



To the members of the Macalester Community,

I cannot pretend that I have anything new to add to the chorus of voices condemning the virulent white supremacy on display this past weekend in Charlottesville. I cannot pretend that I can say anything that has not already been said about the disgracefully inadequate response to that display of hatred and bigotry from the White House. I would not have thought it possible to whiff on an opportunity forcefully to condemn neo-Nazis, but then, there is much going on these days that I would previously not have thought possible.

What I want to emphasize for our community are the implications of these events for the work of our college. Let us be clear: anti-Semitism is alive and real; sexism and homophobia are alive and real; xenophobia is alive and real; racism is not only alive and real, but continues to be woven into the fabric of America and to be the one thing that most relentlessly prevents us from realizing the potential of our democracy.

It is natural for all of us to become inured to the power of the familiar, and so Macalester's mission—re-cited endlessly in speeches and promotional materials—can begin to lose its original force. Academic excellence. Internationalism. Multiculturalism. Service to society.

Each of these ideas is impactful but fragile. It is too easy for those of us within the Macalester orbit to forget that each is under sustained attack by no small number of people, including many in positions of power and influence. If we take for granted either the permanence of our mission or its universal acceptance, we make a grave mistake. Sadly, it is probably true that this mission is less broadly embraced today beyond our campus than it was when it was approved by the Board of Trustees twenty-five years ago.

To insist that we live up to this mission is not to claim that we do so perfectly. We are, as an institution, perpetually a work in progress, admirable and flawed and inspiring and disappointing all at once. This is what it means to be human, and this is what it means to aspire to accomplish difficult things.

So as we prepare to begin another school year, I would ask that each of us takes some time to consider what the mission of Macalester and the current state of the world mean for the work we do every day. It is important for our words to repudiate the hatred marching through the streets of Charlottesville, through the back alleys of the internet, and—worst of all—through some of our public policy, but it is even more important for our actions to do so.

Let us begin.

Brian Rosenberg  
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**THE PRESIDENT**

1600 Grand Avenue  
Saint Paul, Minnesota  
55105-1899

651-696-6207  
rosenbergb@macalester.edu  
macalester.edu