



OFFICIAL PRESS STATEMENT

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

August 14, 2014

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From Ferguson to Florida...From New York to California...From Michigan to Mississippi...Lest We Forget...Another 18 Year Old Black Man Is Dead

What do we want? Justice. When do we want it? Now. The late, great attorney Charles Hamilton Houston once said, "the race problem in the United States is the type of unpleasant problem which we would rather do without, but which refuses to be buried." It would seem that there is a force at work which more often than not appears on the scene to rip up racial progress, negate social justice, and divide people of conscious.

The recent events in Ferguson Missouri, not very far from Kinloch, Missouri, (a place where I was raised as a small boy with my grandmother, mother, aunties, cousins, and uncles) has all of a sudden provided me with a stark reminder of what I was told as a boy living in St. Louis. I remember my grandmother Arie Neal advising my Uncle Sam and Uncle Bobby to avoid Ferguson, Missouri when at all possible. This was due to Ferguson's long time history as a place that did not embrace black folks in general, and black men in particular. I remember hearing her say as well as others, "you don't ever want to get stopped in Ferguson or other counties outside of Kinloch, because the police will put a whooping on you and treat you very bad." This was during the 50s, 60s, and 70s. Ferguson was for the most part, a white community with no African Americans on the police department, or involved in any significant positions of authority. Today we find three African Americans on a department of 55 police officers, in a community of over 70% as the African American majority. This is not unique to Ferguson. This is typical of many communities throughout our nation. The results of such demographics, even in large urban cities, can have a disastrous result. The situation is the same even though the names may be different.

We as Americans, white or black, must not lose sight of the fact that 18 year old, unarmed, not guilty of any crime, college-bound Michael Brown is now dead. He was shot to death while his hands were held up in the air in a position of surrender. He lay on the streets of Ferguson with blood flowing from his head for over four hours on a hot summer day in August. Whether it is Michael Brown in Ferguson, Trayvon Martin in Florida, Eric Garner in New York, Ezell Ford in California, or Renisha McBride in Michigan, or remembering the late Medgar Evers shot down in his driveway in Mississippi, something is wrong in America. There seems to be a small value placed upon the lives of African American young men and women. One must look at what has now replaced a legitimate concern over the death of Michael Brown, and has now shifted to the issue of stores being looted and bottles being thrown.

Whenever my grandmother came home and was forced to discipline me and my cousin for fighting, when the story was being told she would inevitably ask the question, "Wendell and Eddie, what did you do?" In other words, her first inquiry was to get the facts of the matter so that she could make the appropriate decision of discipline. She made it very clear to everyone involved that she was after justice and was going to administer the appropriate remedy. For every action there is a reaction. We must remember and never forget what led to the recent events in Ferguson, Missouri over the last few days. Let us look at the facts as we know them:

- Michael Brown, 18 years old, shot at least 8 times, is now dead.
- He lay on the street for 4 hours on a hot, August day.
- There was no local investigation involving people on the scene or questioning eye witnesses or attempts to gain information immediately following the shooting.
- There was no evidence of the police talking with or engaging the local community to demonstrate their human-concern over this incident.
- The name of the police officer who did the shooting has not been released over the past four days.
- A police officer referred to the citizens as "*animals*."
- Ferguson has a history of stopping young blacks and disrespecting others in the African American community.
- High unemployment among African Americans exists within this community.
- It took four days for the Governor and the Mayor to step up and speak out on this issue.
- Only three African Americans are on the Ferguson Police Department

It is important to point out here that many municipalities are now becoming places for the militarization of police departments. As an example, following the withdrawal of troops from both Afghanistan and Iraq, great army supplies of materials composed of machine guns, Bearcat vehicles, tanks, MRAP (mine-resistant ambush protected) armed vehicles normally used to hunt insurgents in Iraq and Afghanistan, and helicopters, are now a part of the arsenal of local police departments. In many cases, they are reportedly obtaining these vehicles from the Department of Homeland Security or from certain governmental Sales in preparation for a so-called war against "domestic terrorism". Let us be clear, Ferguson, Indiana, Atlanta, Detroit, Los Angeles, and New York, are not Baghdad, Erbil, or the Middle-East. Even when this unnecessary arsenal was deployed in Ferguson, Police Chief Thomas Jackson indicated that his police department "had not even had time to drill with the equipment" that he was using against the people in his city. One must ask the question, were they experimenting or practicing on the people of Ferguson for such a war on domestic terrorism, particularly when there had been no mines laid, no machine guns fired, or no mortars fired at the police department. Police officers dressed in fatigues, army helmets, with long rifles, firing tear gas, flash bombs, and rubber bullets, and pointing weapons at innocent protesters, is not a recipe for racial harmony and civic engagement. Lest we forget there is what is known in America as a Constitution. It guarantees the people the right to assemble and the Press the right to gather information for the benefit of the people. In case you have forgotten, let me remind everyone of the words of the First Amendment:

"Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances"

Does America need a wake-up call? Is there an assault on black and brown youth, particularly as it relates to the devaluing of their lives? When one looks at the high unemployment in urban

communities, the high incarceration of our youth, the unchecked violence in urban communities like Chicago, St. Louis, Washington D.C., or Detroit to a degree, where is the priority? Is there no urban agenda to quell the violence, to bring the peace, and to reinstitute civility among people? It is difficult to charge the community with reporting individuals who commit crimes on the street or in the neighborhood, when local police officials refuse to divulge the names of police officers involved in the violent deaths of members of the community? Remember it is not about snitching, it is about reporting the facts of the matter. What is good enough for the community is certainly good enough for police departments around our nation. There must be a national commission established to investigate, correct, and prosecute these instances of violence against young men and women who for no other reason, are shot down, choked to death, or beaten up, for having chocolate skin while living in a chocolate community.

America is better than this. Our people are better than this. If we can rescue the people from a mountaintop of hopelessness in Iraq called Sinjar, then we certainly can lift up our own citizens from a valley of despair right in the heartland of America called Ferguson. This is not a black problem, this is not a brown problem, this is an American problem. America must recognize that it has a problem. There will be continuous chants, continuous outrage, continuous rebellion and a continuous declaration of no justice and no peace. What do we want? Justice! When do we want it? Now!

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For more information on the Detroit Branch NAACP please call (313) 871-2087 or visit www.detroitnaacp.org.