

Our Anti-Racism Commitment: Understanding Ferguson, Missouri

The Smith College School of Social Work holds an anti-racism commitment that calls us to identify, critically analyze, and intervene against the injurious effects of racism. The commitment urges us to speak out against the kinds of systemic racism and oppression playing out in the current events in Ferguson.

Violation of basic human rights—the criminalization of people of color, particularly young men of color, and the institutionalized and too often lethal violence perpetrated against them with seeming impunity—has sparked outrage in Ferguson, in our nation, and across the world. The events being played out in Ferguson are far too reminiscent of those from the civil rights era. They are dismaying evidence of the fact that, six decades after that era of hope and struggle, systemic racism continues to oppress communities of color and debase every member of our society.

The crisis in Ferguson does not exist in isolation; it loudly echoes historical and current conflicts in the US and across the globe. The outrage spilling from every corner of the country may be naming Ferguson, but it is speaking about the everyday crisis of racism in every neighborhood, every town, and every city. Racism recognizes no geographical or political lines; likewise, active opposition to the destructive and deadly effects of racism must be universal and unceasing.

As clinical social workers invested in social justice, we aim to bear witness to the grief, loss, and collective pain and rage of those close to such struggles. As a school for social work with an explicit commitment to working against racism, we aim to expose the forces of structural oppression and injustice that result in violence and dehumanization across all relationships.

A call to action

We call upon you, as members of this community, to engage in:

- Non-violent social and political action to provoke systemic change that promotes justice, safeguards human rights, and ensures fair and equitable treatment and respect for human dignity for all people
- Critical dialogue about the systemic forces of race and racism that shape ourselves and construct our relationships with others
- Investigation and analysis of how these dynamics affect the communities within which we live and work.

We also encourage members of our School community to attend local response events, such as the one that will take place at 5:30 p.m. tomorrow (11/25/14) at Northampton's City Hall. Information on planned responses in other locations can be found on the Ferguson National Response Network website (fergusonresponse.tumblr.com).

Marianne R. Yoshioka, Ph.D.

Dean of the Smith College School for Social Work

Smith College School for Social Work

Anti-Racism Task Force

Hye-Kyung Kang, Ph.D.

Fred Newdom, M.S.W.

Peggy O'Neill, Ph.D.