At the beginning of 2019, the University of Oklahoma faced overt racist incidents that brought a national level of attention. Numerous students contacted the Anne and Henry Zarrow School of Social Work (AHZSSW) to request support. The AHZSSW mobilized with listening sessions for students to process and cope. As a result of the crisis, the AHZSSW faculty was determined to be proactive versus reactive. The Undoing Racism Committee (URC) was created with two Co-chairs (Dr. Renea Butler-King and Dr. Lisa Byers) and four founding members (Dr. Christina Miller, Dr. Shane Byewo and Charlotte Kendrick). Monthly meetings were held to meet the ongoing requests from students, staff, and faculty to address racism. These meetings continue to occur with the 2020-2021 Co-chairs (Dr. Renea Butler-King and Dr. Lisa Byers) and members (Dr. Christina Miller, Dr. Ann Riley, Kely Beewo and Charlotte Kendrick).

Social Workers Can Build Capacity for Change and Hope in the Face of White Supremacy

In early 2020, in the span of three months, Ahmed Arbury and George Floyd, two black men, were violently killed. These murders are echoes of the slayings of Trayvon Martin and Eric Garner. The lives of these men, along with many other black men and women were eradied by violence in an expression of racist terrorism. White supremacy and racist aggression are still alive and well 401 years after the beginning of slavery. Neither the Emancipation Proclamation of 1863 nor the Civil Rights Act of 1964 have been able to stop the killing of black people by white people. What will it take for the killing to stop? What will it take for black people to stay safe? For black mothers not to worry? For black boys and men to not fear for their lives at every turn?

The members of the AHZSSW Undoing Racism Committee are calling out the murder of Ahmed Arbury and George Floyd as examples of the pervasive and ongoing demonstration of White Supremacy in our nation. These acts of racist aggression have shone a light on how black men are demeaned and treated as sub-human. Our nation that states “all men are created equal” has created a caste system that systematically and effectively dehumanizes people of color, particularly black men.

As social workers, we stand united against this tyranny by white people to support the dignity and worth of each person as an inalienable human right.

We are working to unmask the oppression of white supremacy within our school by educating ourselves about the history of racism and the reality of white privilege. We are creating intentional spaces for shared dialogue about the damaging effects of racism and the need to be proactive versus reactive.

We create spaces for critical dialogue, reflection, education, and action rooted in best practices of antiracist approaches and consistent work with social work values and ethics for the Anne and Henry Zarrow School of Social Work.

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