

So with that, I would like to start with a recommendation, or with a reflection.

You know, you will see the photo here that will somewhat summarize my reflective points for today, but it's something that I found recently and I found very, very insightful, very reflective for me.

As I was reflecting on the activities that were happening, especially on Monday when the verdict came down in the Derek Chauvin case in Minneapolis, and that's part of what my reflection is going to be today with you and it has to do with conversations that we and I had with colleagues and students up until Monday afternoon, and conversations that I have had with many of you, my colleagues and students since Monday afternoon.

You know, over the past three days, I like you have been watching and reading social media and news reports and listening to so many of you who in recent weeks had to relive the events surrounding the murder of George Floyd and then on Monday, learning of the verdict of Derek, Derek Chauvin.

Justice has been met, but as so many of us know it cannot erase the decades and centuries of the Injustices to people of color and most importantly, our black colleagues and their ancestors, the people who really built this country.

However, now it is Thursday and it is three days or 72 hours since the verdict and I don't know about you, but I am seeing less news, I'm experiencing less conversation about the 330 days we all endured from the murder to the verdict.

You know, I am a person who at times can be uncomfortable with silence. I am afraid, deeply afraid of the silence that is possibly returning and replacing the focus and feelings of what happened to Mr. Floyd and over the past several weeks the killing of a young child, a young adult and other people of color in Atlanta, Chicago and again in Minneapolis.

In fact, do you know that five weeks ago on March 13, 2021, we memorialized the first year anniversary of the murder of a university student in Kentucky, Breonna Taylor, for sleeping in her bed during the silence of the night.

These facts must remind us daily that our colleagues, individuals who we work with and we see daily in our little boxes in Zoom, that they continue to be besieged and attacked and killed by police regularly and that over the decades they and their ancestors have seen little to no justice.

We see it in our service region, our 11-county service region, where black and brown people are killed at a vastly disproportionate rate.

We live in an America where white people can storm the US Capitol and go home safely and unharmed, while Black and brown people are effectively sentenced to death for something like loose cigarettes.

In listening to many of you, especially our colleagues and students of color, the sense of loss, the sense of concern, the sense of exhaustion, is on many days, overwhelming.

As you have heard me, a gay, white male say before, I cannot imagine you our colleagues and our students of color, and how you feel and the trauma that you feel day in and day out.

There's no way for us who are white to completely understand, but we can be there for our colleagues and our students of color to check in, to listen, to offer support, to provide safe respectful and supportive spaces to commit to change daily.

Like you, many of you, I studied Latin when I was in school and I'm reminded that the word college or collegium has its roots in a word that stands for fellowship, brotherhood, sisterhood.

Therefore we at HACC are a fellowship of employees and students, all very different, different identities, different perspectives. In fact over a 1,300 different ways as employees and over 20,000 different ways as credit and non-credit students.

However, each of us have chosen to work here at HACC, to work together to influence our institution by the values we support of excellence, inclusivity, innovation and integrity.

Seeking to be gateways, as Dr. Chrissy Davis Jones said recently and as we continue to change lives, destinies and family trees.

Therefore today I hope you will loudly recommit with me and so many others at the college to ensure that justice is not a rare occurrence in the types of events that we are witnessing.

That accountability is not uncertain, that not another father, brother, son, friend or neighbor is not another victim. That Black lives do matter.

If silence needs to be a part of this journey, it is my sincere hope that in it we pause, we reflect, all before we speak about not only the recent verdict, but how we can translate these moments into our collective history, into a turning point for authentic reconciliation in change, change in heart, change in mind, change in our systems. Yes, even change in systems of some of the racist systems that we have here at HACC.

As the community's college, serving 11 counties, we have a responsibility, we have an opportunity to be leaders in the fight for reform. We must facilitate the critical conversations within our divisions, within our departments, necessary to identify and most importantly eliminate inequalities for all who we serve so that we can maintain an inviting, inclusive and safe teaching and learning community.

We must let our colleagues and students of color hear us say, I'm not Black but I see you,

I'm not Black but I hear you, I'm not Black but I mourn with you, I'm not Black but I see the injustice that you face daily, I'm not Black but I see your fear for your sons and your daughters and I'm not Black but I will stand, kneel and fight with you.

Will you colleagues join me in being an anti-racist, striving to be an anti-racist and fighting for the reform not only in our communities, but within our educational institution to ensure the future that Martin Luther King spoke about a little over a half-century ago.