

January 7, 2021

Dear Stokes School community,

I wish I could say that I was shocked by the events that occurred in the District of Columbia yesterday or even that they came as a surprise. But I was neither shocked nor surprised. Many of my family members, friends and colleagues—and likely many of you--have anticipated and prepared for unrest in our city as the time for transition of government approaches.

To some this may seem like paranoia, but for an African American woman born in the 1960s and raised in the deep south, paranoia is a natural state of being. Confronting and navigating through a lifetime of racism has deep and lasting impacts--one of which is a heightened state of awareness of surroundings and circumstances. My first vivid memories of racism directed towards me came very early. I was in Little Rock, Arkansas and it was around 1976. I was 8 or 9 years old--the same age as many of our Stokes School scholars. My favorite Christmas gift that year was a red, plexiglass skateboard and I was intent on learning how to ride it. I had taken it just a few blocks away from my house to practice when a pick-up truck full of ignorant young men waiving a confederate flag drove past me yelling and screaming insults including the "N" word. They kept driving but I picked up the skateboard and ran back to the safety of my home and family as fast as I could. I was terrified and even as I write today, I can still remember that feeling.

I remember a similar, but more gut-wrenching incident that occurred just a year or so later when I was riding in a car with one of my closest friends and her mother (who were both white). We stopped to visit one of the mother's friends and were turned away at the front door because the friend didn't want any "Ns" in her house.

I could recount many other incidents, and these stories aren't unique to me. I'm sure that every person of color in this country could share similar stories. But I've shared the stories today and I'm not surprised by yesterday's incidents because I know that the young men in that pick-up truck in 1976, and the woman who didn't want "Ns" in her house were the same people who stormed the Capital building yesterday. They are people who are absolutely terrified of the thought of losing their white power and privilege and will do ANYTHING to maintain it. Unfortunately, their behavior has been encouraged and enabled by our current political climate.

It is our collective responsibility as a school community to ensure that our scholars understand the history of injustice and racism in America and actively work to dismantle it. It is the primary reason that my mother, Linda Moore, founded the Elsie Whitlow Stokes Community Freedom Public Charter School and it is the continuation of the work that my grandmother undertook to educate children in her lifetime.

Whether with children or adults, conversations about race and oppression are very difficult conversations to have. Three years ago, we began working with [Kindred](#) and we are deeply grateful to our Equity Team for facilitating discussions within our school community about racial justice. It is incumbent upon the adults in this community to hold ourselves to a higher standard and ensure that our scholars embrace these same standards.

Stokes School was founded on these values. We stand by these values now and will continue to do so as long as the school exists. We appreciate and commend all of the efforts of our families and staff who tirelessly work instill these values in our scholars.

With sincere gratitude,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Erika Bryant', with a stylized, cursive script.

Erika Bryant
Executive Director