

Department of Justice Petition: One million people

Written by Ben Jealous
Tuesday, 16 July 2013 15:32



As of Tuesday morning, one million people have 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 this 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,

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

Ben Jealous is president/CEO of the NAACP.