

## MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT



### **What happens to a dream deferred?\***

June 1, 2020

Dear Sonoma State Community,

As I write this statement at the end of a tumultuous weekend in our country, my heart, like yours, weighs heavy with anger and sadness. Once again the dreams of so many black families are deferred due to blatant racism. In the immediate aftermath of George Floyd's death in Minneapolis, I could not watch the video footage of his murder. When I did, the pain was unbearable. I watched the footage with tears in my eyes and overwhelming nausea deep inside me. The agony he must have felt is almost impossible to contemplate. So, too, is the agony of his family and friends as they experience both the personal loss of their loved one and the public magnitude of his murder.

The raw cruelty of George Floyd's death amplifies the inexcusable injustice of so many other vicious, needless deaths of black men and women in our country. These deaths are not isolated incidents. They make up an insidious pattern of violence and brutality driven by pervasive, persistent racism.

As a Japanese-American woman whose parents and grandparents were incarcerated because of their race, I know intimately how racism and hate deform individuals, families, and communities. I know that the racism our African-American students, staff, faculty, alumni, friends, and community members experience is both relentless and deeply rooted through generations of our country's history. I know – with every beat of my own heart – that it's racism that must be ripped out and eradicated.

As we all struggle to grasp the enormity of George Floyd's murder and its impact, the protests that have electrified our country from coast to coast have illuminated, for me, the words of the poet and social justice activist Audre Lorde:

"There is a timbre of voice

that comes from not being heard  
and knowing  
you are not being heard  
noticed only  
by others  
not heard  
for the same reason."

To not be heard - nor seen - is a persistent phenomena that too many black people experience in this country. It is soul-diminishing. It is violent. It contributes to serious unhealthy outcomes, both physically and mentally. And, it is wrong.

We can see some progress made toward racial equity and justice by virtue of the caring communities that do exist, including at Sonoma State. But moments like this one demand an honest reckoning of what we will do – collectively, and as individuals – to make horrific deaths like that of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and so many others, be more than a moment or two of indignant outrage but catalysts for deep and lasting action.

We still stand at the beginning of the long, hard journey we must walk together, hand in hand, whatever our race, whatever our gender, whatever our sexual orientation, whatever our immigration status, whatever our religious beliefs. We must see the journey we face with clear eyes. We cannot look away. We cannot walk away. And, we cannot be silent.

As your university president, I ask you to join me in a shared commitment to making our country, our state, and our Noma Nation community equitable, inclusive, and just. In the days and months ahead, I ask you to bear witness to the pain and trauma of our African-American community members, to dedicate yourself to the difficult dialogues that lie before us and to taking the steps forward that we must take together – no matter how arduous, no matter how far. I ask you to commit to truly listening to the voices that have not been heard, and to engaging in the real, lasting change that those voices deserve.

Troubling times call for more than just words, they call for action. That is why I have asked Dr. Jerlena Griffin-Desta, Chief of Staff and AVP for Strategic Initiatives and Diversity, in her role as Chief Diversity Officer for our campus, to immediately begin working with our senior administrative and academic leadership, along with our student leaders, and the President's Advisory Council on Diversity, Equity, Campus Climate, and Inclusion to create a series of symposiums themed around racial injustices in the United

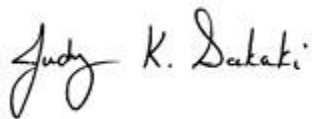
States. I also look to our faculty scholars to help illuminate the current research and promising practices that can help us engage more deeply during this difficult moment in our country.

As we begin a new day – a new week, and a new month – I also ask you to heed the words of another clear-eyed poet conscious of the imperative for racial equality. Gwendolyn Brooks, evoking the spirit of the great civil rights activist and artist Paul Robeson, once wrote the following:

“Warning, in music  
words devout and large,  
that we are each other’s  
harvest:  
we are each other’s  
business:  
we are each other’s  
magnitude and bond.”

We are indeed each other’s magnitude and bond in ensuring that no longer will the dreams of black people continue to be deferred due to racism and silent indifference. These bonds may be frayed, but we remain unified in our commitment to move forward toward justice. I look forward to your willingness, your participation, and your ideas. Our journey forward must begin now.

With a heavy heart that remains hopeful,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Judy K. Sakaki". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Judy K. Sakaki  
President

\*A reference to the opening line in Langston Hughes’ poem, “Harlem”