



## OFFICIAL PRESS STATEMENT

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### **Ferguson, Missouri Once Again Reminds America That It Has A Problem...The Question Is, Will America Find The Will To Fix It?**

For the past several months our nation has been gripped in the vice of a call for justice, fairness, and balance following the killing of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri. However, one cannot look at Ferguson through a lens that does not bring into focus similar situations in New York, Detroit, California, Florida, or South Carolina to name only a few. There seems to be a total disregard of black and brown life on the part of some in our criminal justice system, as their paths cross with members of the law enforcement community. Let me say it is very clear to many of us that police officers are necessary, important, and in many cases most professional in the discharge of their duties. We support professional and responsible police officers, regardless of race, color, or community. However, there are those officers that need to be weeded out due to their insensitivity, disregard, and lack of respect for the citizens they are duty-bound to protect and to serve.

St. Louis prosecutor Robert McCulloch, once again pulled the scab off of a wound that has never really healed. The wound is called "injustice". Mr. McCulloch seemed more comfortable in the role of defense attorney representing Officer Darren Wilson, than the the prosecuting attorney representing the people of Ferguson and the family of Michael Brown. The very definition of the role of a grand jury as given by him was flawed. The process from day one seemed to be more of a choreography leading to a non-indictment, than a pathway that would lead to ultimate justice. From the length of time in which Michael Brown lay on the street 4 ½ hours, strategic leaks from the prosecutor's office, the dumping of data to overwhelm the grand jury, until the timing of the announcement at night by the prosecutor that there would be no indictment. This is particularly curious as the protesters were asked not to hold demonstrations at night by the same police department, and to hold demonstrations during the day. One might wonder, why then would such an inflaming conclusion by the prosecutor's office be held during the night?

It is important to point out that the people of Ferguson did not, or have not demanded anything more than justice. No one has asked for treatment of black or brown people different than other folks. The call has been to treat them the same as our white brothers and sisters who are brought before the justice system. Mr. McCulloch stated that "the grand jury's job was to determine precisely what occurred." However, most lawyers would argue that the purpose of the grand jury, once it is convened, is to determine whether a crime was probably committed, even though the exact probable cause is not precisely defined.

America must take a serious look at the process within our criminal justice system and how it treats all of its citizens who are protected by the U.S. Constitution. It is important to remember that we have been here before. In 1967, the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders (the Kerner Report established by then President Lyndon B. Johnson) asked three basic questions: *What happened? Why did it happen? What could be done to prevent it from happening again?* The tragedy with this report is that many in police departments today have not read, do not understand the full scope of and the benefit from this report. It still serves as a blue print for police, community, social, economic, and political interactions across the country. One of the first witnesses to be invited to appear before the commission was Dr. Kenneth B. Clark, scholar and educator. Dr. Clark said to the commission:

*"I read that report...of the 1919 riot in Chicago, and it is as if I were reading the report of the investigating committee on the Harlem riot of '35, the report of the investigating committee on the Harlem riot of '43, the report of the McCone Commission on the Watts riot. I must again in candor say to you members of this Commission--it is a kind of Alice in Wonderland--with the same moving picture re-shown over and over again, the same analysis, the same recommendations, and the same inaction."*

It is time for action, not just more discussion. Police officers must stop viewing African American males, as characterized by Officer Darren Wilson as "demons or as Hulk Hogans", when encountering them on the streets of our cities. There must be greater training and sensitivity provided to law enforcement officers, and their leaders. There must be continuous oversight by local commissions and a national body established for police departments and law enforcement agencies to monitor their activities. As an example, now is not the time to reduce or eliminate the Board of Police Commissioners in the City of Detroit. Now is the time to strengthen, empower, and support it. The Justice Department must still hold police departments across the nation accountable. Laws need to be reviewed as to the limitations of and the length and breadth in the use of deadly force on the part of police officers. Body cameras must be implemented and worn by police officers as they discharge their duties, not only to preserve their security, but the security of private citizens. Police departments need to reflect the diversity of the communities in which they serve. Police departments do not need to engage in militarization in their communities, but in community policing for their communities.

The Justice Department must proceed to conclude its own independent investigations concerning the death of Michael Brown at the hands of Officer Darren Wilson in Ferguson, and the practices of the Ferguson Police Department. Young people and those who legitimately protest these conditions must be respected and protected. The lives of private citizens and the property of local communities should be protected from those who seek to use this as an opportunity for their own self-interests. We cannot be discouraged by the recent events. We must be encouraged to go forth in the pursuit of justice. In the words of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, "an injustice to anyone anywhere...is a threat to justice everywhere."

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