

Until the killing of Black men...

Written by Marian Wright Edelman
Monday, 22 July 2013 10:35



Until the killing of Black men, Black mothers' sons, is as important as the killing of White mothers' sons, we who believe in freedom cannot rest.

- Ella Baker, Leading Mentor of Black Youth, including the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) in the 1960's
(1964)

Trayvon Martin will forever remain in the annals of history next to Medgar Evers and Emmett Till as symbols for the fight for equal justice for all.

- Benjamin Crump, lawyer for Trayvon Martin's parents
(2013)

The reaction to the not guilty verdict from George Zimmerman's jury was swift and strong. Young people poured onto the streets in peaceful protests in Chicago, Los Angeles, New York City, and Washington, D.C. By 3 a.m. more than 100,000 people signed an online petition urging the Justice Department to pursue civil rights violation charges against George Zimmerman.

The outrage over the killing of an unarmed Black teenager who was doing nothing wrong must

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continue until some semblance of justice is achieved. People who want to keep faith in American justice feel uncomfortable, upset and disheartened. Where is the justice if walking while Black is enough to get you "stopped and frisked" in New York City and fatally shot in Florida with its senseless violent "Stand Your Ground" law that allows people to defend themselves with deadly force anytime and anywhere they imagine they are or say they feel threatened even if they are the stalker?

Many decades of struggle and progress to eliminate racial profiling, arbitrary arrests, unfair sentencing, imprisonment and criminalization of Black males at younger and younger ages are being reversed by determined special interests like the gun lobby putting profits before the most basic American civil rights. The National Rifle Association and their allies', including the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC), determined efforts to support and pass "Stand Your Ground" and other destructive laws to protect guns rather than children perpetuates the epidemic of gun violence, especially for Black male teenagers like Trayvon Martin.

Black children and teens were 17 times more likely to die from a gun homicide than White children and teens in 2010. Since 1963, 59,265 Black children and teens have been killed by guns -- more than 17 times the recorded lynchings of Black people of all ages in America between 1882 and 1968.

What made a Black male teenager in a hoodie walking home in the rain appear suspicious and "up to no good" in George Zimmerman's eyes? Would he have stopped a White male teenager? Isn't it long past time that we have a candid conversation about how we can create a post-racial America for our children and grandchildren beginning today?

Let us refuse to be silent. If Trayvon Martin's parents had been silent and other voices had not joined with them, George Zimmerman never would have been arrested and never would have been brought to trial. Let us continue to refuse to be silent until all the George Zimmermans of this world are deterred and held accountable for vigilante justice against Black males. Let us refuse to be silent until the killing of Black mothers' sons is as important as the killing of White mothers' sons. Only then will we have a post-racial America.

Marian Wright Edelman is President of the Children's Defense Fund whose Leave No Child Behind® mission is to ensure every child a Healthy Start, a Head Start, a Fair Start, a Safe Start and a Moral Start in life and successful passage to adulthood with the help of caring families and communities. For more information go to www.childrensdefense.org .