

From: Catherine A Modica cmodica@mit.edu
Subject: The Way We Live Now
Date: June 1, 2020 at 8:37 PM
To: Catherine A Modica cmodica@mit.edu
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Dear Physics students, including recent graduates,

Last Friday, when I wrote my covering message for the weekly newsletter, my range of vision was a narrow one, limited to comments on Commencement Day: what it was, what it could have been, what it so decidedly wasn't. As always, I tried to write, even in sadness about the changes forced by the pandemic, from a place of love for all of you, our students.

Today I widen my range, because the nightmare that is life in the United States in 2020 just keeps getting worse every day. Over the past several days, we have seen bitter racism overtake even our collective struggle with a world stunted by COVID-19. We learned that a white father and son in Georgia had shot Black Ahmaud Arbery while he was out for a jog, and essentially gotten away with it for months. We heard the recorded words of white Amy Cooper in New York's Central Park, calling the police to tell them that Black Christian Cooper had threatened her life – when what he had done was ask her to leash her dog. We saw the knee of white police officer Derek Chauvin bearing down on the neck of Black George Floyd, calmly squeezing Floyd's life out of him. And in another variant of racism, we read about the President of the United States formally proclaiming the exclusion from the US of Chinese nationals wishing to come here for research and education.

Our ears ache and our eyes burn with what we have heard and seen.

I don't pretend to have any answers. I don't even pretend to know what are the right questions to ask, the right actions to take. As a white, middle-class, well-educated American with a secure profession, most of the time I don't think I even have the right to speak about these atrocities – they are so far removed from my immediate experience. But if there is one thing I have striven for in my writings to you, it is to foster a sense of connection between us. And that sense of connection prompts me to reach out to you, because you are important to me, and because many of you are feeling the pain of these terrible happenings in a more immediate way than I could. I reach out because I want you to know that even if I, and most of my equally-privileged colleagues, have not directly experienced racism, we know evil when we see it. And so we feel sorrow, and we feel anger, and most of all we feel deep concern and caring for the young people in our care, whose souls are at high risk of damage from these events.

The pain of this time will take a long time to heal – if it ever can be completely healed. In this moment it is made even harder for those who care about you, because we cannot be with you in person to listen, to try to provide comfort, to companion you along the way. A part of mourning for me is the being physically away from you at this time, when I would like to give each one of you a shoulder to cry on, a compassionate embrace. Please know that although I can't give tissues and hugs, you are being held in my heart, as you are in the hearts of so many members of this academic department where we strive to be more than an academic department.

Please reach out to me at any time and know that there are many people in Physics who

Please reach out to me at any time, and know that there are many people in Physics who would also welcome the opportunity to bolster you at this difficult time. You are supported and cared about by many.

With my best regards,
Cathy

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“Nobody signed up for this.
“The humane option is the best option.
“We will remain flexible and adjust to the situation.”

----- Brandon Bayne, UNC Chapel Hill