



SHARING THE STORY – LIVING AND TEACHING IN THE SHADOW OF FERGUSON

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SEMINAR GOALS

- **Articulate the impact of social work in or near a racially charged community (like Ferguson)**
- **Describe the process of creating dialogue in response to crises**
- **Explore the value and challenges of conducting race dialogues within predominantly white groups and communities**
- **Articulate how faith, history, values and perspectives influence race communications and relationships**

OVERVIEW

- Your stories
- Our stories
- Our solutions
- Your solutions



RACE:

A significant cultural challenge

(Wuthnow, 2005)

The CALL: Consider a racially charged incident in your community?

OUR CONTEXT

- Mid-size Regional University predominantly commuter students, from rural backgrounds
 - 90% from state and over 40% from two closest counties
 - 8% out of state, Most (78%) from one neighboring state
- Small Social Work Department
 - CSWE Accredited
 - BSW, MSW Programs – less than 100 students in each respectively
 - 7 Tenured Track F/T Faculty; 2 Instructors



STUDENT - FACULTY BACKGROUNDS

Students

- Demographic
 - Predominantly white women
 - Rural backgrounds prominent
 - Christocentric
- Cultural Context
 - Limited exposure to ethnic, racial, religious, gender, or other cultural variation

9 Faculty

- Demographic
 - Seven white
 - Majority women (3 white males)
- Cultural Context
 - Based on White Academic Framework
 - Christocentric
 - Varied experiences, level of understandings



JILL'S EXPERIENCE

- **Caucasian Faculty**
 - Newest faculty
 - Feel strongly supported
 - Not perceived as an ally
- **Experience with Diversity**
 - Adopted 3 African American children
 - GA in diversity Dialogue classes during PhD
 - Intentionally joined black community Activities
- **Other Relevant Identities**
 - Mennonite
 - Graduate work in theology and religious studies



The impact of race and injustice impact 'us' based on social identity, personal values, experience.

KIM'S EXPERIENCE



- **African American Faculty**
 - Only one in department
[University: 13% black and 78% white]
 - Source of Exploration
[Students/Peers]
- **Resident of Ferguson**
 - Over 20 years
 - Amenable & Race-informed Experiences
- **Other Relevant Identities**
 - Family of law enforcement
 - Spiritual

The impact of race and injustice impact 'us' based on social identity, personal values, experience.

FRAMING THE EXPERIENCE



Response

- Strong Emotions (i.e. Anger, Concern, Sadness, Frustration)
- Social Chiasms
- Advocacy

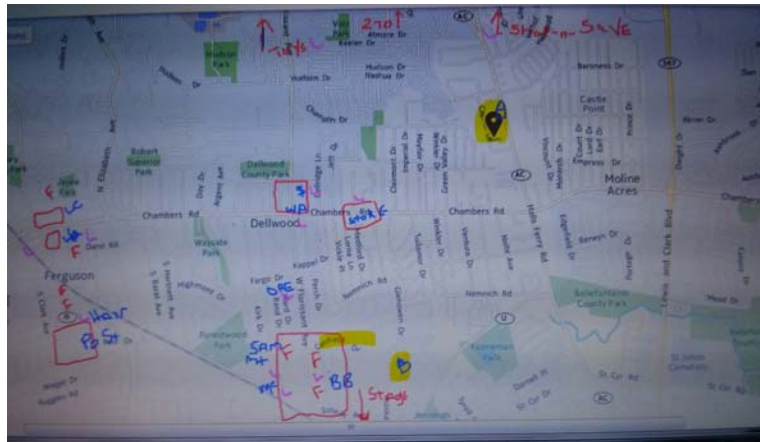


Impacted Groups

- Specific Community (i.e. Ferguson)
- Region
- University
- Department



Reaction to Grand Jury Verdict



The **Need** for Understanding

SOCIAL WORK'S OBLIGATION

NASW code of ethics- principles

- **Service**
- **Social justice**
- **Importance of human relationships**
- **Competence**

NASW code of ethics- ethical standards

- **1.04 Competence**
- **1.05 Cultural competence and social diversity**

UNIVERSITY RESPONSE

Faculty - Staff Town Hall Meetings



Pros

- Outlet of Expression

Cons

- Communication Methods
- Minimal SW involvement
- No Students

OTHER RESPONSES

- ✓ Chancellor's Email Message
- ✓ Faculty - Staff Town Hall Meetings
- ✓ Office of Diversity & Inclusion Activities (i.e. forums, resource drives)
- ✓ Black Lives Matter Demonstrations [campus wide]

SOCIAL WORK RESPONSES

- Letters to Students
- Race Dialogues
- Intentional Curricular Response



OTHER RESPONSES

- ✓ Informal 1:1 and small group exchanges [Faculty:Faculty; Student:Student; Faculty:Student]
- ✓ Random Class Discussions
- ✓ Student & Student Group involvement – food, toiletry drives

LETTERS TO STUDENTS

Process

- Delivered Department Statement to Students (from Chair)
- Minority Faculty Letter to 'Select' Students & All Classes

SOCIAL WORK DIALOGUES:

Process

- Faculty, Staff, & Students
- Scheduling Considered
- Intentional about Facilitation and Facilitators
- Broad Questions to Guide Conversation
 - How has experience affected you
 - What can you do to promote change

INTENTIONAL CURRICULAR RESPONSE

Process

- Class Discussion as a Reaction
- Addition of Special Topic Days
- Curriculum Innovation



RACE DIALOGUES ARE IMPORTANT

- Intentional
- Takes various forms
- Safe space to foster communication between individuals of varied racial ethnic identities

RACE DIALOGUES: CHALLENGES TO IMPLEMENTATION

1. Communication [How, Who, What, To Whom]
2. When to Address (Timing)
 1. Crisis Response
 2. Planned Response
3. Dealing with Race Anxieties
4. Scheduling – Time
5. Recognizing Merit
6. Having Resources (Knowledge, Skills, Mentors, etc)
7. Inclusion of Minority or Affected Faculty

INADEQUATE SOLUTIONS:

- Being invisible - the *'it doesn't exist'* mindset
- Being naïve – the *'it will go away'* mindset
- Being scared – the *'it makes me uncomfortable'* mindset
- Settling on the 'Additive Model' of Diversity [a panacea]
- Unconscious support of spaces where race dialogues are not shared or encouraged;

The solution must be a conscious creation of intentional, safe spaces where critical dialogue and learning can take place

BE AWARE

- Identity and proportion of Students and Faculty shape race experience and explorations
- Expect to be uncomfortable
- Cultural burden, taxation, and commodification

BRIDGING DIFFERENCES THROUGH RELATIONSHIP



WHAT ARE YOU CALLED TO DO?

The 2nd CALL: What can you do?
(personally & professionally)

RACE:

an undeniable force

RACISM IS A REFUGE
FOR THE IGNORANT. IT
SEEKS TO DIVIDE AND TO
DESTROY. IT IS THE ENEMY
OF FREEDOM, AND
DESERVES TO BE MET
HEAD-ON AND
STAMPED OUT.

- PIERRE BERTON

