

CCCC President's Address CCC Board of Trustees Meeting
Thursday, June 3rd, 2021

Chairperson Massey, Board of Trustees, Chancellor Salgado, Provost Potter, Officers of the District, faculty, staff and all others streaming: Good afternoon!

It's my honor to speak before you all today! As a child, I remember my parents taking me to the annual Juneteenth parades in Milwaukee. It will return this year after missing last year due to the pandemic and be the 50th Juneteenth Parade held there. At the time, to me it was like any other parade, except Blacker. As I grew older, I realized it was a holiday that, generally, only African-Americans were aware of and celebrated. In light of the year of racial tensions, uprisings, and reckonings that we have had--and that were arguably well overdue--I think it's important to discuss Juneteenth and the national holiday it foreruns, July the 4th. As an institution seeking equity, diversity, and inclusivity, understanding how these holidays are inextricably in conversation with each other can help us to situate and contextualize the work we aim to do.

Fredrick Douglas, in a speech given at Rochester, New York, July 5, 1852, asked "What, to the American slave, is your 4th of July? I answer; a day that reveals to him, more than all other days in the year, the gross injustice and cruelty to which he is the constant victim. To him, your celebration is a sham; your boasted liberty, an unholy license; your national greatness, swelling vanity; your sounds of rejoicing are empty and heartless; your denunciation of tyrants, brass fronted impudence; your shouts of liberty and equality, hollow mockery; your prayers and hymns, your sermons and thanksgivings, with all your religious parade and solemnity, are, to Him, mere bombast, fraud, deception, impiety, and hypocrisy--a thin veil to cover up crimes which would disgrace a nation of savages. There is not a nation on the earth guilty of practices more shocking and bloody than are the people of the United States, at this very hour."

While White Americans of the mid 1800s celebrated independence from Great Britain, the ideals fought for and artfully spelled out in the Declaration of Independence: the indisputable fact that all men are created equal and held certain unalienable Rights including "Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness" were ideals that were only afforded to White Americans. And when even ethnic whites weren't necessarily included under that umbrella of "men," it stands to reason by the commodification of their very bodies, enslaved people of African descent certainly were not a thought in the drafter's minds.

As the nation approached its third year of bloody civil war, the Federal Army was in desperate need of soldiers, but enlisting blacks was banned by congress in 1792. Knowing that the only way to win a losing war was to enlist more soldiers, President Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation. While it freed slaves, what we don't speak about is how it allowed them to join the army. President Lincoln was waiting for a battle victory to announce emancipation, and did not have one. Lincoln's saving grace was that on September 17th, 1862 at the Battle of Antietam—where more Federal soldiers were killed in combat than Confederate soldiers—the Confederates withdrew from battle, and the Federal army claimed the draw as a victory. Five days later, President Lincoln published the preliminary Emancipation Proclamation threatening the ten states in rebellion with the freedom of the enslaved if they didn't come back in the Union and

accept him as their President. As they had been winning battles to that point, those states saw no need to surrender, so Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation and enlisted black soldiers, literally tasking them to give up their lives for their freedom. So, what is often thought to be an act of moral strength on behalf of Lincoln can also be read as an act of desperation in an effort to maintain the American empire.

Again, because they had been winning battles, Texas continued the practice of slavery for another two and a half years after emancipation. A month after the end of the Civil war, Union General Gordon Granger, tasked with enforcing emancipation, arrived at Galveston, Texas and issued General Orders No. 3., a very short, but very meaningful message to Texas Slaveholders It reads:

The people of Texas are informed that, in accordance with a proclamation from the Executive of the United States, all slaves are free. This involves an absolute equality of personal rights and rights of property between former masters and slaves, and the connection heretofore existing between them becomes that between employer and hired labor.

The freedmen are advised to remain quietly at their present homes and work for wages. They are informed that they will not be allowed to collect at military posts and that they will not be supported in idleness either there or elsewhere.

Why is this history important to what we do: First, while all General Granger had to do was ensure that slavery ended; however, his message—in no uncertain term—recognized the equality between Black and white Americans. We must similarly continue to recognize the value and equality of difference. This time last year, we were embroiled in riots and messaging from our leaders left many feeling devalued. I'm certain that that wasn't the intention, but it was received that way. To date, I want to remark on how drastically that has changed. The messaging that we now see feels genuine and, in many cases, I have felt a sense of pride when I see how our district officers are vocally responding to issue of diversity. The hire of Dr. Bruce King, the AVC of Racial Equity, a position that we didn't previously have, is another way in which we are taking steps in the right direction. We have had the opportunity to have Dr. King join FC4 in our Diversity Equity and Inclusion Committee meeting, and we look forward to continuing to work with him. Diversity and Equity are now commonplace buzzwords in almost every industry. It is our hope that this position is not one that merely checks off boxes so that we are in step with trends, but that we are, as I believe us to be, truly committed to this work. That means more than healing circles and programming, but it means examining and changing policies and practices. I must note while speaking on equality, while we will enjoy a full day off the 4th to celebrate the independence of White people from the oppression of other White people who sent them to this country to expand empire—a gruesome undertaking involving the murder of and displacement of millions of indigenous people, and the forcing of Blacks into chattel slavery—we will only have half a day to commemorate an event that should be about hope, resilience, and a promise to live up to the ideals of this country. I hope in the future we can give our students, staff, and faculty a full day to reflect on this occasion. As for this year, many will be unable to participate in the Juneteenth programming districtwide because they will be working.

Second, in General Granger's order while he noted the equality of the races, he also made it clear that formerly enslaved individuals would receive no assistance from the government. As we reflect on Juneteenth and its history, we cannot ignore that freedom came with nothing else. Our work should, in a way, be a form of reparations. As we look around our society, we see the damage caused by the lack of investment in communities that are owed due to their contributions to our society. Last week marked the 100th anniversary of the Tulsa Massacre, but it wasn't the only large-scale act of violence against prospering African Americans. In our state alone, there was one in 1917 in East. St. Louis, one in 1908 in Springfield, and one in 1919 right here in Chicago in which 38 people died (mostly Black) and between 1000-2000 Black people lost their homes. While we acknowledge the physical violence enacted upon Black people in our city, we have to also recognize the violence we visit people when we disinvest in their education and how that reinforced General Granger's message by leaving people with nothing to create better lives for themselves. I am glad to say that through the philanthropic work of the foundation, through scholarship opportunities, and efforts to reduce tuition, we are combating this disinvestment. We look forward to finding more ways to provide access to quality higher education.

In conclusion, I look at what we have achieved over this past year with hope that outside some of the failures of our past, we can continue to rise to the occasion racial healing and equity. It is not easy work, and it will often be mired in emotion, but we the faculty of the City Colleges, support it and will continue to engage with the board and admin to come closer to the goals of real equity, diversity in all areas, and creating inclusive spaces.

If there are no questions or comments from the board, that concludes my report.

Respectfully submitted,
Keith Sprewer on behalf of the Faculty Council of the City Colleges of Chicago