



"We Have To Change the Narrative of Racial Injustice and Inequality in this Country"

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Reflections from Head of School Tad Roach on this week's events in America

Head of School Tad Roach wrote these reflections over the course of the past week (May 25-31, 2020).

The images from the streets of Minneapolis and around the country today lacerate all of us, for they depict an assault on the dignity and humanity of African-American citizens in the country. George Floyd died on the street Monday after a police officer knelt on his neck as he repeatedly said, "I can't breathe." Three other officers watched the incident, refusing to intervene even as a citizen pleaded for mercy and restraint. All four officers were fired by the end of the day .

My sophomore and junior English classes this week wrote reflections on the poem "Invocation" by [Elizabeth Alexander](#), found at the National Memorial for Peace and Justice in Montgomery, Alabama.

The poem addresses "enslaved black people, people terrified by lynching, African-Americans humiliated by racial segregation and Jim Crow, and people of color burdened by contemporary presumption of guilt and police violence."

The Memorial, in other words, stands literally and figuratively as our country's own approach to truth and reconciliation. What Bryan Stevenson teaches us every day is that we have to change the narrative of racial injustice and inequality in this country.

Monday's tragic event , as well as the shooting of Ahmaud Aubery in Georgia two weeks ago, remind us that we have so much work left to do in our schools, in our communities, and in our nation to move intentionally, consistently, and urgently towards an end, once and for all, to the madness violence, and poison of racism.

If we all knew our history , if we all studied how racism in America continues to replicate itself in multiple and and ever changing forms, if we were truly familiar with the stories and names and suffering of men and women, children, and young men and women caught in the whirlwind of racism and violence, if we truly read and listened to Douglass, Parks, King, Lewis, Baldwin, Morrison, Whitehead, and Ward, if we traveled to Montgomery to see the Legacy Museum and National Memorial, we would finally understand that we have a responsibility to end this terror, once and for all.

We at St. Andrew’s remember what we learned, what we felt, and what we promised after seeing “Just Mercy “ together as a school community this winter. We witnessed that story of injustice, inequality , and cruelty together, and afterwards, we felt that each of us had a role to play in fighting for a better, more just and equitable country and world.

In “*Testimony: 1968*”, the poet Rita Dove reflects on the horrific events of that year in American history, particularly drawing on the tragic deaths of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Robert Kennedy. She writes:

Loss whittling you thin. / Grief is the constant now, hope the last word spoken.

I kept thinking of that poem yesterday as I realized how important civic leadership is in a national crisis—leadership that understands our country’s aspirations, ideals, and principles; leadership that expresses empathy, love, and compassion; leadership that listens carefully to the anguished voices in the land; leadership that finds a way to express hope and faith in humanity, in conversation, in reform. I see leadership in the sacred calling of students and teachers.

As this nation finds itself caught in a whirlwind of confusion, fear, anger, and betrayal in this 2020 year, we who are students and educators carry a special responsibility to feel and understand the magnitude of the emotions coursing through the heart of the country. We carry the responsibility of offering and embodying hope, regeneration, and creativity in the culture of the country. We carry the responsibility of connecting education in its most enlightened form to the study, understanding, and practice of recovery, reconciliation, peace, and justice.

We understood at the beginning of the pandemic that the virus would attack our public health system, ravage our economy, and test our humanity, compassion, empathy, and love. We knew that the health emergency might well uncover and highlight inequalities in our country and deepen the divide of polarization that has become a feature of American life.

Education will lead us through this difficult time, an education that honors truth, reconciliation, peace, justice, and the redeeming power of love. This country will not emerge from this difficult

time without the humanity, spirit, and dignity of students and teachers who embody the virtues of this nation at its best.

In difficult times, St. Andrew's represents hope, faith, and love in the world. I encourage you all this week to express those virtues and grace.