

EDITORIALS • COMMENTS • OPINIONS

Feds Must Step In Or Rebellion And Vigilantes Will

By Opio Sokoni, MSCJ, JD

People have every right to be angry at the verdict in the George Zimmerman case. Look at the people who are speaking out. Are they all Black? I saw a middle age White man on YouTube ranting and destroying his house because of the verdict. His sons were trying, seriously, to calm him down. The man breaks down at the end and starts to cry. In Portland, Oregon the rally was mostly Whites; joined by Latinos and Blacks all speaking angrily about what they believed was a simple case of justice. Various types of people, other than Blacks, are expressing outrage. After the not guilty verdict, President Obama just simply said that the jury has spoken and that we are a nation of laws. He also made a political plug to end gun violence and advised that “we ask ourselves if we’re doing all we can to widen the circle of compassion and understanding in our own communities.” Huh? What? We hear too often that Obama is not the leader of Black America, but this is not just about African Americans.

There is now a call for the United States Department of Justice (DOJ) to bring a case against George Zimmerman. Following Obama’s comments after the verdict, which shows once again that he has no political courage when it comes to African Americans, this is what the DOJ had to say:

“As the Department first acknowledged last year, we have an open investigation into the death of Trayvon Martin. The Department of Justice’s Criminal Section of the Civil Rights Division, the United States Attorney’s Office for the Middle District of Florida, and the Federal Bureau of Investigation continue to evaluate the evidence

generated during the federal investigation, as well as the evidence and testimony from the state trial. Experienced federal prosecutors will determine whether the evidence reveals a prosecutable violation of any of the limited federal criminal civil rights statutes within our jurisdiction, and whether federal prosecution is appropriate in accordance with the Department’s policy governing successive federal prosecution following a state trial.”

This is not a “yes” or “no” from the DOJ. They must determine whether George Zimmerman violated Trayvon Martin’s civil rights. What we know is that Zimmerman profiled Trayvon. He then used foul language in the process of observing and following the teen. George Zimmerman was known by the Sanford Police Department because he called them several times before – often reporting African-American males as looking suspicious. We also know that George Zimmerman wanted to be a cop and had a police officer as a best friend. That fatal night, Zimmerman overzealously operated outside of the scope of his title as a neighborhood watch captain.

Because of the state trial, we know most of the facts that lead to the death of Martin. Trayvon Martin was a teenager walking back home from the store. He is on the phone with his friend who lives in another city. While walking through the housing complex where he lives, a man in an SUV begins to stare at him. Then this strange man begins to follow him. Trayvon runs. They ultimately meet face to face. No one will dispute that Trayvon has done nothing wrong up to this point. But, there is now a confrontation - which the teen did not start. What must he do? They exchanged words, then get into a

scuffle. George Zimmerman produced a loaded gun and shoots the boy at point-blank range in the heart. Trayvon Martin dies very soon thereafter. George Zimmerman claims self-defense.

Some may remember when the four police officers that beat Rodney King were acquitted by a local California court in Simi Valley. The Justice Department then brought a civil rights case against the four officers. Two of the cops were convicted and sent to jail. Many are hoping George Zimmerman will go to jail for intentionally shooting and killing Trayvon Martin. The feeling is that there is no freedom when a teen can be profiled, stalked and killed for doing nothing wrong – and no one goes to jail. This is a recipe for those who will take matters into their own hands - feeling that the government has failed. In addition, when someone sees Zimmerman on the streets, they may try and make a citizen’s arrest. Or, someone may confront him and dare him to do what he did to Trayvon. For now, people of all persuasions are making their voices heard. Public outcry is not the only reason that civil rights cases get brought by the Justice Department. But, protest and rebellion does not prevent it either.

Opio Sokoni is an activist, political commentator and author of several books, including “Controlling Blue: Race, Media and Policing.” He is a co-founder of Poli-Tainment, Inc. a nonprofit organization which uses various forms of entertainment to inform and bring people together. Find out more at www.Poli-Tainment.com.

It Is Past Time To Confront The Obama Administration

By Bill Fletcher, Jr.
NNPA Columnist

Alright, team, enough is enough. During the entire first term of the Obama administration, Black America—for the most part—gave the administration a pass. Many of us felt that the first Black president of the United States should have a little breathing room. While we gave him breathing room, the political Right, through organizations such as the Republicans in Congress and the Tea Party, did exactly the opposite.

For our silence we received very little. The Obama administration continuously caved to the political Right, apparently hoping that they could convince the other side that they were reasonable. Well, the political Right was not interested in reason: they were interested in blood. So, each concession that the administration made to the political Right resulted in nothing. Consider Obama’s pay freeze for federal workers. He received

nothing in exchange for this, except further demands from the Republicans for even more cuts.

One does not have to be an economist or sociologist to know that Black America is in trouble. Our unemployment rate continues in double digit and at least double that of Whites. The Supreme Court’s recent decisions on the Voting Rights Act and affirmative action represent one more step towards grinding us down. To this must be added, the hiking in the student loan rate brought on by the failure of the administration and the Congress to reach an agreement, but added to this was an effort by the administration to shift how students (and their families) would actually qualify for loans.

There are also concerns when it comes to foreign policy, including, drone strikes, harassing political leaders of other countries (e.g., Bolivia’s Evo Morales), the on-going war in Afghanistan, the growing intervention in Syria and, well, you see the problem.

Many African Americans, for very understandable reasons, have

been reluctant to openly criticize this administration fearing that to do so provides aid and comfort to the political Right. The time has come to cast aside such fears and recognize that there is no constituency that is better placed to lean on this administration than Black America.

Our reluctance to criticize this administration must end. Black America that must say, in no uncertain terms, that this administration would not have come into existence without our support and it is time for it to shift gears and focus on the needs of Black America and other constituencies that were there for this candidate, this president, this administration. Perhaps it is time that we also said that we need no more speeches; we need action that favors those of us who exist beneath the clouds.

Bill Fletcher, Jr. is a Senior Scholar with the Institute for Policy Studies, the immediate past president of TransAfrica Forum.

An Economic Divide Is Growing In Our Cities

By Jesse Jackson

(Trice Edney Wire) - What is the plan for our nation’s cities? Are they simply to simmer with a growing divide between the affluent financial district and the impoverished slums? Will another generation be lost while we wait for the inevitable explosions? The gulf between the realities of our cities and the foolishness of our politics has seldom been wider.

Consider gun violence. Over the Fourth of July weekend, Chicago surpassed 200 homicide deaths for the year. On that weekend alone, 10 people were killed and several dozen wounded in gun violence, including 5- and 7-year-old boys. The only grim salvation in the savage toll is that the city’s year-to-date homicide rate is rising at a somewhat slower rate than last year.

While this goes on, the Illinois state Legislature is gearing up to overturn the state’s ban on carrying concealed weapons. The last of its kind, the concealed-weapons ban was ruled unconstitutional by a federal appeals court. Somehow, the conservative justices concluded that the Second Amendment, which provided constitutional protection for state militias, now prohibits citizens from deciding to

ban concealed weapons as part of cracking down on gun violence. The gulf between the reality on the ground and the crackpot ideology of the right-wing activist judges could not be greater.

Consider the economy. The youth unemployment rate in the U.S. is the highest it’s been since World War II. The Center for Labor Market Studies reports that 72 percent of Illinois teenagers —ages 16-19 — are unemployed. The Bureau of Labor Statistics finds that less than 16 percent of black teenagers are employed. The official unemployment rate for African-American teenagers — which doesn’t count those forced to take part-time jobs or who have given up — stood at 43.6 percent in June, according to the BLS.

This is a human and national calamity. An entire generation of young people is coming out of school and ending up on the streets or on a couch in their parents’ home.

Yet at the national level, Washington and Wall Street are telling us that this calamity — a deep and enduring depression in our urban areas — is the “new normal.” The Congress is cutting jobs, not taking action to create them. In Illinois, those on unemployment are suffering a 16.8 percent cut in benefits. The gulf between the elite

politics in Washington and the realities facing young people in our urban areas could not be greater.

None of this is inevitable. None of it is an act of God. These realities are the result of policy choices, of values and power expressed in policy. This cannot continue without a reckoning. If we choose not to invest in the young, we will pay dearly as they grow older. If we choose to starve the schools of poor children of color, we will suffer when they become adults without skills. If we choose to let companies stash profits abroad without taxes, we will lack the resources we need to build a strong economy at home.

What is clear is that Wall Street, Washington and the conservative judges feel that they can embrace this new normal without paying any price. These policies will not be changed by those who profit from them. They will only be changed if those who are victimized by them make it clear that they will not “adjust and accept.” The young, the unemployed, the poor, the abandoned urban communities must make their voices heard. Change will come only if they force the elites to face reality, not ignore it.

To Be Equal

The State Of Black Men - Part One

By Marc H. Morial

(Trice Edney Wire) - “As of 2004, more black men were denied the right to vote because of a criminal record than in 1870, when the Fifteenth Amendment was ratified, giving blacks the right to vote.” Joshua Dubois, former director of President Obama’s Office of Faith-Based Initiatives

As the Trayvon Martin trial and record high summer temperatures both begin to add their heat to the unemployment and economic woes plaguing Black America, we thought it would be a good time to take stock of the one group that more than most continues to be locked up, shut out and left behind — African American men. This topic is too big and too complicated to cover in one essay. But it is not too big or complicated to solve with the necessary resources, commitment and partnerships. So we will continue our discussion of the issues, along with the creation of solutions, in future columns.

Today, we simply want to provide an overview and begin to point to some answers. A good place to start is the recent Newsweek cover story, “The Fight for Black Men,” by former Obama White House advisor Joshua Dubois.

Like the National Urban League, Dubois understands that the solution to the under-employment and over-incarceration of African American men must begin with changing our perception of who they

are and investing in their potential through job opportunities, quality education and economic development. These have been the building blocks of the great American middle class and represent the surest path to responsible adulthood and stronger communities. So why haven’t we done this for African American men?

The reasons are many but one stands out. As described by Michelle Alexander in her best-selling 2010 book, The New Jim Crow, the intentional mass incarceration of young Black men has created what she calls a “permanent under-caste” that may never be able to escape the past and compete on equal footing with the rest of us. Disproportionate arrests and unequal sentencing have had a devastating impact in Black communities. African American men are six times more likely to be incarcerated than whites. More African Americans are in prison or on probation today than were enslaved in 1850.

The economic consequences have been just as bad. This year’s Urban League State of Black America report found that the average unemployment rate for Black men in 2012 was 15% compared with just 7.4% for white men. Black men earn only 72 cents for every dollar earned by white men. Because of the civil rights advances of the past 50 years and the election of Barack Obama as President, in the words of Michelle Alexander, we may have been “lulled to sleep by the rhetoric of color blindness and the appearance of great racial

progress” and thus have “closed our eyes to the millions who have been locked up, locked out and relegated to second-class citizen status.”

But our focus must extend beyond talking about the problems. That is why the National Urban League has been a leading voice in challenging Washington to develop a comprehensive urban agenda. It is also why we recently announced our \$100 million Jobs Rebuild America campaign designed to address the nation’s employment and education crisis. This effort includes our Urban Youth Empowerment Program, which offers job training, education and other wrap-around services to prepare out-of-school and adjudicated youth for the world of work, as well as our Training for Work-Adult Re-entry program, which targets convicted adults in Work Release Programs and provides them with supportive services, education and training opportunities, mentoring, and job readiness and placement support.

We must create more opportunities for Black men who have been locked up or left out. As we celebrate the momentous anniversaries of our civil rights struggle, let’s remember – there can be no celebration without continuation. We cannot afford to stop now.

Marc Morial is president/CEO of the National Urban League.