

June 12, 2020

Dear Friends,

Last month, all decent people were appalled by the death of George Floyd, a black American who died under the knee of a white police officer while three other officers on the scene did nothing to save him. We only know what happened to Mr. Floyd because a bystander filmed it, which raises the question of how many other horrors have taken place out of sight and therefore out of the public mind.

In the weeks since, Americans of all races have expressed sorrow and outrage at the fate of Mr. Floyd—as well as that of Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, and many others within vivid memory—and have made the irrefutable connection to centuries of injustice and brutality suffered by African-Americans. Most of this expression has taken the form of peaceful protest as protected by the United States Constitution. In a few instances, demonstrations have been exploited by arsonists and looters, which is to be decried.

Eloquent voices—including from the victims' families—have been raised calling for non-violence and systemic reform. We have seen stirring examples of solidarity across racial lines as in the joint efforts of the black mayor of Atlanta, Keisha Lance Bottoms, and her white police chief, Erika Shields. We have seen a gravely ill hero of the Civil Rights movement, Congressman John Lewis, walk the streets of Washington to show his faith in America's future. We have seen the white police chief of Camden, New Jersey, Joseph Wysocki, kneel with protestors, black and white. Such acts of dignity and integrity give reason for hope at this dark time.

In short, we have seen the worst and best of America and we can anticipate more of both to come.

The question is what to do? Every thoughtful individual is asking this question. Institutions, too, must ask it of themselves.

At the Teagle Foundation our first answer is to reaffirm our core commitment: to help young Americans obtain a liberal education that fosters informed thinking, humility, empathy, and awareness of our fraught history and the fragility of civil society. We believe that part of such an education is learning that language can be vile and toxic, or consoling and healing, and that the choice is ours. We believe that such an education entails understanding the validity and vitality of political protest, out of which our nation was born, as well as the difference between protest and anarchy.


Such an education requires learning about the distinctive experience of African-Americans, who have endured centuries of cruelty and compulsion—first in the form of slavery, then in a long series of pernicious forms of exploitation and degradation. For white Americans, it means learning to understand the justified fear that people of color often feel when confronted by police. It also means acknowledging, with Florida Congresswoman and former police officer Val Demings, that many police officers respond with professionalism and valor to “complicated and dangerous situations.”

For all these reasons and more, we will continue to support the teaching of history, literature, philosophy, the arts, and the sciences as a means of learning to contend with complex problems and

to curb the universal human impulse to presumption and arrogance. This effort will never reach a conclusion and therefore must never be relinquished.

In particular, the Teagle Foundation reaffirms its commitment to teachers and institutions striving to serve African-American and other students of color, whose families and communities have already been disproportionately affected by the cruelty of the pandemic.

We wish to express our deep thanks to all our grantees—past, present, and future—for your efforts to make ours a more humane and just society. We look forward to working with you toward that end with renewed determination in the months and years ahead.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Andrew Delbanco". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'A' and a distinct 'D'.

Andrew Delbanco
President, The Teagle Foundation