



Washington University in St. Louis

BROWN SCHOOL

Subject: Follow up to COVID-19 and Race

Date: June 2, 2020

Dear Colleagues,

Over the last several days, we have witnessed expressions of anger, pain, grief and solidarity take hold across our region and nation. For some of us, the actions and events in Minnesota brings up painful memories of the Michael Brown killing and the protests in Ferguson, almost six years ago. Although, the majority of the organized dissent relates to the tragic death of George Floyd, there is also profound recognition that his death represents an accumulated cost associated with structural racism as it intersects with health, economic stability, educational access and importantly, encounters with the police.

Seeing large groups gathered in protest also has many in our community concerned about the spread of COVID-19, particularly given the disproportionate burden that our black and brown neighbors are shouldering in terms of serious illness and death.

Our school community has a responsibility to advance social justice and equity. At the same time, it is critically important that we invest in practices that protect the health and safety of our neighbors, loved ones, and ourselves.

Many in our school community have engaged in peaceful protests which have historically proven to be important in advancing changes in policies, practices and supports, particularly related to advancing civil rights. Yet, during a serious public health threat such as the one that we are experiencing, we want to emphasize that if you make this personal decision, please prioritize your personal safety.

Further, many have wondered about the full range of ways to demonstrate commitment to racial justice. Fortunately, we live in the era of online organizing and social media. There is a vast continuum of options for engaging and mobilizing in times of pandemic. We have compiled a number of ways you can be a part of the social justice movement.

### **Activism and Advocacy**

Our Brown School Website also has more [Social Justice Resources](#) with a particular emphasis on on-line organizing. Also available on the page is an equity-focused toolkit produced by many in our region via Forward through Ferguson as well as [How to Protest in a Pandemic](#) by the ACLU and [Nonviolent action](#)

[in the time of coronavirus](#). Although this is not a complete compilation of resources, we hope that it allows you to consider ways to channel your commitment, values, skills and resources **to act**.

If you are looking to get involved with local organizations and groups working for change, consider connecting with one of the following (this is not an exhaustive list by any means, but a place to start):

[Action St. Louis](#)

[Anti-Racism Organizing Collective \(AROC\)](#)

[Arch City Defenders](#)

[The Bail Project](#)

[West County Community Action Network](#)

[Showing Up for Racial Justice](#)

[YWCA](#)

Nationally, the American Public Health Association is advocating for federal, state, tribal and local authority action. These recommendations include:

- (1) Eliminate policies and practices that facilitate disproportionate violence against specific populations (including laws criminalizing these populations),
- (2) institute robust law enforcement accountability measures,
- (3) increase investment in promoting racial and economic equity to address social determinants of health,
- (4) Implement community-based alternatives to addressing harms and preventing trauma, and
- (5) Work with public health officials to comprehensively document law enforcement contact, violence, and injuries.

## **Education and Engagement**

There is much we can do to educate ourselves. The NYU Silver School of Social Work pulled together the following information to provoke thoughtful, informed action:

- [History of Police Brutality in America](#)
- [The Case for Reparations](#)
- [1619 Project](#)
- [Freedom is a Constant Struggle by Angela Davis](#)
- [The New Jim Crow by Michelle Alexander](#)
- [Between the World and Me by Ta-Nehisi Coates](#)
- [Kerner Commission Report](#)

Closer to home, we invite you to watch a series produced at the Brown School of discussions focused on [COVID-19 and Race Part 1](#) and [Part 2](#), and tune into the series [Still Compromising: The Disparate Impact of COVID-19 in St. Louis](#), a joint effort by Forward Through Ferguson and the Prevention

Research Center. Further, WashU's Academy for Diversity, Inclusion, and Equity has organized a suite of relevant [learning sessions](#) for faculty and staff.

Campus partners have also arranged for several upcoming events. This Wednesday, June 3, from 12:00 – 1:15 pm, tune into [Pandemic Power: Navigating its Science, Politics and Economics in St. Louis and Beyond](#). This panel will feature Kayla Reed, co-founder and director of Action St. Louis; Will Ross, MD, professor of medicine and dean for Diversity, Washington University School of Medicine; Enbal Shacham, professor of public health, St. Louis University; and Starsky Wilson, president of the Deaconess Foundation.

The law school is launching *The Police Accountability and Community Engagement Project*—a project that will document the racial violence unfolding across our country. There will be a panel discussion on Wednesday, June 17 at 3:00 p.m. (CT); registration details will be provided in a follow-up email.

Furthermore, we encourage you to learn about Forward Through Ferguson's [State of Police Reform](#) initiative, which seeks to set a new culture and climate for public safety that is deeply committed to building a healthy and thriving community.

## **A Global Imperative**

For those interested in global work, the dean of Loyola University at Chicago reminded us that we are half way into the [International Decade for People of African Descent \(2015-2024\)](#).

The *International Decade for People of African Descent*, proclaimed by UN General Assembly [resolution 68/237 \(link is external\)](#) and to be observed from 2015 to 2024, provides a solid framework for the United Nations, Member States, civil society and all other relevant actors to join together with people of African descent and take effective measures for people of African descent in the spirit of recognition, justice and development.

The Decade is an operational platform conducive

- to encourage States to implement appropriate policies to reduce injustices, racism and discrimination against people of African descent, and
- to promote cultural diversity by valuing in particular the common cultural legacies that emerged from the interactions provoked by the history of slavery.

Under the theme of People of African Descent: recognition, justice and development, the Decade also symbolizes the international community's determination to reveal the history, the memory and the contemporary implications of slavery across the globe. It offers an occasion to reflect upon the dehumanization and deportation of millions of human beings, but also upon resistance which enabled to redefine the very notions of humanity, dignity, citizenship, equity and freedom.

The main objectives of the International Decade are as follows:

1. Promote respect, protection and fulfilment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by people of African Descent, as recognized in [the Universal Declaration of Human Rights \(link is external\)](#);
2. Promote a greater knowledge of and respect for the diverse heritage, culture and contribution of people of African descent to the development of societies; and
3. Adopt and strengthen national, regional and international legal frameworks according to the [Durban Declaration and Programme of Action \(link is external\)](#) and the [International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination \(link is external\)](#) and to ensure their full and effective implementation.

Many in the Brown School community – faculty, staff and students – are engaged in a breadth of activities that address the ills of racism and proactively work to advance racial equity, efforts that now take on greater importance and gravitas, such as:

- Voting, voter access and engagement
- Census 2020
- Racial Equity Fellowship
- Health equity and access
- Affordable and equitable housing

And many more. We thank you all for the work you are doing to advance equity and social justice. We hope you find the information and resources helpful.

Best,

Mary & Vetta



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