September 24, 2020

PUBLIC STATEMENT FROM THE BLACK LEADERSHIP OF THE SOUTHERN OREGON COALITION FOR RACIAL EQUITY

As Black leaders in our community, we are grieving and we are devastated by the injustice announced regarding Breonna Taylor’s murder on September 23, 2020. We also recognize that as Black people in the public eye in our community, we are not afforded the same space to react emotionally. So, we will start by reiterating a few basic statements that SOEquity Leadership has made clear before:
While we are not an official Black Lives Matter organization, we do and always will believe that Black Lives Matter. We believe that the lives of Black people in this country are currently not valued in the same way as those of other races. This is supported by the fact that Black people are harmed and murdered at the hands of the police at a disproportionately higher rate than almost any other race in the US. And yet the cops who harm us, who violate their oath to serve and protect, almost never face consequences.

Yesterday, a grand jury in Louisville, Kentucky announced the decision not to indict the three police officers—Jonathan Mattingly, Brett Hankison, and Myles Cosgrove—who murdered Breonna Taylor, a 26-year-old emergency room technician who was asleep in her own bed in her own home. The Black members of SOEquity Leadership need to make it clear: we are outraged over this decision, and we are unfortunately not surprised. Black people face injustices like these everyday. This is not news to anyone who lives the Black experience at all. We knew this was coming when officials declared a State of Emergency in Louisville before the decision was even finalized. We knew justice would not be served, and still we are devastated all the same.

There was one indictment, yes, and it had nothing to do with the murder of Breonna Taylor. It was for “wanton endangerment” from the dozens of bullets that were spewed into drywall and could have harmed neighbors in other apartments. The fact that the only indictment was for stray bullets and not the 8 bullets that went into Breonna Taylor is remarkable. A life was lost and Attorney General Daniel Cameron made it clear in his announcement that our legal system and the people who uphold it care more about stray bullets in drywall than the tragic loss of a young life. This is unacceptable.

What is more unnerving is the long and drawn out process that resulted in this unjust decision. For over six months, activists on the ground in Louisville did everything they could to demand justice. They petitioned their local government, spoke with the Louisville mayor and Kentucky senators, created hashtags, spread awareness, marched nonviolently, went through multiple legal channels, and made their demands clear. And yet none of it resulted in justice. Because the system is broken. And now they are back to expressing their right to free speech by marching in the streets.

Last night, only hours after the decision was announced, protestors took to the streets. Two officers were shot and wounded during the protests. SOEquity has said before that we do not condone violence, and, what is more is we know these officers will get their justice. The person that is in custody for shooting these officers will likely receive the harshest of sentences, while Breonna Taylor could not get the justice she so rightfully deserved. Many Black people are no longer in the
frame of mind of letting these murders go. We are so saddened that violence was the answer for these officers. There are no excuses for the constant and sensationalized murder of our people.

We are Angry. We are Frustrated. We are Tired.

Right now, it feels as though we are being criminalized for “living while Black” in our own country. The list of things we are no longer allowed to do while Black without facing the death penalty grows longer and longer:

Our children can’t play cops and robbers in the park with friends.
We can’t lawfully own a weapon
We can’t sell cigarettes on the sidewalk.
We can’t get a traffic ticket.
We can’t buy a bike for our children.
We can’t walk home from work with headphones on.
We can’t walk home from the corner store after buying a snack.
We can’t dance in the street in front of our home.
We can’t drive through a white neighborhood.

We can’t have a barbecue in the park or go bird watching without being harassed and having our lives threatened. And yet white supremacists like Dylan Roof, who murdered Black churchgoers in cold blood, are taken into custody calmly and offered a bulletproof vest and Burger King. Why are nonviolent Black folks who are often trying to comply with the police threatening their lives not afforded the same grace as white mass murderers? This needs to change. We have the right to live lives of dignity without facing persecution in our own homes. We deserve to live our lives free of fear, and right now that is not our reality. The minute we start to get comfortable, it becomes dangerous. Our melanin does not make us criminals. We deserve to live as comfortably as our white neighbors in our community. We deserve so much better from our country.

Why do we repeat “No Justice! No Peace!”? The disrespectful and undignified result of Breonna Taylor’s case is why. We are rarely offered justice for the murders of our Black brothers and sisters and family. If we cannot get justice for the dropping of our Black bodies, we will march in the streets until we do. We advocate for nonviolence, and we will disrupt, and it will be tense at times. As Martin Luther King, Jr. said, “Peace is not the absence of tension: it is the presence of justice.”

Black liberation is coming, and we aim to bring it home here in Southern Oregon.

With Power and Love,

Kayla Talbert, Treasurer and Education Inequity Director
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