

Racial justice, voting rights, police and community relations, and juvenile justice in minority communities – these are the pressing issues of our time. In the aftermath of the killing of George Floyd, as part of the heightened consciousness about systemic racism and racial injustice, the Foundation convened panel discussions and engaged in conversations with and among the Fellowship Class of 2020 about addressing racial injustice.

Those exchanges were riveting, insightful and significant. The bonds created as a result of these discussions among a diverse group of student Fellows inspired the Foundation to make sure this flame of enthusiasm is not extinguished.

In order to carry on the work of many of our Fellows on racial justice (at least 12 Fellows from the summer of 2020), the Foundation decided, in collaboration with the Deans' Circle, to create a second Sustained Impact Fellowship program that will address several specific areas of racial injustice. As with our Sustained Impact Fellowship program in Puerto Rico, the Foundation intends to provide Fellowships for Fellows to work for selected organizations. We will commit to those organizations for multiple summers, beginning this year.

The Racial Justice Fellowship program will focus on three key issues – voting rights, juvenile justice in minority communities, and police/Black community relations. Foundation President John Oberdorfer said, "We consider these to be very important issues to which our Foundation should direct resources. The trio of issues and organizations the Foundation has selected is innovative and the Fellows working for them will make a significant impact." After consultation with the Deans' Circle, the Foundation has selected three organizations with whom to partner:

1. The Voting Rights Project of the National Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law
2. The Lone Star Justice Alliance in Dallas, Texas
3. The Police Department of Charlottesville, Virginia

As Charlottesville Police Chief Dr. RaShall M. Brackney stated, "If a law student wants to learn about racial justice in the criminal process, this is where it starts."

The Voting Rights Project focuses on suppression of franchise rights for minority voters. It is non-partisan. It uses a diversity of tools to litigate cases on behalf of traditionally disenfranchised voters. Since the election, this project took action to stop at least six lawsuits that were filed in an attempt to change the voters' outcome.

The Lone Star Justice Alliance (LSJA) is a three-year old energetic organization that seeks to improve the lives of youth who find themselves embroiled in the justice system. Its Juvenile Sentencing Project engages youth, emerging adults and their families through targeted outreach, public awareness campaigns and other organizing activities. Working together, efforts to change the justice system to develop more positive outcomes for youth will be amplified through this program.

The Foundation's Board chair, Rodney Slater, said of its three participating organizations, "Each organization has dynamic and innovative leadership, and they will be outstanding partners with us in the pursuit of racial justice."

These three Racial Justice Fellowships will be in addition to our ongoing Fellowship Program, which in 2020 had a robust 27 Fellows. Each Racial Justice Fellowship partner will host a Fellow and each of the Foundation's 18 Deans' Circle law schools will nominate a student to compete for a 2021 Racial Justice Fellowship, just as they do for our post-Hurricane Maria Sustained Impact Fellowship program in Puerto Rico. They will also nominate a student for a Public Policy Fellowship, which is provided annually to each Deans' Circle law school, plus the Collège d'Europe in Belgium.

The synergies these three partners bring to the Foundation, and soon among its selected Fellows, cannot be overstated. The Foundation could not be more excited about this new Racial Justice Sustained Impact Program for the Foundation, its Fellows and for the communities they will serve.

