



MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT

Dear Spartans:

I write to you about another incident that has left many members of our community horribly offended, outraged and frustrated. It has prompted many to question the safety of our campus and our commitment to inclusivity.

Last week, a display at the Wharton Center gift shop depicted current and historical African American figures hanging from trees. This was a disturbing reminder of our country's history of terror and unrelenting brutality that targeted individuals based on their race. Members of our community were hurt. Though this display was created to honor prominent African Americans during Black History Month, we cannot ignore the historical context that made it exceedingly painful and traumatic to our community members.

This display was unacceptable and should never have been put up. I'm sorry that this happened. It has been taken down. We can, and must, do better as Spartans. We need to do the necessary work that better informs our thinking and deepens our understanding of how our actions affect others. As I communicated to you last fall after other insensitive and bias incidents on campus, regardless of intent, actions can create painful consequences for many.

In light of this, I want you all to know we are taking the situation at Wharton Gifts very seriously. The center is undergoing a full restructuring of staff, including management, and will make diversity within its workforce and volunteers a priority. In addition, mandatory racial-bias education and development for all staff and volunteers will begin Feb. 12, coordinated by the MSU Office for Inclusion and Intercultural Initiatives. It will be conducted by Dr. Benjamin D. Reese Jr. Dr. Reese is a clinical psychologist and the former vice president for institutional equity at Duke University, who consults nationally and globally in the fields of implicit bias, race relations and diversity and inclusion strategy.

Racial bias education efforts will be a continued part of ongoing employee development at the Wharton Center. Plans are underway to develop a diversity, equity and inclusion committee that will include students, faculty, staff, community members and volunteers who will bring a diverse range of identities and perspectives to the Wharton Center. Wharton leadership will participate in all of these efforts and will be responsible for reporting their progress to me.

I want those who have felt the visceral impact of this incident to know that they are heard — by me and every leader of this university. More than listening and sincerely apologizing, we are making changes to ensure we have a safe and supportive campus. This is why I launched a [diversity, equity and inclusion strategic planning](#) effort in December, and more recently, announced that we are moving with urgency to recruit a new [chief diversity](#)

[officer](#) with the pending departure of [Paulette Granberry Russell](#), Senior Advisor to the President for Diversity and Director of the Office for Inclusion and Intercultural Initiatives.

There is no denying this happened on our campus, at a location that was meant to recognize the contributions of MSU's past president, Clifton R. Wharton Jr., a great American and MSU leader and his wife, Dolores Wharton, who both came to campus with a deep appreciation for the arts. We have work to do.

Spartans need to come together as a community and unite in a common belief that all people are welcome on our campus. We have differences. However, these differences should not divide us, but become our strength as we continue to impact the world through our collective talents. The responsibility of creating a truly inclusive campus should not fall on one person but should be a shared priority for all. All of us must confront the personal attitudes that conveniently blind us to our past and, as a result, make it difficult for us to move forward.

The Wharton Center recognizes the need for greater diversity among its staff and volunteers and for creating an environment that reflects our best efforts. However, they are not alone in that need. Our entire campus must view this as an opportunity to learn and reflect on what we can and should do to create a safe and inclusive culture, and we must hold ourselves accountable for achieving these goals.

There is more to be done, but I am confident that together we will succeed in creating an inclusive community of which we all can be proud.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "S. L. Stanley Jr.", written in a cursive style.

Samuel L. Stanley Jr., M.D.
President