



April 21, 2021

Dear Campus Community,

In the words of my hero Martin Luther King Jr., *“True peace is not merely the absence of tension but the presence of justice.”*

The tension in the air has been palpable for weeks since the trial of Derek Chauvin began. And having endured the anger, disgust, anxiety and psychic stress of these many months since George Floyd’s murder and the subsequent trial, the guilty verdict in this case comes as a welcome relief to us all. After years of watching perpetrators of state sanctioned violence against people of color walk away without being found culpable or charged with a crime, this was a verdict that many of us had not expected, but are grateful for. I am also appreciative of the support and advocacy of CSU Chancellor Joseph I. Castro, whose statement can be found at: [Justice for George Floyd's Family | CSU \(calstate.edu\)](https://www.calstate.edu/justice-for-george-floyd). In no way is this jury’s judgement an indictment of all law enforcement and the brave men and women who run toward danger every day when it threatens our personal safety, security, and property. It is, however, a way to hold people accountable who use their status and authority to abuse citizens and abridge people’s rights.

From my vantage point as an African American university president, the Chauvin verdict leaves me with mixed feelings. First, I am sad that we have to celebrate an incident of judicial accountability, as if we shouldn’t expect this outcome in cases that are so blatantly clear. However, am I pleased that the guilty verdict was reached? I absolutely am. Yet I also recognize that two families have been torn apart; one because of George Floyd’s murder and the cruelty and inhumane treatment he suffered at the hands of the police in Minneapolis; the other because the Chauvin family will suffer given he forgot his oath and couldn’t see past the blinders of racial animus that so colored and distorted his view of Black people. There are no real winners in this drama, even in the momentary relief signaling that justice was done in this trial. A family is still left to grieve the loss of George Floyd, and a daughter is forever deprived of the rituals that fathers and daughters engage in as they make a lifetime of memories together.

Unlike so many people of African descent victimized through our nation’s history, from Emmett Till to four little girls in Birmingham, Alabama; from Fred Hampton to Rodney King; from Michael Brown to Eric Garner; from Amadou Diallo to Sandra Bland; from Tamir Rice to Philando Castile; from Breonna Taylor and even yesterday with the killing of Ma’Khia Bryant, who ironically was calling the police for help and was ultimately shot by them; at least George Floyd’s family will receive a modicum of justice for the pain they’ve endured. Yet, the fact that there is much more work to be done is a truism that frankly understates the problem. As long as the underlying ethos of racism and white supremacy is allowed to infect law enforcement agencies whose personnel operationalize their motto “to serve and protect” with scandalous inconsistency, true justice will remain an elusive pursuit for black, brown, indigenous brothers and sisters, and other poor people of this nation. As long as minor infractions that could be handled with a simple citation are confronted by police with the brutality of lethal force and barbaric control of people perceived to be a threat, then genuine justice will continue to be relegated to the bookshelves of aspirational ideals.

The vicious legacy of racism, bigotry, and white supremacy forces us to remain acutely aware that the murder of George Floyd was not an isolated incident. Even as lawyers were debating the facts of the Chauvin case, our nation was horrified once again by the unjustified killings of Daunte Wright and Adam Toledo. While we can take solace in the fact that Mr. Chauvin will be held accountable for his brutality and callous, depraved indifference for human life, we cannot become complacent in our battle against official malfeasance and state sanctioned violence masquerading as law enforcement. Like the late Fannie Lou Hamer, “I’m sick and tired of being sick and tired” at the constant denigration and disregard for the sanctity of our lives, and the constant vigilance we have to maintain when walking, jogging, driving, sleeping, or just plain living while Black is a burden we should not be obligated to carry.

Quoted above are the words of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., who reminds us that “True peace is not merely the absence of tension; it is the presence of justice.” So, while the streets of our nation may remain calm this week in the wake of this welcome verdict, let us not delude ourselves into believing this outcome represents true justice. George Floyd is still dead, and his family will continue to miss and grieve for him regardless of how many years Chauvin spends in prison. True justice should have intervened when Mr. Floyd was detained; true justice should have occurred when Daunte Wright was stopped; true justice should have ruled the moment when 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt. Caron Nazario was stopped by Virginia state police. True justice can only come when we put more intentionality behind creating an equitable society, and find a way to respect the dignity and humanity of all members of the human family, irrespective of their demographic composition. The continuing violence perpetrated against people of color must stop.

There are more painful days ahead, but I remain prayerfully optimistic that the “arc of the moral universe,” while long, occasionally bends towards justice. However, the weight of social activism will need to be applied to keep that arc from regressing back toward the mean of normality that embraces inequality, reinforces the privileges of a few, and denies too many people of their inalienable rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. I also believe that institutions like our own CSUDH can be an asset in helping to educate a more informed citizenry, challenging people to interrogate the biases and assumption they harbor, and doing our best to dissipate the profound ignorance that is too pervasive in this world. In this regard, I thank our faculty and staff for accepting these challenges as they manage our virtual and face-to-face classrooms, and appreciate the academic and co-curricular learning opportunities and campus programs that are available to help our students, staff, and faculty heighten their awareness, enhance their knowledge about culturally different people, and develop their skills and cultural competence. Many of these forums, however, require a listening ear, an ability to empathize and appreciate other points of view, and a commitment to respect and honor the free speech rights of all in our university community whose views may agree with or stand in sharp contrast to your own.

Before closing this missive, I want to acknowledge those in our community who may be struggling to manage their intellectual and emotional sensibilities during times like these. You need not do so alone. Reach out to a friend or peer; connect with your support groups, and use your networks to embrace the teachable moments of this tragedy and triumph with courage and compassion. If you find yourself needing support, a listening ear, or a vehicle to just engage in a cathartic release, let me encourage you to access the following resources:

[Employee Assistance Program \(EAP\)](#) and LifeMatters at (800) 367-7474 or visit [LifeMatters online](#) (password: DHtoros)  
[Student Psychological Services \(csudh.edu\)](#) 310-243-3818  
[Mervyn M. Dymally African American Political & Economic Institute \(csudh.edu\)](#)  
[Resources \(csudh.edu\)](#)

Rest assured that I will continue to work tirelessly to advocate for more fairness and justice that we all deserve. I ask the Toro Nation to join me in this effort as we create and sustain a more just and equitable society that embraces the authenticity of each of our human beingness.

Sincerely,



Thomas A. Parham, Ph.D.  
President

