



HARVARD
Office of the President

Dear Members of the Harvard Community,

The last several months have been disorienting for all of us. COVID-19 has profoundly disrupted the lives of people worldwide. It has caused more than 365,000 deaths around the globe and more than 100,000 in the United States alone. Forty million Americans have lost their jobs, and countless others live in fear of both the virus and its economic consequences.

In the midst of this incomprehensible loss, our nation has once again been shocked by the senseless killing of yet another black person—George Floyd—at the hands of those charged with protecting us. Cities are erupting. Our nation is deeply divided. Leaders who should be bringing us together seem incapable of doing so.

I cannot help but think back to 1968, the spring of my junior year in high school. First, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated, then Bobby Kennedy. Riots broke out in nearby Detroit, as they did across the country. Then, like now, our nation was hugely polarized, and we desperately struggled to find common ground that might unite us.

At the time, hope was in short supply. It seemed difficult to imagine how we would move forward, but we did. As I think about the challenges that we face today, I return again and again to what I believe:

I believe in the goodness of the people of this country—and in their resilience.

I believe that all of us, liberal and conservative, Democrat and Republican, whatever our race or ethnicity, want a better life for our children.

I believe that America should be a beacon of light to the rest of the world.

I believe that our strength as a nation is due in no small measure to our tradition of welcoming those who come to our shores in search of freedom and opportunity, individuals who repay us multiple times over through their hard work, creativity, and devotion to their new home.

I believe in the American Dream.

I believe in the Constitution, the separation of powers, the First Amendment—especially the right to a free and independent press that holds those in power accountable, and to a free and independent judiciary.

I believe in the 14th Amendment’s guarantee of equal protection of the laws—for everyone, not just for those who look like me.

I believe that no person is above the law regardless of the office they hold or the uniform they wear. Those who break the law must be held accountable.

I believe that one measure of the justness of a society is how it treats its most vulnerable members.

I believe we must provide opportunity to those who may not encounter it on their own so that they may achieve their full potential.

I believe in the power of knowledge and ideas to change the world, of science and medicine to defeat disease, of the arts and humanities to illuminate the human condition.

This is just some of what I believe. I hope you will pause during these troubled times to ask what you believe. Even more importantly, I hope you will find the strength and determination to act on your beliefs—to repair and perfect this imperfect world. Those of us privileged to work or study at a place like this bear special responsibilities. As Luke teaches us, from those to whom much is given, much is expected.

Sincerely,

Larry

Lawrence S. Bacow
President
Harvard University

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