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OPINION

Vigilante Justice against Black Males

Let us refuse to be silent

BY MARIAN WRIGHT EDELMAN

The reaction to the not guilty verdict from George Zimmerman's jury was swift and strong. Young people poured onto the streets in peaceful protests. More than 1 million people signed an online petition urging the Justice Department to pursue civil rights violation charges against George Zimmerman.

The outrage over the killing of an unarmed black teenager who was doing nothing wrong must continue until some semblance of justice is achieved. People

who want to keep faith in American justice feel uncomfortable, upset and disheartened.



Where is the justice if walking while black is enough to get you "stopped and frisked" in New York City and fatally shot in Florida with its senseless violent "Stand Your Ground" law that allows people to defend themselves with deadly force anytime and anywhere they imagine they are or say they feel threatened even if they are the stalker?

Many decades of struggle and progress to eliminate racial profiling, arbitrary arrests, unfair

sentencing, imprisonment and criminalization of black males at younger and younger ages are being reversed by determined special interests like the gun lobby putting profits before the most basic American civil rights.

The National Rifle Association and their allies, including the American Legislative Exchange Council, determined efforts to support and pass "Stand Your Ground" and other destructive laws to protect guns rather than children perpetuates the epidemic of gun violence, especially for Black male teenagers like Trayvon Martin.

Black children and teens were 17 times more likely to die from a gun homicide than white chil-

dren and teens in 2010. Since 1963, 59,265 black children and teens have been killed by guns - more than 17 times the recorded lynchings of black people of all ages in America between 1882 and 1968.

What made a black male teenager in a hoodie walking home in the rain appear suspicious and "up to no good" in George Zimmerman's eyes? Would he have stopped a white male teenager? Isn't it long past time that we have a candid conversation about how we can create a post-racial America for our children and grandchildren beginning today?

Let us refuse to be silent. If Trayvon Martin's parents had

been silent and other voices had not joined with them, George Zimmerman never would have been arrested and never would have been brought to trial.

Let us continue to refuse to be silent until all the George Zimmermans of this world are deterred and held accountable for vigilante justice against black males

Let us refuse to be silent until the killing of black mothers' sons is as important as the killing of white mothers' sons. Only then will we have a post-racial America.

Marian Wright Edelman is President of the Children's Defense Fund.

Don't Let the Memory of Trayvon Martin Fade

We can turn our frustration into action

BY BEN JEALOUS

One million people.

In just three days, one million people signed an NAACP petition asking the Department of Justice to pursue federal and civil rights charges against George Zimmerman after he was found not guilty in the murder of Trayvon Martin.

I knew I was not alone in my outrage, anger, and heartbreak over this decision. When a teenager's life is taken, and there is no accountability for the man who killed him, nothing seems right in the world.

But we cannot let these emotions rule us. Instead, in these most challenging of times, we are called to act. That begins

with the pursuit of justice for Trayvon Martin, and it continues with a comprehensive campaign to fight the underlying problems factors that led to his death.

The first step is clear: we must make sure that George Zimmerman is held accountable for his actions. The jury's decision must be respected

and the rule of law upheld, but that does not mean the investigation should be considered complete. The trial judge's decision to discount debate about race or racial profiling in the courtroom leaves open questions about Zimmerman's motivation and intent.

The Department of Justice has the power to investigate whether Zimmerman's actions constitute a hate crime under federal law. The Department has closely monitored the case since March, and only put their

investigation on hold to respect the state's trial. Since the verdict and the overwhelming response, Attorney General Eric Holder has agreed to re-open his investigation.

As he told the Delta Sigma Theta convention last week, "We are determined to meet division and confusion with understanding and compassion - and also with truth."

This is the power of one million voices. One voice in angry protest can be ignored, but when one million people speak as one - and thousands more take to the street in peaceful protest, rallies and vigils - we can change the world.

So what comes next? As we closely follow the Department of Justice's investigation, we must continue to draw on our collective outrage and refuse to let the memory of Trayvon Martin fade from the hearts and minds of the nation.

Trayvon Martin's death did not occur in a vacuum. Ours was supposed to be the first generation black Americans to be judged not by our race or the color of our skin. Instead, we find ourselves to be the most murdered generation in the country and the most incarcerated on the planet. Meanwhile, racial profiling continues to rear its ugly head in law enforcement and civilian life alike.

At this moment we have a chance to address some of these societal ills. We have a chance to challenge racial profiling in all its forms, and to fight the underlying cause of violence in our communities -- by the good guys and bad guys alike.

This last year we have already changed the world. Not a single state in the continental United States has passed a "stand your ground" law in 2013

- the first time in eight years. And last month the New York City Council passed a strong bill banning the racially abusive practice of "stop and frisk" policing, after hundreds of thousands of people protested in the name of Trayvon.

We have a choice. We can be felled by our sorrows over the jury's decision. Or we can turn our frustration into action. We will demand the Department of Justice address the travesties of this tragedy. We will advance our movement to end racial profiling in America.

And with more than one million people at our back, we will make sure that the memory of Trayvon Martin never fades from the hearts and minds of this nation.

Sign the NAACP's petition at naacp.org.

Ben Jealous is president and chief executive officer of the NAACP.

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