

PRESIDENTIAL REMARKS

TEACHING RACE IN AMERICA

August 09, 2023

PRESIDENT ORA HIRSCH PESCOVITZ'S REMARKS

- And thank you to the esteemed assembly of speakers, presenters, and sponsors.
- Special thanks to our faculty members James Naus, Robert Martin, Jeff Insko and Joe Shively, and my gratitude to Dean Elaine Carey for her passion and vision in bringing this extremely important and timely topic and conference to Oakland University.
- Welcome to the many educators from around metro Detroit who join us today.
- Thank you for being here on our campus.
- We hope you find Oakland University to be welcoming, and that you return as often as possible. And when you do, bring a friend or two.

< PAUSE >

- Metro Detroit is a microcosm of the greater melting pot of American society. The greatness of cultural diversity and promise of an equitable and inclusive society is all around us.
- Historically, this region has played a central role in the Civil Rights and Labor movements. We take great pride that Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. came to Detroit months before his "I Have A Dream" speech to deliver an early version of that stirring oratory.
- And in knowing the history of our region, we are also well aware of the unfortunate public policies and events that have been the result of prejudice and institutional racism.
- As Neil Barclay from the Charles Wright Museum of African American History can attest... Detroiters take great pride in the vibrant culture and indefatigable spirit that is a hallmark of this region we call home.
- As a diverse and inclusive campus, we, at Oakland University, are advocates for human rights, and have a deep respect for people from all races, cultures and gender identities....

- ...and we are committed to education that raises public consciousness of our vital relationship and responsibility to the natural environment.
- There can be no question that we are idealists....
- We are, after all, educators with the shared hope that education can transform the world into a more humane place.
- As idealists, we believe we must speak out against aggressive attempts to censor what is taught in our classrooms.
- In particular, we cannot be naive or Pollyannaish about the forces working to control what is “acceptable” to read, discuss and think....
 - ...nor can we look away from the forces aligned to stop a broad, multi-racial, multi-cultural and inclusive understanding of American history.
- History is history.... and African American history is history.
- We are in agreement: There can be no serious conversation about diversity, equity and inclusion without an understanding of how racism in America has shaped public policies and laws.
- At a time of vociferous political haggling and divisive rhetoric, we, at Oakland University, take pride in placing a high priority on a civil discourse about the issues at the core of our democratic, pluralistic society...
- ... and we are not afraid, nor do we turn away from discussing “difficult subjects.”
- Through the Oakland University Center for Civic Engagement and our Center for Multicultural Initiatives, we are fostering a greater appreciation and tolerance for a diversity of opinions and cultural perspectives...
- Through this conference, “Teaching Race in America,” we are pleased that Oakland University can play a role in supporting school boards, superintendents, principals and teachers who face questions, criticism and sometimes vehement opposition to teaching the role of race as a social construct that not only is manifest in an individual bias but in the American legal system and public policies.
- Again, thank you to our presenters, and to each of you who are here today as education proponents working for greater understanding of history as a vital step in becoming a more diverse, equitable and inclusive world.