



Our Minute in History

Richard Yao

I was recently battling a bad case of insomnia - my mind was racing as I tried to process the death of Daunte Wright. This was extremely troubling to me, but these feelings were especially exacerbated by the recent Derek Chauvin trial – and having to relive the death of George Floyd in traumatizing detail. I then thought about Army 2nd Lieutenant Caron Nazario being threatened and pepper sprayed, and the tragic death of 13-year-old Adam Toledo. On top of everything, we are reeling from numerous mass shootings, with several occurring in multiple cities. In addition, we are still grappling with the rise in Asian Pacific Islander racial violence across our nation. And I know this is all just the tip of the iceberg – there are countless acts of violence that do not make the headline news.

As I continued to process, I engaged in several discussions about whether we've made any progress – especially when considering the momentum created from last year's Black Lives Matter global protests for racial and social justice. It was clear that the weight of this continued violence and loss of life can easily result in us giving up hope, and some I spoke with even raised the possibility that our efforts to make racial and social justice a reality may be futile. This reminded me of a text exchange with a close colleague back in January after the insurrection, and his words impacted me on many levels and will continue to be with me moving forward. He stated,

While these tragedies are so debilitating for us, we can never allow it to steal our hope. Once we become totally cynical about our efforts, all hope is gone... Without hope, there are some days I would not be able to get out of bed. We cry. We are depressed. We curse. And then we get up and put on the armor of hope and press on. As warriors, we do not have a choice in the matter. Giving up is not an option. We are fighting the long game. And I hope you will remain hopeful as well.

This powerful reminder of hope was reinforced when another colleague sent me a journal article entitled "Teaching: The Lessons of Hope" where hope was conceptualized and defined as "a perceived capacity to produce clear goals, along with the routes to reach these goals (pathways thinking) and the motivation to use those routes (agency thinking)" (Snyder, 2005, p. 72). Snyder went on to discuss how goals will only sustain our motivation and efforts if they are of "sufficient importance and value to people" (p. 73), and the importance of dedicating much of our motivation to developing new routes when we face challenges and impediments to our goals.

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This conceptualization of hope was so meaningful, especially when considering that our Inclusive Excellence Action Teams were convening for the first time last week. As you know, our Inclusive Excellence Action Plan is the top priority of my interim presidency and focuses on cabinet level accountability; broad engagement across divisions at all levels; and is designed to bring more people into this work while ensuring we have the necessary expertise to be in full alignment with theory, research and best practices. Perhaps most importantly, this framework has the potential to provide us with clear goals, a more tangible, actionable path moving forward, and the motivation to persevere and find new pathways when faced with challenges. This work, coupled with my unwavering faith in the resilience, leadership and values of our faculty, staff and students is what continues to fuel my hope moving forward.

I sincerely believe that each one of us is in a precious minute, right now, with an opportunity to focus our prodigious, collective energies on realizing racial and social justice. Whatever happens in the coming weeks and months, whether in response to the Derek Chauvin trial or other news in our centuries-old march toward racial and social justice, let us do good things with our minute in history.

About the Author

Richard Yao, Ph.D., serves as Interim President of California State University Channel Islands (CSUCI). Dr. Yao initially joined CSUCI in June 2018, where he served as the Vice President for Student Affairs. Prior to CSUCI, he resided in Las Vegas, NV for 23 years, where he was an active member of the higher education and mental health communities.

References

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