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Gathering for Racial Justice

Office of Diversity & Inclusion Illinois Wesleyan University

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Gathering for Racial Justice
Monday, August 31, 2020
4:30pm at Evelyn Chapel
Sanctuary capacity: 43

Music: Prelude from J.S. Bach's Suite No. 2 in D minor (Kira Gurovich)

During music: Slide show of names

Elyse Welcome

Kaleb Carter reading Poem

Hannah to Speak

Karla to Speak

Nancy to Speak

Sean Ly to Speak

Elyse share questions for reflection and Hannah types in Chat or with a powerpoint?

Music: Sarabande from Leclair's Violin Sonata "Tombeau" (Ethan Schuller and Eva Ferguson)

People share: Elyse - with people in Evelyn

Hannah with people in Chat

Katherine Watson & another Ambassador recite Maya Angelou's poem: Continue

Jarlai to read Poem

Hannah close - future events & sharing of commitments

Welcome and Litany for Black Lives

Hannah and Elyse

Poetry (read by and/or composed by students) -- Here are two possibilities but students could of course choose whatever they want!

“In Honor and Praise to Black Rage” by Byron "Tyler" Coles

“We Are Not Done” by Audette Fulbright Fulson

Sharing our hopes and concerns (begin with Karla)

There are too many names to count. We can go back centuries but we can also look as recently as last week. From George Stinney in 1944 and Emmett Till in 1955 Trayvon Martin in 2012, we see *children* who have been assassinated by the anti-Black racist empowerment of weaponized whiteness. Today we say their names. We invite you to say the names with us knowing that there are so many more than we can share in one short event. Each of these names are but a few of the lives lost, some graphically captured on film, others lost in silence in the stolen comfort of their own homes.

Welcome people and invite them to take several sheets of paper (and pen, if needed) to respond to one or all of these questions.

What are you working for right now?

What are your hopes for this country and our campus?

What are you scared about this semester?

With whom should we be standing in solidarity now and through the year?

Elyse Nelson-Winger Remarks

Good afternoon students, faculty, staff at Illinois Wesleyan to this Gathering for Racial Justice, hosted by the Offices of Multifaith Engagement and Diversity and Inclusion. My name is Elyse Nelson Winger, Associate Dean of Students and Chaplain here at IWU. Thank you, Kira, for your musical offering, the Prelude from J.S. Bach's Suite No. 2 in D minor. Cellist Christopher Constanza writes that “D minor: [is] a key of seriousness, sadness, tragedy, loss, and strength. From the first 3 notes of this intensely emotional prelude we feel immersed in a dramatically dark d minor world.” (<https://costanzabach.stanford.edu/commentary/suite-no-2-d-minor>) We are gathered today in this Chapel and from our homes, offices and residence halls because we feel the realities of a “d minor world.” The persisting brutality exercised upon Black women, men and children from Kenosha to Minneapolis, Louisville to Dallas just doesn’t stop. Jacob Blake was shot seven times in the back in front of his three young children. A white 17 year old brandishing an assault rifle, fancying himself a protector, murdered two men on Kenosha’s streets. We gather today in grief and horror because the list of names of people of color killed by police and citizens alike is just too long. We can go back centuries but we can also look as recently as last week. And embedded in this list are children: George Stinney in 1944, Emmett Till in 1955, Trayvon Martin in 2012. The names that were just shared on the screen represent a loved son or daughter, father, mother, friend or lover. Every name is a person with inherent value and dignity whose brutal treatment at the hands of those entrusted by our communities to keep all people safe and to follow the law has resulted in their death or grave injury. We in this country have created systems of oppression and white supremacy that silence and kill our black brothers and sisters. The time for ignoring that, not understanding that, dismissing that is over. The Rev. Terrance McKinley writes that NOW is the time “to take a stand...The time is now to raise our voices and to call on our nation to recognize the effects of racism in our criminal justice system...” He writes that “Wherever you are, whatever platform you have, whatever sphere of influence you enjoy, the time is now for all of us to do something...” (<https://sojo.net/articles/if-not-now-when>) That is why we are here. To lament together, to listen to and support one another, to figure out what each of us will do to dismantle racism, to challenge oppression, to build the community we’ve got to keep becoming at Illinois Wesleyan. During this time together, I hope that you will take heart, know that you are not alone, and that you have what it takes to add something to this work. Register to vote and vote. Encourage others to register and vote. Join demonstrations in your community and here in Bloomington-Normal. Learn, in classes, at campus events, about

the history and impact of racism and all forms of injustice and figure out how you'll be a part of changing the systems and the attitudes that oppress and traumatize too many. To get there we have to tell the truth about our hopes and our fears. Later on in this gathering, we will invite you to post in the chat or write here on paper responses to one or more of these questions: *What are you working for right now?*

What are your hopes for this country and our campus? What are you scared about this semester?

With whom should we be standing in solidarity now and through the year? We will collect your responses and add them to a wall in Hansen so we can keep reminding one another of our commitments to learn, to support, to act. We are living in a d minor world. There is sadness and tragedy all around. But there is also strength. So let us hold fast to the truth that South African Archbishop Desmond Tutu once proclaimed: "Goodness is stronger than evil; love is stronger than hate; light is stronger than darkness; life is stronger than death." I'd like to welcome Kaleb Carter, junior at Illinois Wesleyan and President of the Black Student Union, to speak.

Hannah Mesouani remarks

Good afternoon and thank you all for being here today.

How many times do we have to gather in fear and grief?

How many times do we have to see Black bodies shot at and smothered?

How many times do we have to see Black lives treated as expendable or dangerous or simply inconvenient?

How many times do we have to hear the screams and sobs of Black children witnessing first-hand the traumas inflicted on their parents?

How many times do we have to hold our breath for fear of having it taken away?

The struggle is not new, nor is the Movement. I would like to offer up a reading of a favourite poem-

Malcolm by Sonia Sanchez –

do not speak to me of martyrdom
of men who die to be remembered
on some parish day.
i don't believe in dying
though i too shall die
and violets like castanets
will echo me.

yet this man
this dreamer,
thick-lipped with words
will never speak again
and in each winter

when the cold air cracks
with frost, i'll breathe
his breath and mourn
my gun-filled nights.
he was the sun that tagged
the western sky and
melted tiger-scholars
while they searched for stripes.
he said, "fuck you white
man. we have been
curled too long. nothing
is sacred now. not your
white faces nor any
land that separates
until some voices
squat with spasms."
do not speak to me of living.
life is obscene with crowds
of white on black.
death is my pulse.
what might have been
is not for him/or me
but what could have been
floods the womb until i drown.

Do not speak to any of us of martyrdom. Why could we not love George Floyd in life? Why did we not run to support Ahmed Arbery before his last breath? Why did we not care about Breonna Taylor before her home was invaded and her life was stolen?

This is on ALL of us. Yes, white folks, absolutely, but also my fellow POCs who do not know the joy and on-going trauma of daring to be Black. Of being blessed enough to be Black.

We all need to give each other our roses while we are still alive because too many lives have been lost. For what? White anxiety? Fragility? The status quo? This has to stop.

So what can you do about it?

Four letters- VOTE. The status quo is poison. It is seeping into every facet of our lives like an oil

spill. This racist poison is showing that our once-presumed solid foundations and the very structures of our society are about as solid as wet cardboard.

VOTE.

You can always tell where a person's or institution's values lie based on where they spend their money, their time, and their truth.

Be LOUD. It is not a disruption when the thing that you are getting in the way of is murder and on-going crimes against humanity. We are all experiencing a trauma right now. It is literally not safe to be outside for fear of harm or death by exposure to covid. For our Black friends, it really hasn't ever been safe to go outside. Or stay in one's own car, home, or bed. Between the uniformed assassins and the Amy Coopers of the world, masks won't help.

As Sonia Sanchez wrote - do not speak to me of martyrdom. How many people have to die to prove that their life was worth living in the first place? Stop turning Black and brown folks into the symbols of their own oppression. Please remember that it is supposed to be Black *LIVES* Matter- not Black deaths.

Start believing Black voices. Start defending Black lives. Start valuing Black love.

If this isn't a priority for each of you as educators and students seeking to make an positive impact on the world around you, make it one. So **VOTE. ENGAGE. LISTEN.** Be active in making the world safe because right now, it absolutely isn't and that's on all of us.

Sean Ly remarks

For those of you who don't know me my name is Sean Ly,

First and foremost I'd like to thank The Office of Diversity and Inclusion and IWU Multifaith Engagement for allowing me to speak on behalf of my own experience and the current climate of society today. As a student, I prefer that I would not be reading off of a paper but I want to be sure to speak clearly and truthfully. I am in no manner trying to convey or represent the black community in full authenticity as my identity is Asian-American and I have multiple identities of privilege.

As a student of color, it is with great pride to represent my identity to the fullest in anything that I do. It is also with great humility that I stand before you to honor my Black peers and use my privilege to be an ally.

Over these past few months, the racial injustices that have occurred to Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Aubery, George Floyd, Elijah McClain, Jacob Blake, and more and the inconsistent response to these horrific events show the true colors of certain faculty and staff that I won't name, but you know who you are. It's been a week since the shooting of Jacob Blake occurred. It's been a week that a statement hasn't been made from IWU in regards to this shooting. Do you realize how the lack of such a statement alludes to the lack of comfort and lack of value of a student of color on this campus?

Glossy objects tend to reflect more than they reveal.

There is plenty of room for us to care about two values at one time. There is plenty of room for two signs to stand on a lawn at once. It has occurred to me that signs on lawns change like the seasons from what I observe, but do you know what doesn't change? It is the lives of many minoritized students that choose to come here and come to a realization that they are presented as a threat. Students of color are countless being tokenized for the benefits of creating a better space for dominant identities. What is not shown is the complete disrespect and notion of invalidation that students of color feel on this campus wherever they are.

Just the other day, at the RSO fair a person came up to the Students of Color in STEM (SCS) table. That person looked us all in our eyes, folded his arms, spread his legs in complete power to ask us "What makes you different from Black student Union?" I back up, pull up my pants and fold my arms as well because that's the New Orleans in me wanting to fight. Considering the circumstances, I acknowledge the question and educate that person on the fundamental differences this club has from the other cultural RSOs. To soon realize that directly afterwards, this same person asks men of color and women of color the same damn question. I was soon to find out that one of my exec tells me this happened to SALSA as well "What makes you different from the spanish club" It is one thing to be naive, but if you are blatantly trying to empower yourself by undermining the very identities on our campus after people are educating you, you are the epitome of a dominant culture threatening the students of color here at IWU and beyond and it is sick.

To be ridiculed for speaking up and for someone to be disappointed in my view is appealing because there are those in this institution who are scared for a student of color to empower themselves for the right reasons. But we are powerful. Whether they come for us on the streets or with the dominant ideologies, we are still powerful and we will always deserve to be heard.

I will now give it off to elyse and Hannah

A Poem *Continue* by Maya Angelou