

# A Statement From PBKNY On Recent Political Violence in Washington, D.C.



January 7, 2021

*“The difference between the almost right word and the right word is really a large matter. ’tis the difference between the lightning bug and the lightning.” --Mark Twain*

To The Membership of The Phi Beta Kappa New York Association:

There are words provided to us in the English language that can be used to describe the events of January 6th, 2021 at The Capitol Building in Washington, D.C.: Shocked, Saddened, Dismayed, Disquieted, Disturbed, Outraged. There are some who may not choose to use these words, but it is our collective belief, not just as an organization, but as human beings that this is the lexicon we must use--to condemn political violence, to condemn insurrection, to condemn the disruption and attempted corruption of our democracy. As we saw on January 6th, words have power, and they also have consequences. And so, it does not feel the time to choose words with delicacy; rather, it is a time to say boldly and plainly (as many in Congress and elsewhere have done), that these heinous actions, and those who perpetrated them, were unequivocally wrong.

So too is it wrong, as many have done, to attempt to shift blame for these activities onto unproven “others” or to play a game of justification by juxtaposing this with moments of peaceful protest. We are a learned organization and an apolitical one, but that does not abrogate our responsibility to use our voice to call out harm and ugly display when we see it. The time for timidity has passed.

As a learned organization, we feel that it is incumbent upon us to not merely point to what has transpired and condemn it. Rather, we must issue a clarion call that is rooted in the beliefs of our humble and long-lived institution: an appeal to a diverse and unparalleled education as a means for reconciliation and national resurrection. The grievances of those people who stormed The Capitol are perhaps rooted in a growing concern for many of us: inequality, driven in part by unequal access to academics. And so, our solution is to encourage all of us to seek and strive for a common truth and understanding through broad learning that challenges assumptions and sharpens our examination of all the worlds’ contours through respectful dialogue. Meaning and enlightenment are hardly ever found at the end of a rifle, but rather through study that leads to the attainment of wonders both intellectual and pecuniary. In this way, we can achieve an equality of mind that makes the recklessness and abhorrent misadventures of January 6th historical artifact.

We grieve for our Republic. We grieve for those lost in the throes of malice. We hold high those who were not cowed by slings and arrows both literal and figurative. We stand together and look forward to a bright and brilliant future in the full light of our better angels.

With wishes for your continued health, safety, and well-being.

Respectfully,

Members of The Board of Directors, Phi Beta Kappa New York Association