

PRESIDENT'S PERSPECTIVE

Juneteenth challenges us to come to terms with history, and recommit to the principles of equality at the heart of OU's diversity, equity and inclusion policies

We can no longer accept our collective amnesia when it comes to the ignominious history of racism in America.

Weeks of protests in response to the brutal death of George Floyd and the recent killing of Rayshard Brooks make clear the deep wounds and racial divisions in our country transcend the current climate of indignation, and are rooted in generations of African Americans' suffering and disillusionment.

Today, Juneteenth, is a day that commemorates the end of slavery, 155 years after the Civil War. It is also known as Freedom Day and Liberation Day, an observance of the day in 1865 when federal orders were read in Galveston, Texas proclaiming all enslaved persons in the state were freed. To date, Juneteenth is recognized as a state holiday or special day of observance in 47 states.

For those of us in higher education who believe history provides a prologue to future behavior and events, Juneteenth is a day to reflect on why we – as a country, university and individually – have not yet fully come to grips with the immorality and crimes against humanity woven into the fabric of the nation.

As a country that honors a constitution based on equality, justice and the pursuit of happiness, Juneteenth must be a day when we commit to taking a monumental step in coming to term with our history of discrimination and confronting the infamous history of police harassment and violence perpetuated against the African American community.

That more private companies are recognizing Juneteenth as a holiday is a step in the right direction. But there can be no mistaking a positive step for building the momentum needed to sustain a movement of social change and moral reawakening.

Today, we, at Oakland University in the spirit of Juneteenth, reflect on the actions we are taking to make sure the university is an open, non-discriminatory learning community that is diverse, equitable and inclusive. Our focus is on accountability and actions that lead to measurable results.

These results include:

- Increasing representation of women and underrepresented students, staff and faculty
- Closing the achievement gap between majority and minority students
- Increasing representation of international students, faculty and staff
- Improving underrepresented minority 6-year graduation rates
- Enacting campus-wide unconscious bias training
- Promoting a Diversity Pledge taken by campus community
- Hiring of Diversity Fellow, who served for two years, and is on a tenure track position
- Establishment of the Leadership Academy, which received 2019 AASCU Excellence and Innovation Award for Leadership Development and Diversity

The incendiary spark ignited after eight minutes and forty-six seconds of watching George Floyd plead for his life is akin to holding up the proverbial mirror to American society. The reflection provokes a compelling and disturbing question: How can this happen in America?

Juneteenth provides a day of reflection to examine our society to find answers.

It's not enough to learn the lessons of history. It's time to do something about it.

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