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Memo from the Office of the President

**To:** The UWLA Family

**From:** Robert W. Brown

**Date:** June 18, 2021

**RE: Federal Holiday: Juneteenth National Independence Day**

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Dear UWLA Family,

Last year I asked you in the closing of my UWLA Juneteenth Holiday designation memo:

“When I am asked how can we begin to heal as a nation and as a community,

I would ask that each of you in the UWLA family do what you can to:

- 1) Help make Juneteenth a federal Holiday recognized in all states, that is celebrated and discussed just as the fourth of July is...”

I am proudly writing this memo to you, just as President Biden signed into law S. 475, “Juneteenth National Independence Day Act,” which designates Juneteenth National Independence Day as a federal holiday. The last federal holiday added was fittingly for this conversation: the birthday of Martin Luther King, Jr., which was signed into law in 1983. This is a step in the right direction for our nation as we continue on our unrelenting quest for civil liberty.

As I discussed the history of Juneteenth in my memo on this issue one year ago:

“That systemic racism is an extension of the original sin of America, slavery itself.

Slavery has long been embedded into the cultural fabric of our society but rarely spoken of, rather many prefer to speak in polite terms of socio-economic status as the primary driver of our current difficulties rather than the original sin of our nation’s founding, that primary driver being that Peculiar Institution: Slavery. “

Ironically, the Declaration of Independence, the foundation for the holiday which we will celebrate in sixteen days, began with the words “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.” That lofty statement was made by men who at that very moment owned and exploited other humans in the cruel bonds of slavery and although eloquently stated, it was utterly hypocritical and fell upon tone-deaf ears as to its universal meaning and application.

President Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation took effect on January 1, 1863, but that proclamation only freed slaves within states that “shall then be in rebellion” (i.e., the southern states in the confederacy) and not all slaves in the United States. Our nation’s Civil war ended on April 9, 1865 at the Appomattox Court House in Virginia, two months before the Juneteenth proclamation in Texas and over two years after the aforementioned Emancipation Proclamation in 1863. Juneteenth is our nation’s informal commemoration of the ending of slavery in the United States. It is now officially recognized in all states other than Hawaii and the Dakotas. It originated when General

Granger read aloud the contents of "General Order No. 3", announcing the total emancipation of those held as slaves in Texas on June 19, 1865.

Sadly, it was not until the ratification of our Thirteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution on December 6, 1865, that the malignant institution of slavery officially become outlawed throughout the United States, some eighty-nine years after those beautiful words in the declaration of independence that "all men are created equal, ... endowed with unalienable rights."

Even after the abolition of slavery in our nation, it would not be until 1967 when the aptronym couple the Lovings in *Loving v. Virginia*, 388 U.S. 1 (1967) were found to have a constitutional right to be married in spite of existing state misogyny laws that barred marriages of individuals from different racial classifications. That case was decided 191 years after our Declaration of Independence and only fifty-three years ago."

As an institution of higher learning that includes a law school, the importance of the rule of law cannot be overstated. However, as you can gleam from the above timeline, the law itself or the passage of a law itself is not enough, rather justice must be heard and justice must be served by actual practice and incorporation of those mores into the actual fabric of our culture.

To quote the Reverend Martin Luther King Jr. from 1957 "The tensions are not between the races, but between the forces of justice and injustice; between the forces of light and darkness." And again, later in 1960 "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice

everywhere. Therefore, no American can afford to be apathetic about the problem of racial justice. It is a problem that meets every man at his front door.”

The following Representatives voted against this holiday: 1) Biggs of **Arizona**, 2) Brooks of **Alabama**, 3) Clyde of **Georgia**, 4) DesJarlais of **Tennessee**, 5) Gosar of **Arizona**, 6) Jackson of **Texas**, 7) LaMalfa of California, 8) Massie of **Kentucky**, 9) McClintock of California, 10) Norman of **South Carolina**, 11) Rogers of **Alabama**, 12) Rosendale of Montana, 13) Roy of **Texas**, and 14) Tiffany of Wisconsin.

The following Representatives choose not to vote on this holiday: 1) Crenshaw of **Texas** and 2) McHenry of North Carolina.

The **underscored and bolded states** above were states, territories or recognized as part of the former Confederate States of America, thus 79% of the current U.S.

Representatives that chose to abstain or vote against Juneteenth’s recognition as a federal holiday represent the very states that were in open rebellion causing the Civil War.

Resistance is expected and echoes of the past are strong. We must accept that there will be resistance, and we must still engage with the resisters in order for us to persevere as a society committed to democracy and self-rule under law. We as a people have persevered through the pandemic known as COVID-19, and we have persevered together now in the creation of a new holiday that will help to begin the necessary dialog, which must always come as a precursor to the healing that our

American family needs so badly, and that we must journey through, though if not now, eventually.

In closing, I want to reflect on the fact that Juneteenth should go down as marking a new beginning and not an end unto itself. It should commemorate a new beginning when our society renounces, once and for all, the awful systemic domination and exploitation of a segment of its people for the sheer advantage and benefit of those who would immorally subjugate fellow humans for their economic and financial gain. We should forever condemn such illicit actions but more importantly be vigilant and protective not to ever allow their horrible influences to be allowed in any aspect of our human culture.

But I would suggest to you that the commemoration of the end of slavery actually should have marked the beginning of the freedom of all people within our society. For you see, oppression captures the captors and the captives in its inhumane evil embrace. We should all be free to pursue our inalienable rights to the pursuit of happiness. We should not have to choose between subjugation and prosperity. One should not come at the jeopardy or expense of the other. Indeed, instead of spiraling down in this embrace of evil, we are should be liberated to mutually pull each other up in a positive spiral of mutual support and respect in our pursuit of societal prosperity and happiness.

There should be systemic recognition of the beautiful humanity underpinning all that we do, think and say. It will take communication, anxiety, and work to sometimes negotiate and balance the competing interests and conflict that will almost inevitably arise in the

throes of our collective experiences as humans. This is why I signed on to serve at UWLA. I want our university family to be a positive catalyst for positivity, and the promotion of the uplifting of our community and the individuals that we serve. I would hope that on this day, everyone would internalize the ideals that this time represents by focusing on how we can individually and collectively contribute to the growth and positive pursuits of wealth and prosperity for all segments of our society, strongly reaffirming the ideals that domination, exploitation, and oppression are intolerable practices that should never belong in any human society.

Thank you for being a part of and interested in our UWLA family.

In closing I will quote a passage written by Maya Angelou:

“You may write me down in history  
With your bitter, twisted lies,  
You may trod me in the very dirt  
But still, like dust, I'll rise.

Does my sassiness upset you?  
Why are you beset with gloom?  
'Cause I walk like I've got oil wells  
Pumping in my living room.

Just like moons and like suns,  
With the certainty of tides,  
Just like hopes springing high,  
Still I'll rise.

Did you want to see me broken?  
Bowed head and lowered eyes?  
Shoulders falling down like teardrops,  
Weakened by my soulful cries?

Does my haughtiness offend you?  
Don't you take it awful hard  
'Cause I laugh like I've got gold mines  
Diggin' in my own backyard.

You may shoot me with your words,  
You may cut me with your eyes,  
You may kill me with your hatefulness,  
But still, like air, I'll rise.

Does my sexiness upset you?  
Does it come as a surprise  
That I dance like I've got diamonds  
At the meeting of my thighs?

Out of the huts of history's shame

I rise

Up from a past that's rooted in pain

I rise

I'm a black ocean, leaping and wide,

Welling and swelling I bear in the tide.

Leaving behind nights of terror and fear

I rise

Into a daybreak that's wondrously clear

I rise

Bringing the gifts that my ancestors gave,

I am the dream and the hope of the slave.

I rise

I rise

I rise.

If you have any questions feel free to contact me

I remain humbly,



Robert Brown



P.S. I want to acknowledge the collaboration of Dean Jay Frykberg in contributing and substantially writing major portions of this message. I want to acknowledge our collaboration and mutual respect for each other and most importantly that, the ideals set forth in this message are human ideals that are not about the fictional illusion of race or ethnicity, but rather more importantly that our humanness and desire for a more positive society, transcends those immutable societal designations, which do little more than serve as a totally rebuttable presumptive points of reference. They generally serve very little value beyond that reference point. Thanks Dean Frykberg, I salute you my friend.