



The UNIVERSITY of OKLAHOMA
College of Law

Dear Members of the OU Law Community:

“I am tired.” Simple, profound words that one of our students shared with us almost three months ago. The student was referencing the immediate but ongoing struggle of navigating studies and life within a racially charged context: one where words could feel as violent and harmful as actions, and in which those affected by those words were too often asked to explain why they hurt.

This was before we learned that emergency room technician Breonna Taylor was killed in her own home as police served a no-knock warrant while investigating an alleged drug offense, before unarmed Ahmaud Marquez Arbery was killed while jogging, before George Floyd was killed at the knee of a police officer investigating a counterfeit twenty-dollar bill. We should all be tired, and worse. We should be horrified. As lawyers, we learn to lift up our voices in protest and pleading; this is our constitutional right, this is part of that which our education trains us to do. But we can also learn to listen harder, more carefully, and well. And after we listen, we can act to engage the sort of structural and systemic change that is critical if our nation is to deserve the beautiful words that we claim for ourselves. Racism – and for that matter, discrimination of any kind – cannot be tolerated and must be condemned. As lawyers, we swear an oath to defend and uphold the Constitution. The 14th Amendment guarantees everyone equal protection under the law. We support the peaceful protestors exercising their constitutional rights; we mourn for George Floyd and the many others whose rights and lives have been treated with callous disregard. Mr. Floyd’s words were as simple yet powerful as those of our student. He said “I can’t breathe.” We owe to Mr. Floyd and countless others to listen with understanding and to have the courage to act, whether through bold steps or in the everyday.

All are welcome to join our bi-weekly open discussion between COL deans and all students tomorrow morning at 9:00. Tomorrow’s topic is “A Conversation on Race and Change.” On Friday, the Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion will host a dialogue over Exploring the Impact of Racialized Violence from 12:00-1:30 pm. That panel, which includes speakers from the community, will conclude with means through which to move forward individually and collectively in combating racialized violence. These are just the most immediate steps.

Last March, Ms. Lynne Jackson and Mr. Charlie Taney reminded us that what happens to others happens to all. If so, we owe change not only to each other, but to ourselves and to all who come after.

Sincerely,

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Interim Dean and Professor
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