

Black Lives Matter and the Future of Our Country

A letter from Dr. Phil Metres, Director of the JCU Peace, Justice and Human Rights Program

June 2, 2020

Dear students, staff, and faculty,

I wanted to take a minute this morning as director of JCU's PJHR program to address what's happening in our country. My family and I went to the Black Lives Matter protest on Saturday. A lot of energy will be spent talking about the riot that took place afterward. But in the time we were there, I saw not one instance of violence. I saw power, grief, righteous anger, organization, and collective purpose. At the end of the march, there was so much feeling and no place to put it. At the Justice Center, some people directed their anger against the police and that building. We left because the energy didn't feel right. A small fraction of people evidently wanted a fight. In the crowd, there were also, without question, agitators, and undercover police (cf. COINTELPRO).

The shattered glass of businesses in Cleveland's downtown (and, indeed, throughout the country) is a visible sign of an invisible disgrace—the disgrace of systemic racism.

Let's keep our attention on the main thing, which is that our criminal justice system is deeply, criminally flawed—from police brutality to mass incarceration. Racism is breaking people. It's killing us. It's destroying us physically, morally, and spiritually. And it's our job now to ask for justice, true justice, justice for all.

So, what can we do?

To the Black students, staff, and faculty, I want to thank you for being part of or connected with the PJHR program. Do let me know if there's anything we can do to support you at this time. To everyone else, we are the ones who need to step up and take on this struggle to make change happen.

We need to keep learning, stop pretending we know all the answers, and refuse the fear and hatred of the other. Just because we have black friends doesn't mean we're not racist. We live in a racist society. We participate in systems that perpetuate racism, and all of us need to do more to make change. [Learn how to become an anti-racist](#). Although it might not make sense right now, please don't ask your black friends to educate you. Reach out as a friend.

Here's a link to send a letter to your Representative to support recent legislation—the PEACE act, which seeks to change the police use of force standard from “reasonable” to “necessary,”

which could hold law enforcement more accountable, and a house resolution condemning police brutality:

<https://www.peaceaction.org/get-involved/action-alert-end-police-violence/>

[Please register to vote!](#)

As a society, we need to shut down or transform systems that produce hatred without anyone ever having to confront their racism—that includes not only policing and criminal justice, but also our exploitive economic system, our segregated education system, our religious organizations, and our arts organizations and museums. That’s a lot, but it’s time to start making change.

Okay, you might be saying, but I’m not someone who wants to be in a riot. Hey, neither am I! That’s why my family left. But all of us have a role to play, and gifts and powers to bring. We need [to find our role](#) in making these changes.



Let’s challenge ourselves to move through our discomfort. If we imagine what it might be like to experience racial terror every day, and know that our minor discomfort is a small price to pay for the centuries of oppression that precede this moment.

We need the arts more than ever. Artists are the prophetic witnesses to the past and visionary architects of a new future. We need to keep our spirits lit through the fire of imagination, the fuel of justice, and the oxygen of love.

We need all of us to become the We that is the People.

Black Lives Matter.

Sincerely, Philip Metres
Director, Peace, Justice, and Human Rights Program