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OPINION

Value and Justly Treat Every Parent's Child

Time for prayer and strategic nonviolent action

BY MARIAN WRIGHT EDELMAN

In the wake of Ferguson and a series of young black male deaths at the hands of official law enforcement personnel (and one self-appointed neighborhood watchman who cost Trayvon Martin his life), I hope we will use this time of Thanksgiving and celebration of Native American Heritage as an opportunity for national and personal soul searching and discussion about what it means to be an American.

I also hope we will recommit to doing what we can to serve, speak up, and work with others to build a nation where every child is safe, seen, heard, respected and hopeful, and every parents' son – and daughter – is valued and justly treated.



On the cusp of a holy season for Christians and Jews, it is timely to remember and help America remember that the kinship of human beings is more important than the fellowship of race and class and gender in a democratic society.

We must all try harder to be decent and fair and insist that others be so in our presence by not telling, laughing at or tolerating racial, ethnic, religious, or gender jokes – or any practices intended to demean rather than enhance another human being.

Walk away from them. Stare them down. Make them unacceptable in your presence. Through daily moral consciousness we must all counter the proliferating voices of racial and ethnic and religious division that are regaining too much respectability over the land.

And let's face up to rather than ignore our deep seated and growing racial problems while applauding the great progress we have made. We must all struggle to wake up and recognize that our ability to compete and lead credibly in a

majority non-White world is as inextricably intertwined with our poor and non-white children as it is with our white and privileged ones, with our girls as well as our boys.

Let's not spend a lot of useless time pinning blame and denying rather than thoughtfully examining the root causes of our country's systemic racial disparities and healing our divisions.

Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel put it aptly: "We are not all equally guilty, but we are all equally responsible" for building a decent and just America and ensuring the safety and hopefulness and opportunity of every child.

So I offer a prayer for all of us in this time of national trial:

Lord I cannot preach like Martin Luther King, Jr. or turn a poetic phrase like Maya Angelou and Robert Frost but I care and am willing to serve and stand with others to build a movement to protect all our children.

I do not have Harriet Tubman's courage, or Eleanor Roosevelt's and Wilma Mankiller's political skills

but I care and am willing to serve and stand with others to save all our children.

I cannot sing like Marian Anderson or Fannie Lou Hamer or organize like Ella Baker and Bayard Rustin but I care and am willing to serve and stand up with others to build a powerful nonviolent movement to protect all our children.

I am not holy like Archbishop Tutu, forgiving like President Mandela, or disciplined like Mahatma Gandhi

but I care and am willing to serve and stand with others to protect all our children.

I am not brilliant like Dr. W.E.B. Du Bois or Elizabeth Cady Stanton, or as eloquent as Sojourner Truth and Booker T. Washington but I care and am willing to serve and stand with others to protect all our children.

I have not Mother Teresa's saintliness, The Dalai Lama's or Dorothy Day's love or Cesar Chavez's

gentle tough spirit but I care and am willing to serve and stand with others to save all our children.

God it is not as easy as the 60's to frame an issue and forge a solution but I care and am willing to serve and stand with others to protect all our children.

My mind and body are not so swift as in youth and my energy comes in spurts but I care and am willing to serve and stand with others to protect all our children.

I'm so young nobody will listen. I feel invisible and hopeless and I'm not sure what to say or do

but I care and am willing to serve and stand with my peers and adults to save myself and all our children.

I can't see or hear well speak good English, stutter sometimes and get real scared standing up before others but I care and am willing to serve and lift my voice with others to save all our children.

God, use me as you will to save your and our children today and tomorrow and to build

a nation and world where every child is valued and protected.

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

A Path Forward in Prosecuting Ferguson Cop

Follow Bush and support federal charges

BY EARL OFARI HUTCHINSON

On March 22, 1991, a visibly shaken and angered President George H.W. Bush said he was sickened and "outraged" by what he saw on television. That was the beating of black motorist Rodney King by a swarm of LAPD cops. A year later following the acquittal of four of the police officers by a Simi Valley jury with no blacks on it, Bush ordered then Attorney General William Barr to begin the process of slapping federal civil rights charges on the officers.

He issued a terse statement saying "the verdict has left us all with a deep sense of personal frustration and anguish." He backed this up with a televised address a few days later in which he strongly signaled that civil rights charges would be brought against the officers.

Bush had the authority to order a prosecution, via a string of federal criminal civil rights laws specifically authorize the prosecution of police officers, who blatantly violate the law by using deadly or excessive



force against civilians, when there is a "compelling public interest" to do so.

In the case of King, the compelling public interest was that the state trial was flawed in the racially skewed jury composition, and that there was a need to confront the corrosive violation of civil rights by a law enforcement agency. More spe-

now finds himself faced with the same decision Bush Sr. had to make 22 years ago.

The call has repeatedly gone out for U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder to bring civil rights charges against Wilson. He would not have moved as quickly as he did to assign a phalanx of FBI agents to the case, secure an independent autopsy of Brown's death, and personally travel to the city to review proce-

encounter with Wilson occurred. Multiple eyewitnesses say he was shot with his hands up. An independent autopsy has confirmed that Brown was shot after an alleged scuffle with Wilson.

Though there was no apparent racial motive in Wilson confronting Brown, his action clearly violated Brown's right to exercise his freedom of movement, and his rights. This civil right was violated the moment Wilson presumed that a young black man walking in a public thoroughfare had committed a crime. The safeguard of that right must be a fundamental concern of federal prosecutors.

The Brown case also strongly points to systemic issues of excessive force by police. The obvious excessive force that was used was the slaying of Brown. This strikes to the heart of another basic right of citizens, namely the freedom from undue harm. His killing once more raised deeply troubling questions about the power of the law to protect citizens from their unimpeded right to life and safety. Federal prosecutors play a major role in ensuring that where there's the suspicion that an individual's rights might have been violated solely because of their race and gender, that the power of federal law is brought to bear to

ensure that right is protected.

The charge that Wilson abused his power as an officer in killing Brown under the color of law is the linchpin of federal prosecutions against local police officers. This is the same rationale that federal prosecutors used to bring civil rights charges against the four LAPD officers that beat King. The crucial legal point was that they acted in an official capacity when they violated King's rights.

As in the King case, there are crucial federal interests in ensuring the rights of individuals to be free from undue harm because of their color, age, and being in a public area merely because someone perceives they shouldn't be there and then acts on that perception with no cause other than that belief or perception.

Bush Sr. was deeply concerned that the King beating had caused an even deeper, volatile and dangerous rift between police and African-Americans. The riots after the cops were acquitted underscored that. This was enough of a compelling interest to force Bush to act. Obama will have to consider the same. As Bush Sr. did, he can and should follow his example and green light a prosecution of Wilson.

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cifically, the statute on "compelling public interest" makes plain that the alleged violation must involve "egregious conduct, including that which . . . causes loss of life," and where "the result in the prior prosecution was manifestly inadequate in light of the federal interest involved."

With the Ferguson grand jury deciding not to bring charges against Ferguson police officer Darren Wilson for the slaying of Michael Brown, President Obama

dures with civil rights attorneys and investigators without the personal approval of Obama. Obama, as Bush did on King, has spoken out on various aspects of the Brown case and has almost certainly kept a close watch on developments.

But can and will he do what Bush Sr. did and order Holder to go forward with charges?

There's the compelling federal interest. Brown was not detained or charged with a crime when the fatal