

MESSAGE FROM PROVOST EVANS IN RESPONSE TO NATIONWIDE PROTEST AGAINST POLICE VIOLENCE

May 2020

Dear ERC Students,

I write to you on behalf of a college that is proudly committed to peace and justice, at home and abroad. But I also write in the spirit of a South African who was shaped for decades by a murderous white supremacist state that kept its knee on the necks of the black majority. The anger that we all feel in the US today, therefore, feels doubly real to me because killings that masquerade as “policing” were as emblematic of racial violence in Apartheid South Africa as they are of the United States today. Unlike George Floyd, who was murdered on a street in Minneapolis, the black majority in South Africa prevailed with the support of white allies and the embrace of the world. Racism saturates whiteness, privilege, and entitlement here just as it did in Apartheid South Africa. Sadly, it is not easy to envisage racial democracy coming quickly or soon to the United States.

The parallels between the two racial orders are also a reminder that racism, xenophobia, and the systematic marginalization of communities can never ever be left on automatic pilot. It requires active complicity--of states, dominant groups, and social movements--to maintain and continually modernize the ways in which people can be deprived of their citizenship rights. As Malcolm X once said, “Racism is like a Cadillac—they come out with a new version every year”. Reacting to decades of police killings that the law has sanctioned, the multi-cultural protests that erupted first in Minneapolis before spreading across the country are saying precisely this: Racism is a chameleon that adapts to every corner of American society—no nook or cranny can, or ever has escaped its noxious creeds. We are all racialized. The protests, therefore, challenge each of us to define where we stand in relation to privilege and entitlement and to ponder these as racialized subjects. The protests remind us, too, of that elemental and unadorned truth that resides at the core of all compassion: “Silence Is Violence”.

The staff of Eleanor Roosevelt College applauds all those who have so bravely cracked the code of racial silence that hobbles American society. They are the latest in a long line who have exposed the racist brutality that disfigures so much of civilian policing in the United States. We recognize, too, that the greatest burden in this multicultural protest movement falls on the shoulders of our black and brown students, communities who already suffer disproportionately from the COVID-19 crisis. We salute these students in particular and share their pain.

Ivan Evans

Provost of Eleanor Roosevelt College