



Lincoln Memorial University Duncan School of Law

Juneteenth Faculty Message to Students

June 19, 2020

The LMU Law School faculty has collectively written and unanimously approved the message below for our students:

On June 19, 1865—more than two years after President Abraham Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation—enslaved men and women in Texas learned that they were free. As we commemorate Juneteenth this year, we are charged with recognizing the profound and lasting effects of institutionalized racism.

Only three weeks ago, George Floyd was accused of a crime. He was not given an arraignment, not given a probable cause hearing, not given an attorney to represent him, not given the opportunity to confront his accusers, not given a trial before an impartial jury, not given a right to appeal his case, and not given any form of due process. Instead, George Floyd was killed in a Minneapolis street after being pinned to the ground by four police officers. One of the officers kept his knee on George Floyd's neck for eight minutes and forty-six seconds as Mr. Floyd called out for his mother and told the officers that he could not breathe.

As horrific as the failure of this nation's criminal justice system was in the case of Mr. Floyd, we know that he was just one of many such victims whose names we have learned in our lifetimes. Moreover, he was just one of the countless and often nameless victims of racial violence and white supremacy that stretches throughout this nation's history in an unbroken chain from 1619 to today.

When attorneys are licensed, they take an oath to affirm and support the United States Constitution. We would be forsaking that oath if we were to stay silent any longer and ignore the systemic and institutional biases that deny some their fundamental rights and liberties. This is a denial made for no other reason than the color of their skin. As attorneys, we are also well aware that when the law fails anyone, the specters of self-help and violence are not far behind. That is why

we have the heightened responsibility to work to enact significant and meaningful reforms to our criminal justice system.

As educators, our responsibility begins with you, our students. As first steps toward doing our own part, we commit to educating ourselves, our students, and our community by:

- Developing a law school course exploring critical race theory;
- Working with local organizations that serve communities of color to offer “know your rights” presentations and presentations on legal issues that have historically negatively affected people of color;
- Further educating our faculty and staff on issues of race and anti-racism;
- Offering continuing legal education opportunities to educate attorneys, students, and ourselves on the effects of systemic racism in the law in a variety of substantive legal areas;
- Including implicit bias training in our orientation program; and
- Continue working with the Beck Cultural Exchange Center to secure the posthumous exoneration of Maurice Mays.

In the meantime, for those of you who see yourselves or someone you love in George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, or any of the other countless victims of racial violence, know that we see and hear your anger and grief. Your lives matter. And for those of you who are frightened by civil unrest and the prospect of what seems like radical change, we see and hear you as well. We understand your fear because, as James Baldwin said, “[a]ny upheaval in the universe is terrifying because it so profoundly attacks one’s sense of one’s own reality.” But we would remind you of the oath you will one day take as an attorney. Our Constitution seeks to establish a more perfect Union. That task was not completed in 1788 or 1865 or 1965. Rather, it is our ongoing responsibility to strive toward that ideal.