

The School of Social Work at Louisiana State University stands together with other Schools of Social Work, universities, professional organizations, and communities that are working to address the systemic racism within the criminal justice system in the United States of America. As a School we are saddened by the recent events that have taken place regarding the deaths of unarmed Black men being pursued by, or in the custody of, White police officers.

The demonization and criminalization of men of color—as well as the institutionalization of policies that affect them—is of grave concern and has sparked community outrage across this nation. Communities of color are often monitored and targeted by police and as such are disproportionately represented in the criminal justice system. The perceived impunity with which some members of law enforcement harass, beat, choke, or shoot civilians is an issue that is symptomatic of a system that has apparent immunity from the laws of society. The actual extent of such abuses is unknown, and this fact alone is cause for grave concern. A democratic society must be committed to the redress of injustice, but this cannot be accomplished without the will to expose injustice where it occurs.

Social workers recognize the historic injustices perpetrated upon, among other vulnerable groups, people of color, and are called upon to confront these injustices wherever and in whatever form they exist. The profession's Code of Ethics advises social workers to “act to prevent and eliminate domination of, exploitation of, and discrimination against any person, group, or class on the basis of race, ethnicity, national origin, color, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, age, marital status, political belief, religion, immigration status, or mental or physical ability” (NASW, 1996, §6.04 Social and Political Action).

As a School of Social Work, our mission affirms our core values of social and economic justice, respect for the dignity and worth of each individual, and the centrality of human relationships to well-being. It is also our mission to use our voice to speak for those who cannot speak and to stand for those who cannot stand, and to lend our efforts to those who are working on these issues in their communities. As social workers we aim to make a commitment to working against racism, and we aim to work towards the exposure of structural racism and oppression that often results in violence and dehumanization of a collective group of people.

As we move forward, the School of Social Work will work with our community partners to begin discussions to formulate solutions that will dismantle institutionalized racism while supporting those individuals who are most affected by these practices. As a school we must continue to support those individuals who are victims of an oppressive environment—in this case Blacks who are disproportionately represented in all facets of the criminal justice system. We must respond to our current social conditions and continue to promote social justice and anti-racist policies, programs, and organizations.

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.
- Improve relations between law enforcement agencies and the communities they serve
- Encourage agencies in positions of power to serve their constituents with fairness and sensitivity

The LSU School of Social Work wishes peace for individuals, families, and communities that are hurting, justice for those who are denied it, and integrity among those charged to serve and protect.

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