Statement on America’s Lethal Racism

Graduate Student Association, Boston College

The killings of Alton Sterling, Philando Castile, and now the killing of eight police officers--the five police officers in Dallas (Officers Zamarripa, Ahrens, Krol, Smith, and Thompson) and the three in Baton Rouge (Officers Jackson, Gerald, and Garafola)--are the most recent casualties of a lethal racism that has been tearing our country apart. For many of us, the evidence of a morbid genealogy is here: it begins with the removal of black bodies from Africa under chattel slavery. It continued under the living deaths that were, first, the daily routines of Africans under slavery before they were Americans in the late 19th century. Later, it continued as the lot of African-Americans whose environments served as continued external manifestations of racism: the South under Jim Crow and the North under a silently deafening urban and suburban segregation. Today’s lethal racism continues to accrue a body count, though not only with the obvious shooting deaths charged with racial dimensions with which we’ve tragically become familiar, but also with more living deaths in the form of young black men whose lives are locked away in a culture of mass incarceration. Over the last few weeks, today’s lethal racism is inciting violence upon violence, where brutality by and on police officers signals the boiling point that we, as a nation, have reached with respect to our past.

We here at Boston College, a university summoned to the goal of enacting social justice, are also mourning and questioning, because we ourselves are being torn apart. We find our values threatened as a Jesuit university community that embraces the call to live justly together. In no small part this is because, in our age where fact-checking has become reductively dismissable as the latest ideology of the Left or the Right, we no longer trust each other to answer questions truthfully. Instead, we just ask questions with greater suspicion, and we trust more in our biases than we do in the risk of being people who are truly for others. Embracing this risk first involves refusing to see the other as threatening simply because that person exists, simply because that person wears a hoodie; simply because that person wears a uniform. A community’s power of healing—which is certainly the task of our nation at present--cannot begin unless we put down our physical and emotional weapons that only perpetuate a domestic arms race. As the aftermath of the shootings in Orlando and Baton Rouge have shown us, this fact tinges our grieving with complicity.

When we are torn apart, we hope that our community’s values, prayers, and conversations can begin the work of healing. Within the context of our community here committed to academic excellence, we hope these values, prayers, and conversations propel us to even greater research and education in pursuit of justice in the time of lethal racism. Know that, for those of us within the Graduate Student Association, we understand that racial trauma is real. There are people who understand and who are ready to support you here. Those of us signed below are campus leaders who are willing to be present, to listen, and to respond to what you need during this time.
May the work of healing, informed always by the call of justice, begin today. If all lives truly matter, we must make it so.

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