

ALL UNIVERSITY MESSAGE

Good afternoon Lobo family -

The last twelve months have fundamentally altered us as a nation. Even as we have worked to adapt to the challenges of living under a global pandemic, every passing day seems to bring yet another image, another story, another name, another town — Breonna Taylor, George Floyd, Daunte Wright...Atlanta, Kenosha, Portland — that changes the way we think and talk about race, policing, public demonstration, and social justice. Whether it is a rise in Anti-Blackness or an increase in bigotry and violence against Asian Americans, transgender/gender nonconforming, women, or other historically disadvantaged and disenfranchised communities, we have reached a pivotal crossroads in our national identity—a vital moment for reflection, certainly, but also an opportunity for action.

Now, as we wait for the verdict coming later this afternoon in the Minneapolis trial of the police officer charged with the murder of George Floyd, I recognize that the trial itself has been deeply challenging and traumatic for many, especially those in our Black community. I know there is a very real emotional cost that comes from bearing witness to the heart-wrenching testimony and deeply distressing evidence. For many of us, this trial represents a demand for accountability, equity and profound cultural change--a demand for justice and humanity.

It is a time for reckoning—a time for change informed by our own lived experiences and those shared by so many Americans. I was at Florida State University in 2012 when Trayvon Martin, an unarmed Black teen, was shot and killed in Sanford, FL. Nearly three years later, I was at the University of Missouri - Columbia in the wake of the death of Michael Brown, an 18-year-old Black man who was killed by a white police officer in Ferguson, MO. I witnessed first-hand the ways in which their tragic deaths sparked a national debate about racism and the systemic oppression of Black Americans. That spark has turned into a flame that has not only grown brighter, shining a light on social and racial injustice in our communities, but one that refuses to be put out by indifference, intolerance or injustice. Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown, George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Tamir Rice, Ahmaud Arbery, Daunte Wright. We say their names because they matter - because Black lives matter.

Across our campus, I have heard from students, faculty, and staff who are scared and angry, or despair that justice may never be done—not in this case, nor ever. I, too, am haunted by the images I've seen and the stories I've read; I share your sense of urgency. Bigotry, hatred and violence will never be tolerated at The University of New Mexico, nor in the Lobo community at large. Still, I also acknowledge that much work remains to be done as a university, a community, a state, and a nation.



April 20, 2021

For over 130 years, we at The University of New Mexico have cherished our differences and found a unique strength and unity in our diversity. We strive daily to create a culture where innovation and knowledge know no boundaries. But we also know there is no such thing as curiosity without compassion; our concern for our fellow citizens is at the root of who we are as a university, and as human beings. We, therefore, must work every day to ensure our university community remains one of support, respect, strength and safety; a place where ideas can be freely and openly discussed and debated; and where voices can be raised in peaceful protest, free from violence or intimidation. As The University for New Mexico, with our deep roots in communities around the state, we understand that we are uniquely positioned to lead these discussions, ask the difficult questions, and ultimately be an agent for institutional, cultural, and societal change.

I am proud of the work we've done over the last year to lead this fundamental shift in thinking. The Division for Equity and Inclusion, led by Dr. Assata Zerai, has done exceptional work through scholarship and engagement, from providing a forum for the discussion of combatting anti-Blackness and community policing and designing a robust plan for enhancing faculty diversity and inclusion at UNM to the current [Racial & Intersectional Microaggressions \(RIMA\) survey](#). We have also taken the time to reflect on and tell the stories of our community through an [educational racism series](#). We haven't always gotten it right; despite our best intentions, we realize that sometimes we've failed to achieve our intended result. But we will continue to grow and learn — but more importantly, we will cultivate real and lasting changes necessary for a more equitable and accepting society.

We take pride in supporting our community—but we are also always constantly striving to do better, and above all, to do what is right. In anticipation of a verdict that could come at any time, I encourage the Lobo community to respond with respect and civility, as well as with honesty and passion. If you or someone you know is in need of support, please consider accessing the mental well-being [resources](#) available to you at UNM, to take care of yourselves and each other. We are also planning opportunities for the members of the Lobo community to make their voices heard and look forward to working together to make The University of New Mexico a safe and supportive community where all are welcome to learn, work, live, and thrive. This conversation is far from over.

Garnett S. Stokes
President

