



## Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Statement in the Wake of George Floyd's Murder

The murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis is just the most recent act of anti-Black violence that is rooted in a centuries-long American history of abuse of Black bodies. Beginning with the 17<sup>th</sup> century Atlantic slave trade, continuing through nearly 250 years of chattel slavery, more than a century of epidemic-level vigilante lynching, and more recently in the 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> century, a decades long pattern of sanctioned police murders of unarmed Black people, the dehumanization and devaluing of Black bodies has sadly been at the center of the American experience. This long history has unfortunately progressed in parallel with a robust collective amnesia that has conveniently sifted out all the facts of trauma and repression and replaced them with a confident national image of freedom, equality and prosperity.

In this context, it is remarkable that George Floyd's murder at the hands of police has appeared to have once again awakened the nation to the fact that this murder is connected to a much deeper history. It is difficult to know exactly why this apparent awakening has happened at this moment. Some have pointed to the vivid video images of the lynching, but there has been lots of video footage captured of previous, equally egregious acts. Others have pointed to the added experience of suffering that has accompanied the novel coronavirus pandemic. It's impossible to know for sure if that is the prime cause.

At the same time, we have to be cautious about concluding that we are on the edge of any true reckoning, or a new era of racial justice, reconciliation and healing. We have had similar moments of recognition in our shared past. Our country's tendency to avoid dealing with the painful parts of its history should serve as a warning that if those of us who live and work in America don't seize the moment to catalyze a genuine opportunity to work towards the achievement of substantive change, the time will pass, with a return, once again, to the status quo.

We also have to come to terms with the fact that institutions of higher education are hardly immune from the spiritual, psychological and moral ills of the culture at large, as pointed out eloquently in Francie Diep's [op-ed](#) in a recent edition of the *Chronicle of Higher Education*. The University of Denver is no exception. Despite much of the hard work we've engaged in over a number of years to build a culture that is welcoming, equitable, and respectful of every individual, we know that there are many members of our campus community – students, staff, and faculty – who feel unwelcomed, excluded, and targeted. So we are called to double down on our work, and to sustain it into the infinite future.

ODEI will of course continue our role as consultants on a wide variety of diversity, equity and inclusion issues, including recruiting, staff and faculty development, inclusive pedagogy, curricular reform and development, and campus climate issues. But in addition, we are building a repository of resources, events, and public statements that are emerging throughout the

campus community, so that we can collectively maximize the impact of currently fragmented efforts across the campus.

We are calling on administrative and academic units across campus to let us know exactly what they are doing to contribute to our collective healing and transformation. We will support as we are able those initiatives, and provide cross-campus as well as community engaged connection. In addition to the expanded work we are initiating from our office, we will post information about other campus initiatives on our [website](#), which will be continually updated.

So, while we continue to experience a range of emotions – rage, grief, sadness, despair, fear – in the wake of George Floyd’s murder, we will turn crisis into action, and we will deepen our commitment to creating a DU culture that we have always aspired to. We are encouraged by the words of our brother, friend and mentor Vincent Harding, a fierce warrior for justice who frequently reminded us that he was “[a citizen of a country that does not yet exist](#).” What he meant was that we are all tasked to not only dream about the kind of country (and campus) we want to live in, but we are the ones who have to bring it into being.