



A Message from University of Kentucky
PRESIDENT ELI CAPILOUTO

“History is not the past. It is the present. We carry our history with us. We are our history.” – James Baldwin

Dear Campus Community,

We are our history.

The reckoning we now confront as a country cannot be for one moment or one semester. We must, necessarily, carry it with us always – as both burden and reminder, as collective grief and motivation.

One of those heartbreaking reminders of our ever-present history is our former student, Breonna Taylor. Her death – and the aftermath of it – is a tragedy. Unfortunately, tragedy does not capture the sense of loss and anger, weariness and cynicism so many of us feel right now.

Many of us, I know, are left with the feeling that no matter how much we try, we cannot possibly understand what our neighbors and friends of color are experiencing – each day – even as we now have seen the images repeatedly flashed on screens large and small.

I can try to picture what it means when colleagues tell me they are consumed with fear when their children leave home to run an errand. I can try to grasp the worry friends say they feel when a loved one departs for a simple jog.

However, I cannot really ever understand. Yet, I can listen. I can care. And I can act.

How Breonna’s tragic death is addressed as a matter of law is not something I, or anyone on our campus, can control or ordain. What we *can* control is how we respond as a community. What we *can* determine is the sense of moral clarity, intellectual focus and urgent commitment we bring to ensuring it never happens again.

We can provide spaces to gather and grieve, to discuss and dream. Our students are doing that, utilizing our MLK Center as a place to reflect, to share and process this moment. It is a small step, but a necessary one. Sharing ideas, after all, is how we always begin.

We have made our counseling center available to students, who we know will have questions and harbor pain during this time. [You can go here for information on services](#), or call 858-257-8701, for more instructions.

And we can also bring to this moment the ability to marshal tremendous intellectual capacity, across an array of disciplines, to understand our history and summon ideas and reforms that might address the systemic, systematic racism that brought us here.

Our own police department has been part of this process already. The department recently used an outside facilitator for anti-racism training to explore how to best confront the biases we all share. Our department also is exploring still other ways to be part of sustainable solutions for the future. Our senior administrative team and academic leadership also took part in anti-racism training this week as a start to what we know must be long efforts to create change within our campus culture.

A number of students, staff and faculty are considering how to carry forward the conversations and ideas for policy reforms and programs. Can we reimagine what a new judicial and legal system, founded on anti-racist ideas, looks like? How might we consider reforms that open wider the doors to capital and support entrepreneurship and business creation? Can access to health care and outcomes of that care be more open and equitable?

Racism is not simply our shared and tortured past. It is our present. Believing otherwise is neither realistic nor honest. And we will carry it with us, even as we work each day to erase its stain and undo its damage.

But our blighted baggage does not have to be our future. What seems inevitable today does not have to persist to tomorrow. As an institution, we were founded on the idea that our past – while imperfect and painfully persisting as our present – can include a brighter and more just future.

We must resist the disheartening temptation to be bound by an unwillingness to imagine. We carry our history with us. We can, though, commit to the idea that history should inform – not limit – our future. In that sense, perhaps, history is giving us a chance to change.

We may not be able to ever truly understand. But we can listen. We can care. And we must act.

Eli Capilouto
President