Race, Class, and Power: University Course on Ferguson and the #BlackLivesMatter Movement

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September 22, 2015
SEEDS You Choose Leadership Award Application
1. **Abstract:**
Funding is sought to sponsor the development and implementation of a University Course that explores the current struggle for racial justice in the United States, reflected at the micro-level through the events in Ferguson, MO over the last year, and at the macro-level through the #BlackLivesMatter movement. As an interdisciplinary endeavor, this course will encourage dialogue and cohesion among faculty and students across the University in a manner responsive to calls for the University to more affirmatively engage racial justice through our teaching, research, and service mission.

2. **Activity Goals:**
In the year since the shooting of unarmed teenager Michael Brown, in Ferguson, MO, the #BlackLivesMatter movement has emerged as a rallying cry and galvanizing force in the struggle for racial justice. The issues raised, however, by Brown’s death, the grand jury acquittal of his killer, the ensuing protests and riots in Ferguson, and the emergence of the #BlackLivesMatter movement, encompass not just race. Rather, broader issues of class and power are also implicated, particularly as manifested in American social phenomena of school and residential segregation, raced and classed public welfare policy, poverty capitalism, inadequately inclusive political representation, and the intersection of conscious and subconscious racism and police presence in minority communities.

A University course on Ferguson and the #BlackLivesMatter movement is an opportunity to engage the cultural, historical, political, and psychological underpinnings of the phenomena that gave rise to Ferguson and the movement for racial justice that has since emerged. Furthermore, by preparing members of the University community to more substantively engage the problem of race in their personal and professional spaces, the Course reflects University values of diversity and compassion, while also keeping with the University’s commitment to transforming lives through teaching.

Modeled after prior successful interdisciplinary programs at the University (e.g. course on The Hospital, course on The 1960s), this Course would be taught by faculty in various schools and departments across the University, potentially including:

- Jafari Sinclair Allen (Anthropology)
- Charlton Copeland (School of aw)
- Marvin Dawkins (Sociology)
- Donnette Francis (English, American Studies)
- David Ikard (Africana Studies)
- Osamudia James (School of Law)
- Michelle Maldonado (Religious Studies)
- Donald Spivey (History)
- Laura Kohn-Wood (Community Psychology)
The Course would also benefit from outside speakers who focus on urban politics and social movements, including:

- Lester Spence (Political Science and Africana Studies, Johns Hopkins University)
- Odis Johnson (Sociology, Education, Washington University)
- Activists from Miami’s social justice organizations (e.g. Dream Defenders)

Course design will also consider broader community engagement, using live-stream technology and social media to engage students, faculty, staff, and Miami residents not enrolled in the course.

Finally, the University Course on Ferguson and the #BlackLivesMatter movement has several goals, including interdisciplinary exchange among faculty who research different facets of racial inequality and struggle in the United States, academic engagement of students on issues of race, class, and power, and the contemplation of a larger and longer-term University-wide collaborative project on race and racial struggle in both Miami and the United States more broadly.

3. **Personal Goals:**
In my own research as a legal scholar, I focus on the interaction of identity and the law, with a particular focus on how both broaden or limit access to quality public education. In recent years, however, my work on identity and the law has expanded beyond education, to more general observations and insights about the role and functions of race in American society. My immediate goal in designing this University Course is to foster the interdisciplinary aspects of my scholarship, especially as it is informed by the work of sociologists, anthropologists, historians, and political scientists. More generally, designing, coordinating, and implementing this course would further develop my leadership skills and organizational capabilities, putting me in contact with colleagues across the University as I navigate interdisciplinary curriculum development. Designing such a course also reflects my personal commitment to advancing racial and social justice in my capacity as an educator, a faculty citizen of the University, a resident of the city of Miami, and a participant in America’s democratic project.

4. **Budget:**
$2,500 is requested:

- $1,500 (refreshments; class is held over a series of either five full day sessions, or ten half-day sessions)
- $500 (to defray costs of content and curriculum development, including printing and advertising)
- $1000 (round-trip flights for two outside speakers)
- $700 (accommodations for two outside speakers, 2 nights, Sonesta, Coconut Grove)
- Remaining balance ($1,200) will be requested from alternate funding sources