



College of Arts and Sciences

June 8, 2020

Dear CAS Faculty and Staff Colleagues,

Like all of you, I am deeply shocked and saddened by the events of the past few weeks and have been battling to find words worthy of the wound left by the deaths of George Floyd and other Black Americans at the hands of police officers sworn to serve and protect.

For me personally, growing up with one foot in rural Montana and the other in suburban New York City, many of the divisions besetting American society were visible but not tangible. As a young man, I sought insight into the Black experience in America in the writings of thought-leaders such as Martin Luther King Jr., Nella Larsen, Ralph Ellison, Toni Morrison, W.E.B. Dubois, and Booker T.

Washington. These voices laid bare the daily struggles faced by Black Americans in this country, and showcased the incredible courage and resilience required to live under such daunting circumstances.

These past several days, rereading passages by these writers that I had underlined years ago moved me to tears more than once: tears of pain for the suffering that continues to this day in communities of color and also tears of hope that we as a nation can summon the courage and resilience and compassion necessary to heal.

In his essay "What These Children Are Like," Ralph Ellison wrote "one of the characteristics of a healthy society is its ability to rationalize

and contain social chaos. It is the steady filtering of diverse types and diverse cultural influences that keeps us a healthy and growing nation." Right now the chaos does not feel contained and the nation does not feel healthy. And many are wondering how to help, how to spur change, how to move forward.

"Education," Ellison also wrote, "is all a matter of building bridges." In my role as dean, I talk often about creating bridges across disciplines and the power of reaching across a chasm and seeing things from a new perspective. Right now our country needs bridges. I believe that we as educators have both the duty and the honor of building them.

To be sure, building cultural bridges will take effort and intention, especially during the Covid-19 health crisis that turned our lives upside down in March. You have already been called upon to meet the needs of family and neighbors, students and colleagues, community and country. I see the caring in your faces and the dedication in your work. I believe in you and stand with you.

Together, we are the College of Arts and Sciences. We encourage an openness to unfamiliar ideas and a willingness to collaborate across boundaries, and we share commitment to lifelong learning. Together and steadfast, we will continue working to make this world a better, fairer, and more beautiful place for everyone.

Thank you,

Matthew Jockers

Dean

