

There's much to say, discuss, and grapple with in the aftermath of the two grand juries that failed to indict white police officers in the deaths of two Black men. As we reflect on these cases, we add to the names of Michael Brown and Eric Garner, the names of Marissa Alexander who while not killed will be serving three years in prison, Cece McDonald whose punishment was disproportionate because of the same institutionalized racism and transphobia that resulted in the deaths of these two men, and countless others whose stories have not made the headlines but whose lives matter.

The staff at JDI has been talking with one another about these cases and the broader issues they represent and our responsibility as the leadership of the Coalition to do more than talk. We want to share with you a snapshot of these conversations as we grapple with the direct and indirect connections between the movements to end sexual and domestic violence and the intersections of multiple oppressions. Many JDI member programs have been creating space for staff to talk with one another about their feelings, how they are being impacted by this news personally and in their work with survivors and community collaborators. And like many of you we are involved in conversations and activism with our friends, family, in our local communities and beyond.

The underlying issues of racism and other forms of oppression and the connection to violence, economic and health disparities, lack of opportunity, and other forms of systemic oppression are nothing new. Women of color in our movement have raised this clarion call before - pointing out how our organizational, systems and movement responses, policies and priorities do not always reflect the needs, experiences and realities of people of color. Indeed the reality is that as a set of movements, we have too often contributed to the oppression and marginalization of the very communities we say we seek to empower. We also believe it's important to acknowledge that our colleagues of color are experiencing the current situation differently than our white colleagues given this historical context of racism. This reality alerts us to the heightened need for us to listen carefully to our colleagues.

The injustice, violence and death experienced by people of color will continue unabated unless there is a radical shift that acknowledges that these incidents are not about one racist cop or one grand jury. We know that there are law enforcement officers and others working hard to do the right thing every day. The problem, however, is pervasive and systemic, so the change needed is much deeper. The historical roots of racism continue to bear fruit today in every facet of our society. Denying or minimizing this reality condemns us to the status quo where not all lives matter equally, where people live in fear, where certain types of violence are met with impunity, where white people benefit from the privilege, resources and structure that undergirds institutionalized racism.

As a movement to end sexual and domestic violence, we need to hold ourselves accountable to asking hard questions of ourselves and others:

- * How does our emphasis on safety shift resources, influence services and dismiss a survivor's priorities and choices?
- * What is our role in the broader civil rights and human rights movements?

* How do our policies, practices and systems perpetuate the status quo and foster untenable choices for survivors of color and others who fear the potentially deadly repercussions for the person who has sexually abused or battered them?

* How do we talk about men as victims and as perpetrators of violence? And understand how this is experienced differently by men based on race and class? And how does this impact services and prevention efforts?

We take seriously and believe deeply that the root causes of sexual and domestic violence are about abuse of power and cultural norms that value some people over others and promote rather than condemn the violence that holds these norms in place. The now popular call "Black lives matter too" sounds a theme easily recognizable across the range of our anti-oppression work. Women's lives matter too, GLBTQ lives matter too, lives of the undocumented matter too, etc. We must work on the individual, community and societal levels to achieve progress in shifting these norms, to undo the racism that threatens the very lives of people of color and survivors of violence everywhere.

These are ongoing conversations and we are committed to engaging with all of you in the months and years ahead. We invite you to reach out to any of us at JDI as we support, learn from and work together to create the world of justice, safety, equity and freedom we all deserve to live in.

In Solidarity,

The Staff at Jane Doe Inc.