



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

January 30, 2023

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OFFICIAL PRESS STATEMENT

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FROM MINNEAPOLIS TO MEMPHIS BLACK LIVES STILL DON'T MATTER. AMERICA...YOU HAVE A PROBLEM!

DETROIT – *“Momma I’m through!”* This is the cry of a dying George Floyd as he lay hand-cuffed, face smashed into a Minneapolis street, while the knee of a white police officer pressed against his neck. Calls came from the sidewalk, *“let him breathe. Let him breathe, man.”* From the streets of New York, *“I can’t breathe. I can’t breathe.”* This is the desperate plea from Eric Garner, as he lay gasping for air, with the arm of a police officer wrapped around his neck, using an illegal choke hold, causing his death. One must ask the question are there those who do not want black folks in America to even breathe? This latest cry *“Momma”* from a dying Tyre Nichols laying on his side, just a few yards from his home, on a Memphis side street, hands behind his back, pepper sprayed in the face, beaten with a baton, kicked in his head by five Black police officers, who demanded *“bitch put your hands behind your back before I break them.”* This comes after pulling him from his vehicle under the guise of reckless driving, for which there is no evidence, according to Memphis Chief of Police Cerelyn Davis. Tyre Nichols tells them, *“I didn’t do anything. Alright I’m on the ground.”* It is clear that there are those who believe more in the enforcement aspect of law than in the equitable application of the law.

Black folks live with the personal trauma every day of wondering whether or not this is the day that I will have an encounter with the police as they pull up behind or right next to my car? Will my child make it home safely from school or work when he and his friends are walking together or driving together in a group? As he goes to visit a friend in a different neighborhood, will he be viewed as a trespasser, a criminal, someone who does not belong? There is a culture in American policing that has imbedded within it, racial, physical, and intellectual stereotypes of Black men in particular. It grows out of the former “slave patrols,” created in the Carolinas in the early 1700’s. Their mission was to establish a system of terror and squash slave uprisings with the capacity to pursue, apprehend, and return runaway slaves to their owners. Tactics included the use of excessive force to control and produce desired slave behavior. The North Carolina slave patrol oath, *“I, [patrollers name], do swear that I will as searcher for guns, swords, and other weapons among the slaves in my district, faithfully and as privately as I can discharge the trust reposed in me as the law directs to the best of my power, so help me God.”* These patrols continued until the end of the Civil War and passage of the 13th Amendment. Eventually they would be replaced by militia, which eventually would lead to municipalities establishing police departments to enforce laws, including Jim Crow laws. Many among the cadres of police have come to believe that Black men do not feel, think, act and even value life as other men. Therefore it is alright to discard us for we possess no true value or conscious. This type of belief system has even infiltrated the very thinking of some Black and brown police officers. It has become a part of the culture within police departments. It inevitably leads to the disease of self-hate and disgust.

Looking at the merciless, depravity of the senseless beating of Tyre Nichols by five Black police officers, I would ask of them, didn’t you see yourself on the ground? Didn’t you see your son, brother, father, uncle, granddad, grandchild,

cousin, friend bleeding on that ground? Have you forgotten Freddie Gray, Tamir Rice, Michael Brown, Rodney King, Philando Castile, Alton Sterling, Stephon Clark, Laquan McDonald, Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, Sandra Bland and too many others we can't name them all? This goes beyond your training. This goes to your very humanity. In the movie Django Unchained, starring Jamie Foxx as Django, Samuel Jackson as Stephen the Butler, with Leonardo DiCaprio as Calvin Candie the slave master. There is a scene in which such self-hate is brought to the screen. Django rides a horse up to the front door of the Candie plantation. The expression of rage and disdain that Stephen the butler has on his face for Django says it all. You don't belong up there. You are out of place. He demands to know from his slave master, "what the hell is the nigger doing on a horse? Who the hell does he think that he is?" His rage explodes even harsher when he is told by his master that he, Stephen, must get a room ready for Django to spend the night in the Big House like white folks. After being ordered to get the room ready, the butler is so outraged, he is even ready to fight Django, even though his master has told him it is ok. The butler has learned down through the years to say everything for the master without the master ever having to say anything for himself. This self-hate has taken root and infects the entire plantation.

W.E.B. DuBois sums it up, "*you see yourself through the eyes of those who despise you.*" The police officers in Memphis were a part of the so-called "Scorpion Unit" (street crimes operation to restore peace in our neighborhoods), supposedly organized to focus on homicides, assaults, and robberies. The very name scorpion is deadly. It has a poisonous sting. Scorpions are dangerous. They don't care who they attack. There are units like this all over the country. Different names but the same game. In Detroit we use to have such units. They were called the Big 4, or Stress (stop the robberies enjoy safe streets), driving around in un-marked cars, plain clothes, big guns plainly designed to intimidate and eliminate. But the streets were not safe for Black people, because they had us under stress and in distress. They killed a number of Black men during their tenure prior to Coleman Young taking office as Detroit's first Black mayor. Many of us have fought, marched, lobbied, voted, and paid a price to have Black men and women involved in law enforcement at every level. In many cities Blacks are involved in law enforcement and police departments. After all it was a Black woman Chief of Police in Memphis, who fired the five culprits quickly after this tragedy. She has set a standard. She has shown the police world and our nation what can and should be done when these situations occur. Straight up with the community, not hiding the law breakers and policy forsakers. Her actions let us all know that it does not take six months, a year, or years to deal with the justice so desperately sought by the victim's family and community. If Black officers can be fired so quickly when the evidence is there so should every white officer when the evidence is there.

Police departments must stop lying and hiding from the truth of the matter at hand. Black people are not stupid. It is clear why police use terms like "*stop resisting, open your hands, he grabbed for my gun, when they are preparing to file their reports.*" It helps their defense and covers up in some cases their bad acts. One could hear it as the Memphis police officers stood around talking among themselves while Tyre Nichols laid dying without aid on the ground. For good police officers, these phony expressions get in the way of trust and belief in you when your own safety is truly at risk. We know the "now you see it and now you don't" game. It has been played against Black people down through the centuries all over America. We face more than just a change in police policy. We must have the George Floyd Justice in Policing Act. We must have the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act voted on and signed into law. Pronunciations of "*my heart goes out to the family, let us remember the tragic death of Tyree Nichols, this was too terrible to talk about,*" we know all that. Let's not talk about it. It's past time to do something to stop it. There must be a change in the culture of American policing. Who does the training of police in America? Who are the recruits for these departments? Policing is not just Black and white. Quite frankly, it is blue. It is a group mentality and consciousness involving control, submit, and obey. Too often it is rooted in violence and aggression rather than service and protection. Every run does not require a gun. Batons and tasers are not always required use, particularly if it leads to personal abuse. Where are the units for mental illness and de-escalation of violence? Where are the supervisors to make certain we are provided with cause and care at the scene of such tragedies? It is past time for meaningful accountability of police misconduct. There should be regular evaluations of police officers for both

explicit and implicit bias. Not every police officer is bad. Those who are good have a duty and responsibility to help eliminate the abusers and lawbreakers from their ranks, regardless of their color. They should not be rehired. They should be fired, as the Memphis five have been fired along with any others who were part of this unnecessary death. There should be a national database to track and monitor the behavior of police who break the law just like we track and monitor civilians who break the law. Corporations and businesses must follow through on what they committed to do in the community, towards these changes, following the death of George Floyd. We need you to advocate for change in these policies and support political leaders who support change and equity in the law throughout our nation. If we pass a thousand laws on police reforms but don't work to pass into our present and future generation a new culture, a new way of thinking and acting, all we are doing is simply waiting on the next death by a 21st century lynching. Policing is what you do *with a* community, not *to a* community. Silence on these matters is not golden. It emboldens the twin evils of tyranny and treachery. Whether you like it or not, Black Lives Do and Must Matter. America, you have a problem. Does it matter enough for you to fix it.

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