

SMC Organizes Peaceful Protest Following Ferguson and NY Indictment Decisions

By Sophie Braccini



Saint Mary's College students stage "die-in."

Photos Andy Scheck



Participants read poetry as part of the recent Saint Mary's College protest.

Approximately 200 Saint Mary's College students, faculty and staff joined the growing number of protests in the Bay Area that followed grand jury decisions not to indict police officers in the killings of Michael Brown and Eric Garner. The group staged a "die-in" and held a candlelight vigil Dec. 4 to express their suffering and sadness surrounding the events.

Brother Charles Hilken and Jane Camarillo, vice provost for Student Life, organized a panel to provide a place for folks to talk, which resulted in creating a plan of action, fostering solidarity, and raising awareness of the issues surrounding police brutality.

"In the wake of lack of indictments for the murderers of Michael Brown and Eric Garner, there are protests across the nation and at their core are commonalities in story," said Saint Mary's Assistant Professor Raina J. León.

As part of the "die-in" students, faculty and staff marched into Oliver Hall with their hands raised chanting, "Hands up, don't shoot!" and then took turns discussing black versus white violence, telling multiple stories of abuse, and expressing their hurt in sometimes poetic and allegoric terms. Then after one last shouting of "Hands up, don't shoot," they fell to the ground, symbolizing the

shooting of Michael Brown.

The event was followed that evening with a candlelight vigil at the SMC chapel, where participants gathered for prayers, songs and reflection.

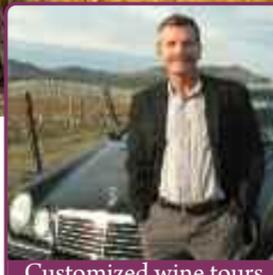
"Saint Mary's needs this, Moraga and the Lamorinda area needs this," said one of the organizers, SMC sophomore Rachel Hartley, after the vigil. "We are on these beautiful hills, in this beautiful area, and we can forget about other things that are going on." For black students on campus who are in the middle of finals, she added, it is hard to think about people out there who are dying. The young student said she felt sad that history keeps repeating itself and that there seems to be no way out, and that terrible events such as these killings overshadow the real progress that has been made.

"We need to recognize that there are police officers who try their hardest to protect lives, but if there are too many police officers who are criminalizing black people and making them the demons, then it's going to be hard to look at the police officers as the good guy," she said.

Hartley would like to see more justice for all and deep reforms of the police and justice systems. She felt that the presence of faculty and staff at both events was very comforting to students.

The Saint Mary's group reached out to other colleges in the Bay Area. Their goal was to come from a place of peace and reflection in order to effect change without anger clouding their judgment.

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