Ferguson: We stand with you

Faculty and Staff of the Portland State University School of Social Work stand in solidarity with communities working to address racism in our society, and in particular in our criminal legal system. We are saddened and outraged by the St. Louis County grand jury's failure to indict Darren Wilson, the officer who killed Michael Brown, and we call for individual and collective healing and organizing for justice.

We know that individual acts of violence happen within broader contexts. In the case of Michael Brown's death and the failure to indict and allow to stand trial those responsible for his death, this larger context includes institutions that continue to perpetuate racism and other forms of structural violence. We know that communities of color and other minoritized groups are consistently targeted by police and disproportionately represented within the criminal legal system. In this country, when law-enforcement agents harass, beat, choke, and/or shoot civilians – particularly black men – it is done with impunity. The current crisis in Ferguson and subsequent reactions and rallies across the country is symptomatic of this structural anti-black racism.

As a School, we have an explicit commitment to working against racism, and other social injustices; as such, we aim to expose and challenge the forces of structural oppression that result in violence, disempowerment, and dehumanization of minoritized communities. What is happening in Ferguson does not exist in isolation; it clearly reflects historical and current conditions globally, across the United States, and locally. In particular, it highlights the injurious effects of racism perpetuated by police against people of color, particularly black men. We know first hand the realities faced by people impacted by discriminatory policing and surveillance and we continue to support efforts to develop alternative models of safety and justice for all of our communities.

As we look toward Ferguson, it is imperative that we strategize around solutions to dismantle racist institutions and practices while simultaneously supporting those who are most affected by the oppression and injustices inherent in these systems. We are not alone in this work, nor is this a new charge for social work and our allied fields. There is a long history of racial justice organizing within our professions as well as important work going on at present. As a School of Social Work, we are well-positioned to respond to our current social conditions and must continue to work to transform our professional work into efforts that promote socially just, anti-racist services, programs, policies, and change.

Toward this end, we build on the Smith College of Social Work's statement on Ferguson (http://www.smith.edu/ssw/docs/fergusonstatement.pdf) to call upon our communities to:

- Participate in non-violent social and political actions to interrupt oppressive practices and promote systemic changes
- Engage in critical dialogue about the systemic forces of race and racism that shape our relationships and communities
- Strategize around solutions to dismantle racist institutions and practices.
- Support those who are most affected by oppression and injustices inherent in our systems.
- Advocate for policies that support alternatives to policing including community-based approaches to safety and conflict resolution.

Please see Dean Laura Nissen's blog post on this matter including additional resources for learning and action at: http://sswdeanconnect.wordpress.com/

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