

Fresno State holds forum on grand jury decisions in Ferguson, NYC

By Rory
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Justo Padron and sociology professor Tania Pacheco-Werner discuss recent grand jury decisions in Ferguson, Missouri and New York City in Fresno State's free speech area on Thursday, Dec. 4, 2014. RORY APPLETON — The Fresno Bee

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Fresno State professors and students discussed recent grand jury decisions in the deaths of Michael Brown and Eric Garner, both killed by police, at a hastily organized open forum Thursday.

Sociology professor Tania Pacheco-Werner organized the forum and led the discussion.

"It's important to teach college students how to talk openly about important issues," Pacheco-Werner said. "These students are the cops, politicians and community members of the future."

No one showed up for the forum at its listed start time, so Pacheco-Werner engaged students running fraternity and sorority booths in the school's free speech area. Most told her they knew very little about the two cases. She explained that Brown and Garner — both black men — were killed by officers during police actions, but grand juries found insufficient evidence to charge either officer with a crime.

Sophomore finance student Justo Padron believes both officers were likely in the right, and he thinks the use of body cameras by police will help illuminate these situations.

"People are only crying injustice because they didn't see what actually happened," he said. "They see a dead body with a police officer, and everyone overreacts."

Senior Alissa Jimenez said the media disproportionately covers crimes by minorities. "If a black or Hispanic guy does anything, his picture is plastered everywhere," she said. "If a white guy kills someone, he pretty much gets away with it."

The situations in Ferguson, Missouri and New York are relevant here in the Valley, Pacheco-Werner said.

"There are people here afraid of police brutality," she said. "There are people here suing local law enforcement agencies for this type of thing. This problem is not just 3,000 miles away."



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