

Dear Students, Staff, and Faculty:

We begin the second week of the semester on August 28, 2023 – 60 years to the day when 250,000 people rallied on the National Mall for the March on Washington of 1963. I discovered only recently that perhaps the most memorable words of Dr. Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" address were not included in his prepared remarks that day. While he was delivering what has become "one of the most famous orations of the civil rights movement—and of human history" (History.com Editors, 2023, MLK's "I Have a Dream" section, para. 1), gospel singer Mahalia Jackson encouraged him to include it, calling out from where she was standing on stage, "Tell 'em about the dream, Martin, tell 'em about the dream!" (para. 3). King's extemporaneous addition in that moment of a vision he had shared in previous speeches captured the spirit of the Civil Rights Movement and has rallied the fight for racial and economic justice ever since.

I sat with Dr. King's message on Saturday, shortly after learning of the tragic news that day from Jacksonville, Florida, that an avowed white supremacist had murdered Angela Michelle Carr, Anolt Joseph (AJ) Laguerre, Jr., and Jerrald Galleon – three people targeted and killed not randomly, but because they are Black (Sforza, 2023; Ward & Zengerle, 2023). This vicious enactment of hate speech occurred 59 years after the Civil Rights Act became law and on the same day that tens of thousands gathered in D.C. to commemorate the original March on Washington (Olson, 2023).

Racially motivated, supremacy-aggrieved violence followed that march as well, of course. The 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama was bombed two weeks later, killing four Black children – Addie Mae Collins, Cynthia Wesley, Carole Robertson, and Carole Denise McNair (History.com Editors, 2020); and nonviolent protesters attempting to cross the Edmund Pettis Bridge – Pettis himself ironically having been a two-term U.S. senator, Confederate general, and Grand Dragon of the Alabama Ku Klux Klan (Peeples, 2015) – were brutally beaten by state troopers and local police (Peeples, 2015; Wallenfeldt, 2023).

Sixty years separate these outrages of domestic terrorism, which occur today in California as well as in Florida, Alabama, and every other part of the country.

The Jacksonville gunman on Saturday had first tried, unsuccessfully, to enter Edward Waters University, a Historically Black College or University (HBCU). It is impossible for me to fully grasp and appreciate what the students, staff, faculty, and administrators of that campus are going through today, knowing they had

been the initial targets of the attack over the weekend. I am both furious and filled with grief with and for them. I am also determined to act. I will recommit, again and again, to doing better in serving our campus and our region through our Inclusive Excellence Action Plan, our new Strategic Directions Framework (not yet finalized – feedback and revision opportunities coming soon), and the One Health approach through the next decade and beyond that I shared in my Convocation Address of August 17.

Our work at CSUCI is about so many different things – but among first things, it is about ensuring that all of us – people of every color; of every sex, gender, and sexual orientation; of every kind of ability and disability; of every faith and of no particular faith – feel seen, heard, and valued here, explicitly including members of the dominant culture in each of these identity categories. All of us are needed to make the world better and more just for all; all of us need the support and the courage to be able to say or do the unpopular and difficult thing when necessary, to hold fast against hatred and intolerance whenever and wherever they are trying to take hold.

In speaking to the quarter-million allies in the fight for justice on the National Mall in 1963, Dr. King said, "We have also come to this hallowed spot to remind America of the fierce urgency of now. This is no time to engage in the luxury of cooling off or to take the tranquilizing drug of gradualism. Now is the time to make real the promises of democracy."

Six decades later, in the "fierce urgency of now" that is the start of the 2023-24 academic year, I am fueled anew with gratitude for the work that I do and that I am honored to do every day, alongside each of you with whom I share connection and community at CSUCI. Let's throw ourselves into this year, solid in the knowledge that what we do here can help our corner of the world to be a better place, where we can work together toward health and wellness in every way.

Sincerely,

Richard Yao

President

References

History.com Editors. (2023, Jan. 10). March on Washington. History. Retrieved from https://www.history.com/topics/black-history/march-on-washington

History.com Editors. (2020, Sept. 14). Four Black schoolgirls killed in Birmingham church bombing. History. Retrieved from https://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/four-black-schoolgirls-killed-in-birmingham

Olson, E. (2023, Aug. 26). Thousands march to mark the 60th anniversary of MLK's "I have a dream" speech. NPR. Retrieved from https://www.npr.org/2023/08/26/1196190910/march-on-washington-mlk-dream-speech-anniversary

Peeples, M. (2015, March 5). The racist history behind the iconic Selma bridge. NPR. Retrieved from https://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2015/03/05/391041989/the-racist-history-behind-the-iconic-selma-bridge

Sforza, L. (2023, Aug. 27). What to know about the racially motivated shooting in Jacksonville. The Hill. Retrieved from https://thehill.com/homenews/state-watch/4173922-what-to-know-about-the-racially-motivated-shooting-in-jacksonville/

Wallenfeldt, J. (2023, July 21). Selma march. Britannica. Retrieved from https://www.britannica.com/event/Selma-March

Ward, J. and Zengerle, P. (2023, Aug. 27). Gunman kills three, himself, in racially motivated shooting. Reuters. Retrieved from https://www.reuters.com/world/us/mayor-number-fatalities-jacksonville-florida-shooting-media-2023-08-26/



CSU Channel Islands

Digital Privacy Statement

View as web page

Office of the President • CSU Channel Islands (CSUCI)
One University Drive, University Hall
Camarillo CA 93012-8599
Office: 805-437-8410