

Statement on Ferguson, Missouri
Association of Black Sociologists
December 17, 2014

PURPOSE

The Association of Black Sociologists (ABS) is a professional organization of academics, students, and community leaders dedicated to enhancing the transmission of sociological knowledge to and about Blacks and other historically disenfranchised groups. The purpose of this statement is to voice our support for the communities of protestors in general, and Black communities in particular, in the aftermath of the recent and controversial killings of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri and Eric Garner in New York City. As an organization of scholars, ABS also offers recommendations that it believes will help individuals in all sectors of society to better understand and resolve these tragedies.

POSITION

ABS believes that in order to fully comprehend and resolve the current situations in Ferguson, New York City and elsewhere, it is imperative that these events be viewed through historical lenses. The killings of Michael Brown and Eric Garner, the exoneration of the police involved, and the protests that ensued are not merely isolated events but in many ways reflections of longstanding social forces that threaten the American ideals of “liberty and justice for all.” These forces include: poverty which limits opportunities for some more than others, ignorance that breeds fear and mistrust among many, and systemic racism that distorts human relationships on the basis of skin color. Combined, these forces undermine the nation’s ability to live out the true meaning of its creed, and they put not only the lives of Black males in jeopardy, but also the lives of Black women, the Black LGBTQ community, and all People of Color as well.

Therefore, until policymakers as well as private citizens are ready and willing to engage in and sustain critical conversations that consider these social forces as some of the root causes of the events in Ferguson – and elsewhere across the United States – American society risks becoming an increasingly unjust and unequal nation that excels technologically and scientifically yet falls farther and farther behind morally and socially. Such contradictions, if unresolved, will degrade rather than develop the nation’s general welfare. Those who truly desire peace must labor earnestly and incessantly for justice, accountability, and systemic change. To achieve these ends, therefore, ABS proposes the following recommendations:

1. Local officials should establish and operate regular (at least quarterly) opportunities for community input regarding law enforcement policies, including the training of police officers;
2. Local officials should hold workshops between law enforcement agencies and their communities to develop relationships and improve mutual understanding of roles and responsibilities to promote public safety and order;
3. Police officers should be equipped with body cameras;
4. The job performance of police officers should be subject to community review boards;
5. Assignment of police officers for duty should be subject to and contingent upon community review;

6. Criminal cases involving “minority-white” parties (for example, “Black-White”) should also have equal representation by “minority-white” jurors;
7. Private citizens and community organizations should propose their own opportunities to work collaboratively with local officials and law enforcement to build relationships and understanding among all parties;
8. Community organizations should provide specific programs and activities to educate youth and adults regarding their rights and responsibilities to promote safety and order;
9. Special federal prosecutors should be in charge of all alleged cases of police misuse of deadly force; and
10. Policy makers, community organizations, police officials and the media should seek out the knowledge, expertise, and research generated by organizations such as the Association of Black Sociologists to better understand and more holistically respond to these types of social issues.

We challenge each of you as citizens to support this effort for redress as well as policies and leaders committed to creating safe spaces for all youth.

Obie Clayton, 2014-2015 Association of Black Sociologists (ABS) President