

## OPEN LETTER TO THE AMERICAN COLLEGE OF SURGEONS

August 31, 2021

I have been a fellow of the American College of Surgeons since 1995. I have been honored to see “FACS” after my name, and I have displayed in my office, not a picture of my medical school graduation, but a picture of me smiling in my cap and gown at the very memorable and grand Fellowship induction ceremony.

I am alarmed that the College is promoting an intolerant and divisive orthodoxy that insists that “white” people are irredeemably racist oppressors and that all others are victims and oppressed. According to this ideology, we must judge each other by skin color and group identity, and if we’re a member of an oppressed group, we must demand and expect accommodations, exceptions, apologies, and reparations.

Recently, fellows on the College’s online community page have engaged in a robust discussion about the College’s new “equity” initiatives. In May, Dr. Richard Bosshardt, someone I have worked with for almost 30 years and whom I respect and admire, questioned how to square “equity” initiatives with excellence because the former will require quotas, which will inevitably impact the latter. I contacted him, indicating my support for his position. When he posted on the forum that he had support from a “black female” colleague, he was met with disbelief and charges of fabricating lies. Since then, I have joined in the discussion, explaining that I do actually exist, and that I’m not “white.” I share Dr. Bosshardt’s concerns, and I reject the regressive ideology that the College is promoting. I am clear evidence that the arguments for the existence of systemic racism and rampant racial and gender hostility are flawed.

As a female, dark-skinned immigrant, I pursued and achieved my lifelong goal of becoming a doctor. The opportunity was there, and I took it. Like every other human being, I have faced challenges. My parents divorced when I was a teenager; soon after, when I was 17, my mother died from breast cancer, and my brothers and I came to America from Jamaica to live with our Dad. Despite these challenges, I was determined to fulfill my dream of a career in medicine. I’m a quick learner, a disciplined student, and a good test taker, so I was able to progress seamlessly toward my goal. I am certain that I achieved my goal, not due to my own exceptionalism, but due to American exceptionalism which gives all individuals the opportunity to fulfill their dreams.

I was described by one of my colleagues on the American College of Surgeons online forum as a “good old boy” and another described me as “optimistic and resilient.” I plead guilty to both. As a human being and a child of God, I am a treasure in God’s eye. Jesus, by His humiliation, torture and execution, provided a Way for my reconciliation with God and my eternal salvation.

My life has value and worth because I am unique and created by God. Other than that, I don't consider myself to be exceptional.

Racism, prejudice, and misogyny are all real, but in America, they are not enough to stop you unless you let them. I am proof that success and achievement of your dreams do not require that you be a particular gender or have a certain skin color. I believe that positive and constructive approaches to diversity will get us a lot further than being perpetually suspicious, offended and victimized.

College leadership denies that they are promoting intolerance or orthodoxy, and yet they invited Ibram Kendi as the keynote speaker at this month's leadership retreat. I will no longer sit by idly as the College promotes and implements this divisive, corrosive, illogical, illiberal ideology. My life and my success are evidence that this ideology is plainly wrong.

Celia Nelson, MD, FACS