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## **A View from Melrose**

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## The urgency of the moment

**Editors' note:** President Davis shared the following open letter with the Linfield community shortly after George Floyd's death in Minneapolis on May 25. It was published by *The Portland Business Journal*, *The News-Register* and *The Linfield Review* as an op-ed. We felt it was important to amplify Dr. Davis' message as a beacon of leadership in uncertain times.

**M**y grandfather taught me the importance of knowing when to stop talking, so I could actively listen and observe. That way, when it was time to talk I had facts at my disposal and fully formed points to make. I have watched and read hours and hours of news over the past week. I have seen the pronouncements made by many. I have read the social media posts from those across the political spectrum. I also spoke with my mother and father about the state of our country.

By now, you know the names as well as I do of those who have been killed while unable to defend themselves. I will not repeat them here. Despite making up only 2% of the total U.S. population, African American males between 15 and 34 comprise more than 15% of all deaths included in ongoing investigations into the use of deadly force by police. Their rate of police-involved deaths was five times higher than for white men of the same age. For the record, my son is 23. I worry every time I leave him that it may be the last time.

To look at this solely through the lens of black and white, however, could cause us to miss larger issues and trends. Hate crimes in the United States against Asians and Latinos are up sharply. Domestic violence in Portland is up 27% during the pandemic. Anti-LGBTQ hate crimes are also rising quickly, according to FBI statistics.

What we are seeing in the streets and the precipitating events that have led to mass social unrest are a result of the continued disintegration of the social compact that held our society together. Even the ideal that we should look out for each other's health has become a political battleground, devolving into tribal behavior.

It's time now to stop recounting what has happened and talk about what we are going to do differently. How are

we going to give birth to a different world? To give birth to a society that does not see pigmentation as a weapon? To shape a society that says that different religions and different cultures are just ... different?

I suggest to you that there are things you and I can actually do to make a difference in our lives, and in the conditions in our communities:

1. Begin with yourself. Are you the best you, you can be? Do you reflect the respect and dignity in your behavior that you wish to see in others? Do you work on your conscious and unconscious biases? Do you accept responsibility for your actions and seek to make right what you have done wrong?
2. Support your family. There are those who are related to you by blood and those connected to you by spirit. They are your family. Are you setting an example for your family to follow? Do you treat elders in your family with respect? Do you nurture the young ones coming up behind you? Do you share your knowledge, wisdom and perspective, not from a plateau of hubris but one of caring and compassion?
3. Support your community. Human beings define themselves by their communities. Do you seek out opportunities to support your community? Have you joined a coalition of like-minded individuals in your community to help make it better, served on the board of a local nonprofit, volunteered to help those less fortunate? Do you buy local when there is an opportunity? Do you help a neighbor in need?
4. Learn to think critically. The United States is a constitutional republic and a representative democracy and a federal republic. This form of government requires informed citizenry capable of

# A View from Melrose

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Photo by Brooke Herbert/The Oregonian

**For several weeks starting in early June, thousands of Oregonians took to the streets to protest racial injustice, carrying signs like this one at a Portland march.**

analyzing the issues of the time. When is the last time you read a book that challenged you intellectually? When was the last time you challenged your assumptions about those who think differently than you do? When was the last time you challenged your own assumptions about how things should be?

5. Register to vote, and then vote. The form of government outlined in the Constitution of the United States only works if you engage the government. The way to engage the government is to vote. In fact, consider running for elected office yourself. Be the change you want to see.

Please do not mistake my tone. I'm outraged. I'm deeply saddened. I'm tired. And I'm scared, for our country and our future. But I'm also hopeful that tomorrow can and will be a

better day. A university is a community where we collectively dream of a greater, more enlightened, future. I'm thankful to be part of such a community, and I remain as committed as I have ever been to toiling alongside so many others to turn the dream into a reality.

We must forever conduct our struggle on the high plane of dignity and discipline. I thank those who came before us in the struggle and those who will come after, and those who are out there even now, insisting on justice and equality. The urgency of the moment is real, and it demands a reckoning inside every one of us.

Be well and be blessed,  
*Miles K. Davis, president*