Statement from the Department of African and Afro-American Studies

During the past several weeks, Ferguson, Missouri has become a flashpoint for national debate on the continued presence of racism in American society and specific issues concerning police brutality towards African Americans. The death of unarmed African American teenager Michael Brown by a white Ferguson police officer, and the subsequent protests which received national attention, have pulled the lid off of long simmering tensions existing in communities of color across the country. At this critical moment in our country’s racial history, it is imperative that we embrace the challenge of understanding why an incident like this took place and what it says about the current society we live in. Sadly, the fact is that the shooting of Michael Brown is not an anomaly, but part of a historical pattern of aggressive policing of black men and women that frequently leads to their death. Between 2006 and 2012, police killed a black person on average of two times a week. The militarized response of local law enforcement to the largely peaceful protests in Ferguson reflect a troubling mindset amongst too many police officers that views the people they are sworn to protect as enemy combatants as opposed to citizens with fundamental rights.

As members of a community committed to “Truth Even Unto Its Innermost Parts,” we must be prepared to face uncomfortable truths about the historical and contemporary devaluation of black lives and our own responsibility to repair an American society still damaged by the legacies and realities of racial discrimination. The faculty of AAAS, in our classes and individual research, are dedicated to understanding and teaching about the full humanity of peoples of African descent from a variety of disciplinary perspectives. We approach our work as an intellectual endeavor but also as a deeply moral one. That is why we stand in solidarity with people all over the world who have stood up and declared that “Black Lives Matter.” We also stand in solidarity with the students, faculty, staff, and alumni of the Brandeis family who are committed to the praxis of social justice in our everyday words and actions. We hope to use this moment as an opportunity to grow as a campus community and stand at the forefront of a larger movement to push America to mature as a nation.

Faculty of the Department of African and African American Studies, Brandeis University