

June 3, 2020

*Let America be the dream the dreamers dreamed-  
Let it be that great strong land of love  
Where never kings connive nor tyrants scheme  
That any man be crushed by one above.*

– Langston Hughes, a stanza from *Let America Be America Again*

Dear Students, Faculty, Staff, and Alumni of the School of Arts and Sciences,

George Floyd was crushed by one above. His body, his life, and his liberty were crushed by officers of the law. America is not yet the dream the dreamers dreamed it could be.

His death sparked furious outrage that is coursing through our nation's cities and towns. His death evokes despair in us, knowing that this injustice is not an isolated event. Hot outrage mixed with cold despair creates a sense of disgust in us, and eventually just exhaustion. This is not the dream the dreamers dreamed it could be.

Universities, like our own, are not apart from society. We are embedded in society and so subject, in some measure, to all the strengths, weaknesses, glories, blots and deficits we see around us. Several years ago, Rutgers began a deep historical examination of its roots in the slave trade. This is the *Scarlet and Black Project*, a principal lesson of which is not to bury the past in silence but rather to understand the past and embrace it with both courage and humility.

We must not bury the present in silence either. Many of our students, faculty, staff, and alumni of color experience racism at Rutgers as a daily fact of life. It is a privilege not to be so subjected but the lack of direct personal experience of racism doesn't mean it doesn't exist. Ask any chemist, astronomer, or mathematician and they will tell you that molecules exist, black holes exist and so do theorems, even though you can't see them or touch them.

In the spirit of courage and humility I say this is a deeply uncomfortable fact. In the same spirit I say the discomfort one feels in acknowledging the fact is less painful than continuing to pretend it doesn't exist. And in that spirit I say let us use that discomfort as energy to drive ourselves and our university toward greater understanding, cooperation and change.

It's up to us to make America the dream the dreamers dreamed. If not us, then who?

Sincerely,  
  
Peter March