



June 4, 2020

Dear Members of the UDSL Community:

Christian Cooper's experience in New York's Central Park and George Floyd's murder on the streets of Minneapolis present us all with sad reminders of both the ever-present threat and actuality of state-associated violence perpetrated against Black people and other communities of color. Perhaps it is this strange pandemically altered time, that has itself exposed deep ethnic disparity in our society, but never in my lifetime have two events encapsulated so profoundly, and for so many, our country's deep reservoir of racial pain.

Despite our COVID-imposed physical distance, now is the time for us to transcend that distance psychically and come together as a UDSL community. It is a time to come together because we are hurting, and we can find solace and healing in our support for one another. It is a time to come together because we are a multiethnic community, and our very act of coming together is itself a personal and powerful rebuke of the forces of racial hatred. And, it is a time to come together because we are a law school, and specifically we are a Marianist law school dedicated to the common good.

The threat to Christian Cooper and the murder of George Floyd were personal acts, but as demonstrated by the seeming endless loop of such *personal* acts—Ahmaud Arbery, John Crawford, Trayvon Martin, Eric Garner, Michael Brown, Sandra Bland, Tamir Rice, Alton Sterling, Philando Castile, Amadou Diallo, Botham Jean, Walter Scott, Oscar Grant, Aiyana Jones, Marquise Jones—there is an historical, social and legal context that is larger than the individual perpetrators of such acts. What could go more to the heart of our mission to explore justice as the aspirational essence of law, than an exploration of our society's most poignant injustices and what can be done about them?

In my call for us to come together, I am not Panglossian. Dealing with racial injustice is difficult. This is true even in times when we are not in the middle of a pandemic, a divisive presidential election, and when our cities are not being torn apart by spasms of violence.

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We all have different backgrounds and experiences, and there is no doubt that when we open deep racial wounds, pain and disagreement will rise to the surface. But, with the knowledge that what unites us is more profound than what divides us, that we have a caring community, and that with intention and resolve we can learn to listen to each other, I believe that the rewards of summoning the courage to ask the question, “how can we do right by our Black and other marginalized brothers and sisters” outweigh the risks.

If we can meet these times head on, painful as it may be, I believe that we will grow individually and as a community, and we will remember this time for what we did rather than for what we did not do. In this spirit, I met yesterday with Assistant Dean of Students Shannon Penn, Assistant Dean for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Julie Zink, and incoming Black American Law Students Association President Zion Savory to begin a discussion of how we can most sensitively begin a community discussion on racial violence in America. In the coming days we will be working with Balsa and then other student groups to formulate a way forward. If any of you have thoughts of your own on this initiative, please contact one of us. It is my hope that by openly and honestly confronting our racial past and present, we can help alter our racial future in a way that will enrich all of us.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'AS', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Andrew Strauss