

Dear Students,

I write to you at the end of 10 days of protest, uprisings, and calls to condemn and dismantle the ideology and effects of white supremacy in our country, most specifically police brutality and state sanctioned violence against people of color. We in the Children and Youth Studies Program add our voice to this call. Today, and every day, we also ask for you - those who do or will work with children - to make justice for children of color a centerpiece of your work life.

Children and Youth Studies is a discipline that calls for the human rights of all children. In most of our classes, we focus on social justice issues, honing in on the inequalities that children of color face in our society. Our entire curriculum is tailored to bring awareness to the different childhoods of children in the US, especially those based on race, ethnicities, and backgrounds. We learn how children of color are thought of as less innocent than white children in US society. This thinking has ramifications in our schools, our day care centers, our social services, our sports and after school programs, our art programs, at the playgrounds and parks, and walking home from the corner store. Children of color are often thought of as being up to no good or needing punishment rather than as children, being silly, making mistakes, and being full of wonder.

As students of this program, you know it is up to you to help right these wrongs. To do whatever you can to treat children of color with justice and equity, kindness and compassion, with the benefit of the doubt, and to see them as children.

In my courses we always talk about what is at stake - for children and our society - as we learn about these injustices against children of color. What is at stake for children is that children of color do not get to be children. What is at stake for society is that our society 1) remains violent against these children, our children, and 2) limits all of the ways these children can make our society better.

Therefore, we must act. What do we do? We do not label the black children in our classrooms as badly behaved. We do not assume that the black girls in our classes are older than they really are. We let our children of color be children. We look at our own biases, our own assumptions about what we have been taught, the stereotypes we carry about who is deemed innocent and who is not. And we work hard to dismantle those biases so that we do not continue the violence against children of color.

You have chosen to be a Children and Youth Studies student because you care about children and you care about the future. Today and every day we ask you to spend more effort on the children of color in our classrooms, programs, and under your care and be sure that you and others treat them with justice.

Sincerely,  
Katie Rose Hejtmanek  
Associate Professor  
Director, Children and Youth Studies Program  
Brooklyn College, CUNY