



A message from **THE PRESIDENT**

Women's Rights are Human Rights: On Voting and Civic Engagement

My Dear Students and Colleagues,

Recent decisions by the Supreme Court have left many of us angry and feeling abandoned by an institution that is supposed to protect women rights and human rights. The old belief that women's bodies were territories to conquer and that guns were needed in the streets to conquer the wild west that empowers violence has become our present nightmare as citizens of this the most just system of governments. We cannot lose our right to live in a civilized and fair society. I am writing to you, my dear students and colleagues, to urge you to register and to exercise proudly your honor and privilege to vote for leaders who represent your interests and share your beliefs.

As a woman who emigrated from her native Dominican Republic at the age of 13, I am the happy and proud president of one of the finest community colleges in the country. Mine has been a journey marked by hard work and opportunity, supported along the way by caring teachers and professors in public and higher education. I am a believer in the value of public education and above all, in the value of taking full advantage of the rights afforded me as a citizen of this beautiful and generous nation.

My first thirteen years were spent in a country ruled by a dictatorship; a country where women were not involved, for the most part, in political leadership positions and where voting a right granted to women in the 1940's, was not fully exercised. Years later, as a young U.S. citizen and mother, I was proud to exercise my right. I always took my young children with me in the voting booth, to teach them the importance and the value of my vote. I vote. I vote because it is my obligation to vote. I vote because every voice needs to be heard so that we can continue to be a strong and caring nation.

I was blessed to come to the United States in the sixties, a time of change and progress for us, people of color, for women and for all the people of the United States. I lived to hear Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. speak and to have the privilege of having his speeches and writings shape the woman I am today. I evoke now some words from one of my favorite speeches by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., "Civil Right No. 1: The Right to Vote"

“Voting is the foundation stone for political action. With it the Negro can eventually vote out of office public officials who bar the doorway to decent housing, public safety and decent integrated education. It is now obvious that the basic elements so vital to Negro advancement can only be achieved by seeking redress from government at local, state, and federal levels. To do this the vote is essential.

In New York Magazine (14 March 1965): 26-27 in A Testament of Hope, The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King Jr., edited by James M. Washington.

My dear students and colleagues, if you have not done so, I urge you to register and to have friends and family register to vote. More than ever, taking personal responsibility to ensure that you and yours cast a ballot today in the primaries and on November 8, 2022 has become imperative. It is about voting out those whose intentions are to take our rights as women, as LGBTQ+ and as diverse people. For it is about power, the power to contribute to the shaping and the fabric of life in this beautiful country. The power to stop the clock from turning back to years when America had not been as inclusive as it could have been. The power to ensure that our elected officials continue to move us forward toward “a more perfect union”. Statistics show that the young of every ethnicity, and Black and Latinx in general, vote in much smaller numbers than the older population. As Dr. King taught us, we all must be heard and must be counted. Be at the voting booth, exercise your right and be counted, for it is a privilege that was earned by the struggle, suffering and sacrifice of so many who came before us. This is a responsibility that we cannot walk away from. Be there! Silence is not a luxury any of us can afford. [Click here](#) to check your voter registration status and for information on your local polling site.

For you and yours I wish a thousand splendid suns and offer many, many thanks. *Mil gracias y bendiciones.**

Daisy Cocco De Filippis, Ph.D.
President
Eugenio María de Hostos Community College, CUNY

A Poem As We Seek to Rebuild

It Is I Who Must Begin

By Vaclav Havel

It is I who must begin.
Once I begin, once I try —
here and now,
right where I am,
not excusing myself
by saying things
would be easier elsewhere,
without grand speeches and
ostentatious gestures,
but all the more persistently
— to live in harmony
with the “voice of Being,” as I
understand it within myself

— as soon as I begin that,
I suddenly discover,
to my surprise, that
I am neither the only one,
nor the first,
nor the most important one
to have set out
upon that road.

Whether all is really lost
or not depends entirely on
whether or not I am lost.

Vaclav Havel in *Teaching with Fire, Poetry that Sustains the Courage To Teach*, Intrator and Scribner, editors. Jossey-Bass, 2003, p. 189.

*I wrote an earlier version of this essay which was distributed in 2012.

Office of the President
Eugenio María de Hostos Community College
475 Grand Concourse, A-Building, Room 341, Bronx, NY 10451
718-518-4300 | PRESIDENTSOFFICE@hostos.cuny.edu

