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**Rationality, Racism, and Imagining Social Justice**

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**4:30 p.m. | KL 355**

ABSTRACT: “The most elemental facts of this case will never change. A teenager went out to buy Skittles and iced tea. At some point, he was confronted by a man with a gun who killed him. There is no universe I understand where this can be declared a noncriminal act. Not in a sane, just and racism-free universe.” So wrote sociologist and Harvard professor Lawrence Bobo after George Zimmerman was acquitted for killing Trayvon Martin. The recent decision of the grand jury not to indict Darren Wilson for the killing of Michael Brown, Jr., produces in many the same sense of disbelief, and outrage. The world does not seem sane or just — it seems precisely and graphically turned upside down. And the ideal of a racism-free world is certainly not going to happen any time soon. What are we to do in the meanwhile? This talk will discuss the failures of language and law to aid us in securing social justice, and the need for some way to express, in state-sanctioned and enforced ways, a sense of social abhorrence of hate. Using the case of Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown, Jr. and others, in conjunction with the political philosophy of Hannah Arendt, as well as other texts from the humanities, we will explore together the moral imperatives we face as a society to imagine differently.



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