Statement in Support of Black Lives and Protests against Police and State Violence

NWSA is outraged about the recent death of George Floyd at the hands of a white police officer. Mr. Floyd’s murder is just the latest iteration of recent police violence, state-sanctioned lynching, torture and unjust incarceration of Black people. Breonna Taylor, an emergency room technician in Louisville, was shot in her own home. Ahmaud Arbery was shot by two armed white men who pursued him while he was out jogging in his Georgia suburb. And Tony McDade, a Black transgender man was shot to death by police last week in Tallahassee, Florida. As we struggle to cope with the global pandemic, which has disproportionately hit the Black community, an epidemic of murder of Black people, including transgender and gender nonconforming people, continues to sweep the country. These horrific killings are symptomatic of structural racism and systemic violence rooted in white supremacy, racialized heteropatriarchy, capitalism, militarism, imperialism, and the carceral state.

The question of violence is at the center of Mr. Floyd’s murder, the protests, and the harsh state response. Equating looting—property damage—to violence, officials have deployed tear gas and rubber bullets, and cops in riot gear have shot and beaten people and arrested protesters en masse. The racially coded language of looting and rioting rationalizes the use of military-style force by the state but fails to take into account the generations of corporate looting, labor theft from Black people, land theft from indigenous people, and the multiple forms of exploitation and expropriation upon which this country was built. It also fails to account for the other forms of state-based violence that shape people’s lives: the epidemic of hunger, homelessness, and unemployment, the decades of disinvestment in poor communities, the millions of incarcerated and detained people, Black and brown service workers who are lacking protective equipment, and the failure of the federal or local governments to ensure the health of the most vulnerable. The current protests have grown out of festering rage and frustration around relentless police violence, economic deprivation, political marginalization, inadequate health care, and social isolation.

NWSA joins people around the world who have expressed outrage at the continued state-based and state-sanctioned violence directed at Black communities. As intersectional feminist scholars and activists we are acutely aware of the multiple racialized and gendered forms of state-based violence, both overt and covert, that structure people’s lives. We understand that the police officers in Minneapolis have been arrested and charged but we believe that that is not enough. Police procedures that negatively target Black communities must be changed. We call for resistance, resilience, justice, and solidarity.

Signed by the Executive Committee of the NWSA Governing Council with affiliations for identification purposes only:
Premilla Nadasen, President, Barnard College
Diane Harriford, Vice President, Vassar College
Karsonya Wise Whitehead, Secretary, Loyola University Maryland
Natali Valdez, Treasurer, Wellesley College

June 2020