

Acknowledging the long history of racism and rejecting toxic government leadership

We were shocked, but not surprised, by the horrific hate-driven violence in Charlottesville and the motivations behind it. We reject hatred, racism, white supremacy, and white nationalism. Sadly, the violence and unrest perpetrated this weekend reminds us that what happened in Charlottesville could happen at any moment anywhere in the United States. Every city, every community in our nation is vulnerable as we are living at a time when hate groups, who have a long history of discriminatory policies on their side, have been emboldened by the divisive words and inactions of political leaders whose responsibility is to ensure justice and safety for all—including communities of color and Native American communities, people who are LGBTQ+, low-income communities and people living in poverty, people of various faiths, and immigrants. Both the hate and the devastating outcomes of the ‘Unite the Right’ rally are politically unacceptable and deeply personal to all of us.

A University of Virginia (UVA) student, the daughter of our staff member, shared the following:

I would like to start this post off by thanking the friends, family and loved ones that reached out to me and my parents and sent thoughts and prayers about the violence and racism that occurred in Charlottesville. I was heartbroken, shocked, angered, and even confused by the events that occurred this weekend. To see such senseless acts of hate and violence in the city and at the University I call home was chilling. As I return back to school I return with pride and a reinvigorated desire to be a part of the dialogue and passion for social justice. I have been blessed with two amazing years at UVA, blessed with a strong Black community, brilliant teachers and minds surrounding me, and a University that I am proud to say I attend. That being said, I am very aware of the racism that has existed and does exist on my grounds and in its neighboring communities. My peers, my University, and I are in the unique position of having national attention placed on us and we have the opportunity to spark national discussion and be a part of history. Remember that "if you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor." In this case, the oppressor is very clearly the white supremacists that do not believe in equity, equality, and justice for all people no matter their race. How we proceed in acknowledging and addressing these acts rooted in racism and hate will determine who we are as people, a University, city, and as a nation. My hope is that this past weekend will be a catalyst for conversations and actions revolving around social justice. I pray for safety, progress, and peace on my grounds and throughout the nation. #hoosagainsthate #prayforcharlottesville

– Kendall Johnson, UVA Class ‘19

We reject the physical violence that happened in Charlottesville, and the latent violence that bubbles beneath the surface daily through micro-aggressions and institutional decisions.

Across the United States, local, state, and federal systems continue to fail communities, particularly communities of color, in ways that are preventable. From the lead crises in Flint, Michigan and in Oakland's Fruitvale neighborhood as well as water contamination in other cities, to repeated acts of police violence and brutality witnessed around the country, to the aftermath of hurricanes Katrina and Sandy, to communities torn apart by immigration raids, to anti-LGBTQ military policies, we are exacerbating and failing to undo violence in many forms.

As a starting point, we must acknowledge the historical and current transgressions and intentionally constructed policies and practices that limit opportunity and create preventable trauma and exclusion for many in this country. Charlottesville is an important reminder that as long as we remain averse to addressing and reversing the long history of racism and racial violence in the United States, we empower those who work to maintain those beliefs and way of life. Until we are willing to have honest acknowledgment, dialogue, and to work together towards policies and solutions that ensure justice for all, there can never be healing and progress. This approach—reconciliation—has advanced efforts of healing in South Africa and other places, and should be adopted and undertaken in the United States so that we can finally come to terms with many of our offenses as a nation from its inception. We must change the conditions that lead to misplaced hatred as well as the conditions that have led to oppression and inequality.

We applaud the positive changes and the important leadership from so many of our visionary leaders, friends, and colleagues, struggling against and undoing inequity. These voices will not be silenced. For many of us, Charlottesville only furthers our commitment and resolve.

Politicians across the spectrum decried the injustice and the lack of an adequate response from the President. The nation's capital must present a renewed commitment to equity and justice, and must, ***without delay, discharge the voices of white supremacy that are part of the current administration.***

We stand among those who insist on justice, compassion, and truth. As Martin Luther King Jr. said, "The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice." We affirm that it bends most when we all stand together and insist on it. And we commit to that.

If not us, then who? If not now, then when?