



Heritage University Press Contact:  
David Mance  
509.969.6084  
[mance\\_d@heritage.edu](mailto:mance_d@heritage.edu)

KCTS 9 Press Contact:  
Hilda Cullen  
206.443.6791  
[hcullen@KCTS9.org](mailto:hcullen@KCTS9.org)

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**For Immediate Release**

## **Heritage University and KCTS 9 Yakima to Host Town Hall Discussion on Race, Justice and Democracy**

**Toppenish, WA**— The Center for a New Washington at Heritage University, KCTS 9 Yakima and Humanities Washington will host a town hall-style panel discussion September 10, 2015 at the Yakima Valley Museum about one of the most difficult and important conversations facing our country right now: race, justice and democracy. The distinguished panel will include Mark O'Mara, CNN legal analyst and the attorney representing George Zimmerman; Dr. Christopher Parker, University of Washington Associate Professor of Political Science; Sue Rahr, Executive Director of Washington State Criminal Justice Training Commission and a member of the President's Task Force on 21<sup>st</sup> Century Policing; and Mirta Laura Contreras, Directing Attorney for the Northwest Immigrant Rights Project, Eastern Washington Office. The panel will be moderated by Enrique Cerna, KCTS 9's Director of Community Partnerships and a Yakima Valley native.

"This panel will create the opportunity for the community to voice thoughts on issues of race and justice," said Kimberly Bellamy-Thompson, Assistant Professor of Criminal Justice at Heritage University.

Recent events - including the riots in Ferguson, Missouri and the death of Sandra Bland - have placed race and justice in the national media spotlight. The panel will set a context for discussion and then focus the conversation on how race issues pertain to the local community. Along with the panel discussion, the audience will have the opportunity to ask questions and share personal experiences.

"We hope the discussion will provide insights into how issues that have been elevated into the national consciousness are playing out on the local level and what can be done to prevent injustices in the future," said Bellamy-Thompson. "We expect this event to empower people to speak up about and take action against injustices in society and to connect individuals with local organizations and resources. Healthy communities need strong relationships with law enforcement and the criminal justice system, and we are all working in this direction."

During the conversation, KCTS 9 will also share the results of an exclusive state-wide poll pertaining to racial attitudes, police and community relations, and views on the equality of our justice system.

"It's not easy talking about race," said Enrique Cerna. "It can be uncomfortable, but right now it is especially important. I see us starting the conversation that can be continued by

others in their homes, schools and communities. As we bring the issues out in the open, we can spark understanding that will lead to change.” Cerna has anchored current affairs programs, moderated statewide political debates, and produced stories for national PBS programs as well as local documentaries on social and juvenile justice, civil rights issues, the environment, and Latinos in Washington state.

The forum will begin at **7:00 p.m.** at the Yakima Valley Museum. Race, Justice and Democracy will be filmed for broadcast. It will air on KCTS 9 and KCTS 9 Yakima on Tuesday, October 13 at 7:00 pm. The program will be available online at [KCTS9.org](http://KCTS9.org) beginning Thursday, September 15, 2015.

Additional support is provided by Yakima Community Foundation, the Yakima Herald Republic, and the Yakima Bar Association.

For more information about the event, contact Kimberly Bellamy-Thompson at 509-865-0748 or [Bellamy-Thompson\\_K@heritage.edu](mailto:Bellamy-Thompson_K@heritage.edu).

For information about KCTS 9, contact Hilda Cullen at 206-443-6791 or [hcullen@kcts9.org](mailto:hcullen@kcts9.org).  
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#### **About Heritage University**

Heritage University is a non-profit, independent, regionally accredited institution of higher education offering undergraduate and graduate education across the state of Washington. Visit our website, [www.heritage.edu](http://www.heritage.edu).

#### **About KCTS 9**

KCTS 9 brings quality public television programming to more than 2.2 million viewers each week in Western and Central Washington State, British Columbia and across Canada. To watch or learn more about any of our programs, visit [KCTS9.org](http://KCTS9.org).