



SAINT LOUIS
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— EST. 1818 —

SCHOOL OF LAW

100 North Tucker Boulevard
St. Louis, MO 63101-1930

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May 31, 2020

Dear members of the SLU LAW community,

The academic year has ended and the summer months have begun. Even as the pandemic crisis continues, there are so many things that could be occupying our time and attention and emotional energy right now: the start of summer jobs; the dream of summer vacations; the easing of stay-at-home restrictions, even as we continue to wear masks and engage in social distancing; for our graduates, the pride of having graduated and the need to prepare for the pending bar exam. And yet, during the past week, it has been difficult for many of us to focus on anything other than the tragic acts of violence that continue to be inflicted on the Black community.

Such acts of violence, most recently the depraved killing of George Floyd by a Minneapolis police officer, are horrifying. The feelings of anger, despair, grief and rage have been overwhelming. And I acknowledge that I cannot begin to understand just how difficult and exhausting it must be for those members of our community who are Black. I am so sorry for your pain.

This is yet another instance when it is nearly impossible to find words that can adequately or meaningfully speak to the pain and anger that I know many of you feel. But let me at least acknowledge how heavy and deeply troubling this week has been. To my Black colleagues, students and friends, let me at least affirmatively say that I see you; I acknowledge that you are hurting; I stand with you. And to all my colleagues and students who are grieving or angry, let me at least say that I am here for you.

As current and future lawyers, judges and members of the legal profession, we are called to be committed to that great American ideal of justice for all. As a society, we have fallen far short of that ideal. Yet, we have a shared duty to work to ensure access to justice, to seek the equitable administration of justice, and to pursue justice for the oppressed. As members of a Jesuit law school community, we have a special calling to insert ourselves in the world on behalf of the marginalized. We are called to create a more just society, rather than to perpetuate, through our inaction, a system that does not work equally for all. That is a calling we should all take very seriously, no matter our specific vocation.

What does that mean in this context? As the national narrative shifts, it is critically important that we not lose sight of the fact that another man was killed simply for having been born Black. We must remain focused on that. It is critical that we remember George Floyd, as well as Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and so many others. Racial injustice has always been a significant problem; we have now all seen videos that demonstrate very

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clearly what Black voices have long been trying to tell the rest of us. It's past time we begin to listen.

One voice, the hauntingly powerful voice of 12-year-old Keedron Bryant, singing "I just want to live; God, protect me," broke my heart and brought me to tears. That young child shouldn't have to feel such anguish and fear. Yet, until something changes, his survival could depend on it.

Members of the SLU LAW community, I care about each of you. If you wish to speak or to shout or simply to cry together, please let me know, and I will be here; I will listen. Please know that. Until then, please be safe, please be well. And please, let's actively and intentionally work together in pursuit of anti-racism, to end oppression, and to achieve that as-yet-unrealized dream of liberty and justice for all. It is long overdue.

Bill Johnson
Dean and Professor of Law