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National Black Law Students Association

Pursuing Racial Justice and Lasting Social Impact

A Response to the Police Killings

Police shootings of Blacks have become a regular occurrence in the media. We want to be clear that the deaths are not new, the coverage is. We also want to bring clarity to our message and our pain. In no way, do we insinuate that the police only kill Blacks. However, Blacks are killed by the police at an alarmingly higher rate than other races. According to the latest census, Blacks make up 13 percent of the U.S. population, while Whites make up 62 percent. The Washington Post counts Keith Lamont Scott as the 173rd Black person to be shot and killed by the police this year; that means that so far, Blacks make up 24 percent of the 708 police killings in 2016. The Washington Post has also found that Black are 2.5 times more likely to be killed by the police than Whites and that unarmed Blacks are 5 times more likely to be killed by police than unarmed Whites. We are in a constant search of solutions to this epidemic.

News outlets and the internet have made it impossible to avoid witnessing videos of Black bodies lying dead in the street after they have been shot and killed by the police. One of the results of these consistent injustices is the mental anguish it brings many Blacks. We often struggle with feelings of helplessness, hopelessness, anger, resentment, and even depression due to not only the killings, but also the lack of indictments charges and successful prosecutions. Studies have consistently shown that internalizing these mixed emotions is not healthy and that the human psyche has limitations on how much it can endure.

Blacks struggle to come up with ways to cope with the trauma of witnessing Black bodies gunned down and left in a pool of blood. On a daily basis we deal with these issues on even deeper levels than many can comprehend. Whether we are at school or work, we have been conditioned to mask our grief so that we do not make others feel uncomfortable; although we are often not met with the same consideration. We often conceal our grief to avoid being known as that Black person that is always talking about race. W.E.B. DuBois coined this behavior as double-consciousness, which describes the psychological conflict that Blacks experience as they are forced to view themselves dually from not only their cultural perspective but also through the lens of the oppressive society in which they live.

Our grief is not only ignored and suppressed but it is also met with conditions. Often times, we are not allowed to highlight the unjust police killings of Blacks unless we also condemn every other act of violence in America. The most recent example of this suppression is the phrase “All Lives Matter,” which has been used as a silencing, counterargument to “Black Lives Matter”. The “All Lives Matter” group is not around when Black bodies are lying dead in the street, they do not organize or attend protests. They merely use their voices in an attempt to combat the idea that Black Lives actually Matter. Understand this, we agree, that all lives matter. In fact, if you truly believe that “All Lives Matter,” then you must also believe that “Black Lives Matter”. That is simple logic. We have not stated that our lives matter more than others. We are saying that we need to be included in the “All.” Because if all lives mattered, then there would be no reason for the phrase to be used as an opposition statement instead of a supportive one.

The dismissiveness of our pain does not stop there. Many other forms of suppression exist. Blacks are often blamed for these police killings. People use respectability politics as a justification for our experiences. We are told to fix our broken homes and the police will stop killing us. We are told to submit, to be respectful, and to give up our constitutional rights in exchange for our

lives. We are often met with statistics of Black on Black crime as if the numbers are not identical in White communities in accordance with the laws of proximity, or as if the police should be allowed to kill us because we kill each other. When we push the envelope we are met with cherry-picked words from Martin Luther King Jr. quoted back to us in an attempt to sustain order. However, let us be clear; Dr. King did not die of old age. He was murdered while using the very tactics and quotes that we are being told to use today. His enemies told him that his demonstrations were deplorable, and yet he continued to demonstrate and fight injustice. Like Dr. King, we too will continue to demonstrate and fight against injustice.

It is perplexing that some of us are desensitized to the violence while others still experience trauma. How much longer can we be made to walk around concealing these afflictions? With every hashtag, we lose another piece of our humanity. With every killing, we lose another piece of our soul. If you are looking for ways to help, start with empathy. Simply think about the ways in which you would want us to react if the situations were reversed. Do not try to justify our pain. If you are silent in the face of injustice you are endorsing it. If you see something wrong, speak out against it, it may not be easy, but it is the moral thing to do. As students pursuing higher education, you have the power to change the face of injustice. You will go on to shape policies, laws and the society in which we live. Join us in drafting policy, engaging our communities and holding all those in power accountable. Lastly, please understand, we cannot stop until racial equality has been realized. This is a problem that we cannot solve alone, nor should we. The crisis of police violence is not a Black issue. It is a national problem and an American epidemic.