Sociologists for Justice: ISU Faculty and Students Engage Critical Sociology to Respond to Events in Ferguson, MO.

Dr. Marta Maldonado and Angie Carter were part of a small group of sociologists who convened informally at the national American Sociological Association (ASA) on August 16th to discuss a sociologically-informed response to the recent events in Ferguson, Missouri. The group—known as “Sociologists for Justice,” shared an open letter, now signed by over 1,500 sociologists and published in a variety of media outlets including New York Magazine [http://nymag.com/scienceofus/2014/08/read-a-powerful-letter-about-ferguson.html] and About.com [http://sociology.about.com/od/Current-Events-in-Sociological-Context/fl/Sociologists-Take-Historic-Stand-on-Racism-and-Police-Brutality.htm]. Signatories including renowned sociologists such as Immanuel Wallerstein and Nancy Naples, among others.

Maldonado (faculty in Sociology and US Latino/a Studies) and Carter (doctoral candidate in Sociology and Sustainable Agriculture) helped to craft the collective, sociologically-informed response to the recent events in Ferguson, Missouri, and to similar events involving ongoing interactions between police and Black (and Brown) communities throughout the US. As Dr. Maldonado explains:

“We had never met before, but were brought together by a desire to respond, as sociologists, to recent events that are at the center of public discussion, shaping the lives and consciousness of so many. Mobilized initially through social media, we met face-to-face in between conference sessions at a hotel lobby, and discussed how to get as many concerned sociologists as possible to contribute to, edit, and sign a document of public scholarship: a statement in which sociological knowledge would be invoked and marshalled in the service of informed public discussion and debate. Our goal was to mobilize a critical mass of trained sociologists whose grasp of history and social conditions, theory, and research evidence had something to contribute to public discussions about the ongoing tensions and concerns shaping life and interactions within Ferguson and other communities of color grappling with policing issues.”

The statement calls attention to how what transpired in Ferguson results from “deeply ingrained racial, political, social and economic inequities.” The authors and signatories call for “law enforcement, policymakers, media and the nation to consider decades of sociological analysis and research that can inform the necessary conversations and solutions required to address the systemic issues that the events in Ferguson have raised.” Sociologists for Justice have also put together a collection of resources to help teachers and students engage in sociological discussion of the events in Ferguson in their classrooms and communities. The teaching resources can be found here: [http://sociology.about.com/od/Current-Events-in-Sociological-Context/fl/The-Ferguson-Syllabus.htm]