To those that take the time to read this letter,

I, Kristofer Newsome, have the honor and privilege to serve as the president of the USF Black Faculty and Staff Association. I am a Black man, a son, a grandson, a husband, a nephew, a cousin, an uncle and friend to many people. I am emotionally and mentally drained from seeing the news on almost any day but especially now. This past Saturday evening going into Sunday morning, I have been additionally saddened, frustrated, disheartened, worried, angered and tired. I do not have the heart to watch the 8-9 minute video of George Floyd being murdered. I have become fatigued and wounded from being in meetings this week, in which I saw and heard my colleagues and students crying as they shared their feelings about the injustices that have occurred. There is a saying that when negative things happen in the United States of America, the negative item impact Black people at least twice as hard. When positive things happen in the United States of America, the positive effects are received at half the rate for Black people.

- Which one of these statuses make me a threat when I walk down any street in a hoodie with a bag of skittles and a can of iced tea?
  - Trayvon Martin – 2012

- Which one of these make me guilty until proven innocent and permit law enforcement (or permit a white person to serve as a proxy for the police) to serve as the judge, jury and executioner without having the opportunity to have a fair trial through the judicial system?

- Which one of these statuses give me the chance to have longer mandatory legal sentences and to be looked at as an adult for a crime that I am convicted for even though I am 18 years old or younger?

- Which one of these titles stops me from being allowed to breathe?

- Which one of these items gives inherit permission for lesser pay for the same work as my white counterparts?

- Which one of these titles does not allow me to feel safe to play in the park or at a community pool party as a teenager?
  - Tamir Rice – 2014 and Dajerria Becton – 2015
USF Black Faculty & Staff Association:

Statement About The Recent Acts of Racism & Injustice  
6/4/2020

- Which one says that I am a suspect in my own home when someone else mistakenly enters my home and believe that they are in their home?
  - Botham Jean – 2018

- Which one of these statuses increase the likelihood that I will be pulled over by the police and possibly not make it home alive?

- Which one of these items says it is alright for someone to shoot me because they do not like my choice of music or the volume of the music?
  - Jordan Davis – 2012 and Elijah Al-Amin – 2017

- Which one of these statuses adds to my intersectionality and reduces the chance that my murder case will go unsolved/not treated as a priority as a because I am either a woman or member of the LGBTQ+ community?
  - Tamla Horsford, Athena Cadence, Celine Walker, Antash’a English, and Cathalina James – All in 2018, Tony McDade and Nina Pop – 2020

There is one answer that is common to all of the aforementioned questions – It is being Black. I have another question to ask: Why does history continue to repeat itself within this country, state and city? The simple answer is because of the privileges afforded to white people in this country via the systemic racism within the legal system, governmental policies related to housing, education, access to healthcare, unequal pay and unemployment rates. There are many more subjects that could be added to this list but I encourage you to do some research and learn more about this history. The reason this is racism and not prejudice is because racism is the belief that a particular race/group of people are superior to another, based on various prejudice beliefs and have created governmental policies and laws to ensure that one race/group maintains power over the other races/groups. You can watch a video in which a group of white people are asked if they would switch lives with the richest, most famous and any other positives social statuses you can think of instead of possibly being an economically challenged white person. None of the white people were willing to make that trade of race.

As I compose this message, I do not have the emotional energy to watch the eight to nine minute video of George Floyd (age at time of death – 46 years old) being murdered by law enforcement in Minneapolis over possibly using a counterfeit twenty dollar bill. I do not have the strength to
watch the video of Ahmaud Arbery (26 years old) attempting to engage in healthy physical activity in Brunswick, Georgia but instead is followed, chased, and murdered by white men that want to be a proxy for the police and the court system. My heart aches knowing that Breonna Taylor (26 years old) was shot eight times while in her home in Louisville, Kentucky by law enforcement while attempting to serve a search warrant, to the wrong house and that had already been served. All three of these tragedies have happened this year between February and May. I have to make sure that I share my excitement and pride in knowing that USF faculty and staff members walked along side of USF students as they all peacefully protested for change! Others have found different ways to show their support through social media posts, making donations to bail bonds funds and other related causes, and/or by just checking on how one another is feeling. How does history repeat itself you may ask?

Every day my spouse is concerned that I might not make it home safely, especially during this time of COVID -19 because I am encouraged to wear a mask on my face to limit the chance of spreading/catching the virus. That mask adds to white people’s fear that I am a threat to them. However, if I do not wear a mask, I am still a threat to white people. My wife’s, my family’s, and my friends’ concern for me is reciprocal because we all know that no matter our age, education, income, or influence – we are Black! We are seen as less than. We are seen as the suspect. And then we are not seen at all! We are not seen by white people. Injustices are ignored because they only happen to Black people. This has to stop because Black people want to live and not merely exist in this world. We want and demand to be treated fairly and equally to any other person on this planet, in this country, in this state of Florida, in the Tampa Bay area, on the USF campuses! Why is it so hard for Black people to be respected and to be treated as equals by people that are not Black? At what age did your parents have a conversation about racism with you? At what age did your parents have a conversation about how to act when confronted by the police? At what age do you have to have these conversations with your children, nieces and nephews, or younger cousins? If these conversations have not or do not happen in your family, speak with any Black person to learn more about these conversations. Please understand that it is difficult to breathe and live free as a Black person because we have so many fears and anxieties that white people and others that have privilege do not have to be concerned about.
Here are three more times that similar tragedies occurred:

2014 – Eric Garner (46 years old) is confronted by New York City police because of possibly selling loose cigarettes in front of a store. Eric Garner and George Floyd both told the police officers that were applying the deadly choke holds on them – “I can’t breathe!” Shamefully, both Eric Garner and George Floyd were correct and died from the choke holds that were applied to restrain them.

2012 – Trayvon Martin (17 years old) was shot by George Zimmerman because George Zimmerman felt threatened by Trayvon Martin walking down the street in Sanford, Florida while wearing a grey hoodie, holding a bag of candy and a can of iced tea. George Zimmerman was arrested and later found not guilty of the fatal shooting by a jury.

2018 – In September, Botham Jean (26 years old) was shot in his home in Dallas, Texas by Amber Guyger when she mistakenly entered Botham Jean’s home, believing it was hers. Amber Guyger believed that Botham Jean was a burglar within Guyger’s home and shot Jean in the chest.

Additionally, there have been protests in Tampa and St. Petersburg before this past weekend. In June 1967, Martin Chambers (19 years old) was shot by police officer James Calvert. There were three days of protest and riots along Central Avenue. In 1987, the deaths of Otis Miller (35 years old) and Melvin Hair (23 years old) by white Tampa police officers led to protests and riots again. In 1996, there were protest and riots in St. Petersburg following the shooting death of TyRon Lewis (18 years old) by police following a traffic stop. While the protest and riots that are taking place now do not focus on the death of local residents, the refrain is the same, a Black man or woman has lost their life by either white police officers or people going beyond reasonable force to enforce the law on their own.

Everyone, not just Black people or minority groups, has the charge to engage in meaningful conversations that causes lasting and positive changes in policies/laws at all levels. Without the conversations, things will either stay the same or the voices of the disenfranchised will not be heard. When the voices of the disenfranchised and downtrodden people are not heard or acknowledged, there are limits to the positive changes that can be made. The people in power do not want significant changes that could lead to a reduction in their power. Due to the lack of more impactful changes to governmental policies and laws, we will continue to repeat the past.
How do the Black faculty and staff within the USF system feel currently? The following are comments from many of the USF Black faculty and staff members, along with allies, about their feelings and emotions:

- USF leadership cannot only “pause to think about racism” but we must actively engage one another to combat racism daily. I am sick of white faculty perpetuating the notion that racism is Black people's concern.

- The USF President’s statement was mostly invisible until Tuesday, June 2 when President Currall’s message was made readily and easily accessible on the front page of the USF home page. When the president’s statement was first released on Saturday, May 30, it was nowhere to be found on the front page of the USF website. It took multiple clicks and/or a search to find the statement.

- We must hold people at USF accountable, including leadership.

- Black faculty and staff members are having to find ways to have difficult conversations about racism with their children (as young as 4 years old) and how to represent themselves appropriately so they can come home safe (hopefully) related to any interactions they might have with police, even before the recent murder of George Floyd. Black faculty and staff members have to express our love for our children, re-affirm our children to let them know that they should be proud to be Black and how to handle the racist events that we face. As Black people, we too, want to create a better life for our children so they do not have to face the same hardships that we did growing up. We want our Black children to have hope that brighter days are to come. We want our Black children to be able to run around freely and play with children of all backgrounds without fear of harm and bias against our children.

- Black faculty, staff and students are exhausted! Black people and our allies have been telling our stories for decades. While there have been some positive changes, we still have more changes to make to create meaningful, lasting positive impacts that will uplift Black people and the entire United States of America.
USF Black Faculty & Staff Association:

- The Black faculty and staff are finding ways to survive instead of being able to enjoy the fruits of our labor. We are struggling to find the energy to stay positive and maintain hope. However, the Black people understand that we must strive to find and share positive outlets to replenish our energy, to keep fighting and support one another.

- When I contemplate that Dylan Roof murdered six people as they welcomed him to worship with them in their church, and he was arrested peacefully, and afforded his due process. George Floyd was suspected of forgery and was beaten and killed. The recent events which propelled us to this renewed stand for the fundamental human right to breathe and to live can threaten to overwhelm us. I draw from the strength of our mothers during slavery times who watched their sons brutalized, maimed, and murdered and who sometimes had to smother their own babies in order to silence them and keep themselves and others safe. We WILL emerge from this horror stronger...and still we rise.

- The difficult conversations that everyone is taking part in now are heartbreaking and soul crushing. However, Black people have always had to have these conversations. Right now, we hope that white people and any allies that are protesting for positive change are finally listening and willing to make the necessary changes.

- It is extremely challenging to avoid all forms of media as Black people. We want to start our healing processes through forgiving those that trespass against us. It is hard to do when we all can read and see the continual killing of Black people, the lack of justice for those lives lost and the absence of concern for Black people overall.

- I think we need to express how saddened we were to not see a message from leadership, how there's been no space provided for Black faculty and staff to get together to process how we are feeling before we jump into supporting students, there needs to be systemic change and a commitment to this as much as we saw communication about COVID-19 and us being number 1 in the state for Performance based metrics.
I really feel that USF perpetuates racism by not holding faculty and staff accountable when a person (Black or another minority group) is treated in a negative way because the white faculty or staff member knows that they have white privilege and will not get in trouble for using it.

The awareness is troublesome for me because I know that my white counterparts do not see me as equal in their eyes, but only as a servant to get their job completed. Keeping silent means you agree with what happens on the USF campus and are not willing to change the status quo. I feel like I come to work under a group of buddy, buddy systems when we have staff meetings - whites on one side and black people on the other. When we have outings, the same thing happens, even when I have tried to change my spots. The white employees will come into the meeting and just move to the other side. They show you, you are not important and they are not afraid to do so.

My thoughts are that the message in response to this, not just national but global situation, from the university president, is very difficult to locate unless you’re really hunting for it on the USF website (prior to Tuesday, June 2). It is a good, strong message but it is buried in the website. I would like to see this statement made more prominent on the USF homepage, or at the very least on the USF News homepage because it is happening right now, it is news, and it impacts all of our students, faculty, staff, administrators, and everyone on this campus. If we truly care, we will be open, prominent, and transparent in such messaging.

That's part 1 for what we need to do at a bare minimum. We should follow this up, again at a minimum, with a statement from a university official on camera (as the university did for our campus with COVID-19 updates) expressing the thoughts of the university on this in that same space where it can be easily found.

Action items: Please refer to the unified message from a coalition of Black Faculty and Staff leadership from around the USF System titled “Call to Action – USF Black Employees 2020”. The unified message contains the action items that have been shared with the USF administration to create lasting, positive and impactful changes.
In closing, I encourage you to review the various statements that have been shared by the members of USF leadership, especially the one from Dr. Charles “Charly” Lockwood – Senior Vice President, USF Health and Dean for USF Health Morsani College of Medicine. We cannot be afraid to say the word “Black”. We cannot act as if by ignoring what is going on, you will not be affected. We must not allow our fear to consume us and prevents us from supporting/fighting for justice and positive changes. Per the USF President, Steven Currall’s message: “I believe we must support and care for each other during times like these and not forget that each of us is empowered to stand up to injustice whenever and wherever it occurs.” We must also remember that we have to continuously fight against injustice every day because we cannot simply wait for another horrible video of a Black person suffering to feel motivation for action! While the Black community is asked to forgive another miscarriage of justice, we should not have to suffer any more man-made atrocities. We cannot walk alone in creating positive and lasting systemic changes!

Stay safe, remain in good health, find ways to remain positive and support each other,

Kristofer Newsome
USF Black Faculty and Staff Association – President