Message to LMU History Students from the Chair

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31 May 2020

Dear LMU History students and recent graduates,

It’s hard not to feel both despair and outrage in response to the killings of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and George Floyd, the latest victims in a long history of racist violence in this country. What I found most chilling about the murder of George Floyd was just how relaxed and casual Derek Chauvin was about it, coolly looking into the camera as Floyd cried for his life and for his mother, all while other officers stood idly by.

As historians, we are equipped with an understanding of the history of slavery, white supremacy, and structural racism in this country, as well as of the history of policing. It is our ethical obligation to interrogate that history and to engage in what Germans call *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* – to struggle with and work through our past and its legacies. Our Jesuit and Marymount traditions also call us on us to use that knowledge in the service of our communities (the idea of the “contemplative in action”), to work to create a more just society, and to stand in solidarity with the vulnerable, marginalized, and historically oppressed.

For those of us who are white, standing in solidarity means listening to our Black friends, classmates, and colleagues, who daily experience the reality of racism; it also means following their lead, for they have been fighting for justice their entire lives. But it does not mean relying on them to educate us about racism or tell us how to be anti-racist; that must be our work, and it is not a single act, but an ongoing process. As history majors, you have likely begun that process, and I commend you for this and write to encourage you to get involved in that antiracism work in whatever way you can. For our students who are Black, Indigenous, and people of color, I want you to know that the history department is committed to this work: to creating a safe place where you can thrive, to the pursuit of justice, to understanding and fighting racism.

Let us put our study of history to work in the world. Let us embrace the call to be people with and for others. Let us not give in despair. And let us not be casual in the face of racism and injustice.

Black lives matter,

Elizabeth A. Drummond