



Yale Law School

May 31, 2020

To the Members of Our Community:

Whenever I walk through the halls of Yale Law School, I pass by a set of posters that bear witness to the collapse of the core values to which the School is dedicated. Each year, our students post the names of the victims of police violence, a silent testament to the ongoing breakdown of law, the persistence of racial violence, and the absence of justice.

George Floyd's and Breonna Taylor's names will be added to our walls this fall. And theirs are not the only names we say today as we reflect on the continued racial violence and abuse of racial power and racial privilege enacted upon African Americans. I think of Ahmaud Arbery and Christian Cooper. I know that these names are just the latest, most high-profile instances of this country's shameful legacy of treating black lives as if they do not matter. And I know that I will see new names on our walls in the future. A part of racism's cruelty lies in its tenaciousness.

The events of recent days have been gut-wrenching and underscore the yawning gap between our practices and our ideals. These acts of racial violence, oppression, and discrimination are immoral. They corrode the legitimacy of our legal system. They threaten the safety, well-being, and selfhood of members of our own community.

My heart goes out to all of you, especially to the African American and Black members of the faculty, staff, and student body. We have already been through an exhausting few months, and I am deeply pained that we are apart and isolated when we most need each other. I hope every member of this community will reach out, connect, and care for one another.

What matters now isn't just this community's strong bonds, but also its work. Many of our

faculty have devoted their life's work to reforming policing, promoting procedural justice, ending mass incarceration, and combating racial subordination. Many of our students came here to engage with these issues and have fiercely pursued these causes through clinics, centers, and their own projects and scholarship.

This week I find it hard to take much solace in this work. We must turn with clear eyes to the posters on our walls, which remind us that the legal system we inhabit has yet to make good on its promise. They remind us that we cannot rest easy. They remind us that we must reflect not just on law's abject failures, but on our own. They remind us how much work is left to do. As a law school, we have a special responsibility to exercise leadership in service of equality, and we will do so.

Please take care of yourselves.

Heather K. Gerken