



FIVE TOWNS COLLEGE

305 North Service Road • Dix Hills • NY • 11746

Office of the President

June 1, 2020

Dear Colleagues,

Like you, I watched the George Floyd video in horror. I am aghast, as every American should be. What happened to Mr. Floyd shocks the conscience, and is unacceptable in any civilized society. And so the indignant outrage that followed his death is not surprising. All Americans should feel this way, and I believe that most do.

Every American knows that this is not the first time this has happened to a person of color, only the latest. I believe that it is fair to consider the spontaneous protests that are happening in cities across America, and indeed around the world, as a clarion call for change. Not merely for changes in the way police work is conducted in Minnesota; but, for the systemic change that has been promised in the names of great leaders like Dr. Martin Luther King and Robert F. Kennedy over and over again across the decades.

To effectuate change, America must finally address institutional inequities that are embedded in the way access and equity to education are provided, in the way the criminal justice system operates, and in the way communities are policed. Indeed, America must finally consider the way it creates opportunities for all of its people, and make changes that deliver on promises of equality that remain unfulfilled since its founding nearly 244 years ago.

These are not easy problems, but they have lingered for far too long. As a nation, we must finally answer the difficult questions and find solutions for why people of color have died at higher rates during this pandemic than others groups. We must address honestly the underlying causes of poverty, inadequate healthcare, malnutrition, and substance abuse. We must finally remove the obstacles to economic opportunity that allow some groups to achieve the greatest success in the history of the world, while others are caught in an endless cycle of deprivation and discrimination. The words of Dr. King, that “a right delayed is a right denied” have never been more true than they are right now.

I have often spoken about Five Towns College as a “Shining City on a Hill.” A place that is a beacon of light for mankind. I know that we are just a place of people, and so even our small community of artists and scholars is inherently imperfect. But I think that the students, faculty and staff do strive to be better than the world which we are part of. I believe in my heart that on this campus we value each individual for their character and the contributions they bring to the academic discourse. And when we come up short, and we do – we take our imperfections to heart and genuinely try to improve. I think we all share with pride, the fact that this little College, just one school out of nearly 350 regional colleges in the North, is now ranked as number 3 on the scale of Social Mobility – helping economically disadvantaged students to graduate. All colleges should seek the same outcomes. All of America should strive for the same result in everything it does.

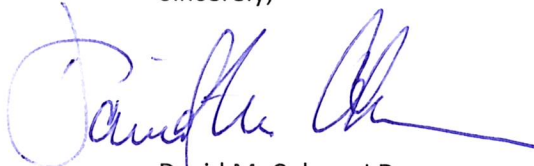
Across this nation people of all races, creeds, and colors are protesting for change. If you are one of them, I hope you will exercise your constitutional rights fully; but, in a peaceful manner that honors the legacy of our great civil rights leaders and the small academic community of which you are a part. Be that beacon of light. Be that "City on a Hill." I urge you not to let wanton violence cloud out the very important message that you are now trying to deliver.

If you are not protesting, then I ask that you listen to the legitimate grievances of our fellow Americans with an open heart and open mind – and that when your turn comes to be heard on the issues being raised, that you respond with your voice and your vote as if each of those human beings asking for your help were your own child or family member.

I know that that there is not a single member of our community who would stand aside if one of their own family members were subjected to inequality and discrimination – at any level and for any length of time. We must all feel equally indignant when the children of any American, regardless of the color of their skin, religious belief, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, or any other personal characteristic is treated that way. And so, I choose to stand with the students, faculty and staff members of Five Towns College who are asking for change, and I urge you to do the same.

I hope that all of you are healthy and staying safe. I pray for each of you, and for our nation. We must get on with the difficult work of building a more perfect union for everyone, and we must do so now.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "David M. Cohen", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

David M. Cohen, J.D.
President