

A Message from the Commission on History, Race, and a Way Forward

As members of UNC's Commission on History, Race, and a Way Forward, we condemn the death of George Floyd in police custody and the deeper structures of white supremacy and racial injustice that set the conditions for such acts of violence. We recognize that those same structures perpetuate inequities on our campus and in the broader community in which UNC is situated. The commission's charge – to reckon with the past in order to move forward – compels us towards actions that expose and dismantle the legacies of violence and advance restorative justice. More than half a century ago, civil rights and human rights activist Ella Baker addressed the challenge that remains before us today. “Until the killing of black men, black mothers' sons, becomes as important to the rest of the country as the killing of a white mother's son,” she declared, “we who believe in freedom cannot rest.”

We are also mindful of words spoken by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in 1967, as he sought to rally people of conscience in opposition to the entangled evils of racism, poverty, and militarism. King urged the nation to confront the “fierce urgency of now.” “We must move past indecision to action,” he warned. “If we do not act, we shall surely be dragged down into the long, dark, and shameful corridors of time reserved for those who possess power without compassion, might without morality, and strength without sight.”

Those words call to us in this moment of anger, pain, and grief. The COVID-19 pandemic has laid bare the chronic injustices that infect our politics and economy. And the killings of Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, and George Floyd are but the latest expressions of racist violence that stretches back for centuries to the dispossession of Native peoples and transport of the first enslaved Africans to the colony of Virginia.

This is our history, but it need not be our future. In times of crisis, there is also opportunity – opportunity to create a new nation that is defined by the radical love that respects the dignity of all humanity and binds us together in the struggle for justice.

In the spirit of Ella Baker, we stand strong in our commitment to carrying that project forward on our campus and in the communities where we live and work. The task will be painful and unsettling; it will require unflinching honesty in acknowledging long-silenced truths. But what other way is there to redress inequity and to fulfill our responsibility as the “people's university”? There is no easy way out. “The choice is ours,” King said, “and though we might prefer it otherwise, we must choose in this crucial moment of human history.”

Indeed, we must. Together, we can light a path toward reconciliation, healing, and repair.

On behalf of the [commission](#):

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