the United States. For what happened to Mr. Floyd is part of a context that includes the names of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, Tony McDade, and Atatiana Jefferson. The list goes on to include Oscar Grant, Tamir Rice, and many, many others – in fact, this list includes thousands upon thousands of names of Black men and women outrageously killed by law enforcement officers or armed vigilantes taking the law into their own hands.

Today, as hundreds of demonstrations occurred in scores of American cities over the weekend, there is another context as well for we mark the 99th anniversary of the Tulsa Massacre resulting in the deaths of approximately (we will never know for sure) 300 African Americans and the destruction of what was known as the “Black Wall Street” by a rampaging white mob. Indeed, violent death caused by nothing more than “living while black” is part of the legacy of what it means to be African American in the United States.

Los Angeles is no stranger to events like those of this weekend. As we know, our institution, Charles R. Drew University of Medicine and Science, is a product of this history as we were founded in 1966 in direct response to the Watts Rebellion of 1965, which was started by the abusive arrest of a Black man and ultimately resulted in 34 fatalities. The Watts Rebellion was preceded two decades earlier by the so-called “Zoot Suit Riots” of 1943 where Latino men were attacked in downtown Los Angeles and East LA by white American military personnel. Just over two decades after the Watts Rebellion, in 1992 Los Angeles again was witness to an urban uprising, what many people call the Rodney King Riots (after the notorious acquittal of the LAPD officers whose vicious beating of Mr. King was shared with the world for the first time by video) that I often refer to as the Latasha Harlins Revolt. 44 people died in 1992 including 10 directly killed by law enforcement officers. It seems that roughly every 2-3 decades, Los Angeles is re-visited by open uprising fighting against overt racism. Here we are again.

It is in this context that I am especially proud of CDU because of our institutional legacy and our institutional mission. For the words: social justice, health equity, and diversity are truly unique as they are rarely found among the mission statements of other higher educational institutions. More so than any other university that I

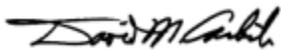
am aware of, CDU has spent decades fighting the very social injustice that leads to events like those of the past weekend and we will continue to do so. Although our niche is health care, our greater purpose is societal equity.

The events of this weekend carry an important message. Americans, especially younger Americans, are simply fed up to the point of action with the persistent and increasing inequity and overt hatred that more and more characterize American society. Americans, seeking change, are taking to the streets to oppose the lurching and bombastic negativism that has replaced an 8-year era of increasing hope for our country. To quote Kareem Abdul-Jabbar in this Sunday's LA Times, "What you are seeing is people pushed to the edge." Dr. Cornel West spoke to much the same issue this weekend saying that "We're living in a system that seems unable to reform itself." We have tasted optimism, idealism, and love for all our fellow human beings, and we want these values back. We are seeking a country where simply being a human being counts for more than being rich, where democracy is more important than autocracy, and where hope replaces hate.

It is important to note that, in my opinion, this weekend's events occurred despite the COVID-19 pandemic, not because of it. The fact that so many demonstrators were wearing face coverings indicated that they were fully aware of the potential to acquire COVID-19 by being in a large group but they were moved to take to the streets in spite of this risk.

I am especially heartened by all the faces I see on the news: not just those of African Americans, but those of Latinos, Asians, and white Americans all taking to the streets to protest the increasing brutality of American society. It is those faces that give me hope for the future because they not only remind me of the faces of my children, but they reflect all the faces of, the mission of, and the contributions of our institution, Charles R. Drew University of Medicine and Science.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "David M. Carlisle". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a prominent initial "D" and "C".

President David M. Carlisle, MD, PHD