

NYU Center for the Humanities

Letter from the Director

We are living through a period of transformation of vast proportions, brought about by the coronavirus pandemic but also deep injustices, especially for the African American community subjected to police violence. We stand in solidarity with everyone demanding accountability for police violence in the wake of George Floyd's death and of so many other brutal killings of African-Americans at the hands of those charged with protecting all of us.

During this time, it is crucial to commit to the work of connecting with others to have truthful conversations and dialogue about what ails this country and how to join together to improve things for everyone, especially communities of color. The humanities, in their variegated and multidisciplinary forms, are based on examining the human condition from all possible angles. The humanities are also rooted in direct exchange and interaction. The Center for the Humanities is committed to fostering such interactions, in the form of conversation, dialogue, and teaching. We must resist pat answers right now and do the hard and necessary work not only to understand our current moment but to act in ways that ensure a better outcome for all. I have been teaching the writings of Frederick Douglass this week. My students and I were struck how relevant and urgent Douglass's [words from 1854](#) are still today. I thought I'd share them, fully cognizant of my own shortcomings to find the right words to express the grief, anger and also hope felt by so many.

"For it is not light that is needed, but fire; it is not the gentle shower, but thunder. We need the storm, the whirlwind, and the earthquake. The feeling of the nation must be quickened; the conscience of the nation must be roused; the propriety of the nation must be startled; the hypocrisy of the nation must be exposed; and its crimes against God and man must be proclaimed and denounced."

We hope you will join us in this difficult, crucial work.

Sincerely,
Ulrich Baer, Director