

RACISM IN AMERICA: Justice for Trayvon: Taking the Struggle to a Higher Level

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George Zimmerman has now been arrested and charged with second-degree murder for the killing of Trayvon Martin.

This happened because people all over the country came together, took to the streets and said with one voice: NO MORE! Tens of thousands refused to let this murder go down without a struggle, and all kinds of people—from politicians and pastors, to celebrities and sports stars, along with those on the bottom of society as well as in the middle class—stood up and demanded justice for Trayvon.

It looked like Zimmerman was just going to walk. *But this time* masses of people were determined to not just swallow another bitter pill. This time, people were determined to *come together and do something* with their outrage. In cities and towns, from coast to coast, people of different nationalities protested and dragged the ugly injustice of this murder into the light of day and onto the top of the news.

These demonstrations have been all the more powerful because people have connected up and been speaking out against something that happens to Black people *all the time in communities, big and small, all over this country.* People are stepping forward to speak their own bitter stories of how Black youth are targeted, demonized, brutalized, and murdered. People carrying signs that say “Trayvon Martin is My Son” are speaking to the fact that there is a whole generation of Black youth this system treats as a “generation of suspects” to be murdered and jailed.

Another “isolated incident”—on top of so many other “isolated incidents.” Another Black family, burying their son for *no reason other than* he was young, Black, wearing a hoodie and so (as Zimmerman told the 911 dispatcher) he “looked suspicious” and “like he’s up to no good or he’s on drugs.”

The murder of Trayvon Martin—and the mass outrage around it—brought to the surface, for all to see, hear and confront, *the history and the current reality of what it means to be a Black person in the United States of America.* People were outraged at what this was—a modern-day American lynching.

In this country that brags about being the “greatest country in the world,” 2.4 million people, the majority Black and Latino, are locked up in prison, many in conditions of torture in solitary confinement. In this post-racial “home of the free,” mass incarceration now concentrates the way Black people are systematically oppressed as a people by this system.

With the murder of Trayvon Martin, people across this country are taking to the streets and

raising big questions about whether things have to be this way. And the whole world is seeing and hearing this—all of which poses a real problem for the powers-that-be.

The anger that poured out around the murder of Trayvon... what it has revealed about the nature of this society and this system... and the potential for this struggle to continue and go even further... for the very legitimacy of this whole setup to get called into question... for millions of people to not accept the current setup and be willing to act to change the way things are... all this poses a tremendous threat to those who rule over this society.

There has been contention over how to deal with this situation and different responses among those who rule. There are powerful forces who are pushing to prosecute Zimmerman who are highly critical of Stand Your Ground-type laws (which exist in over 20 states). At the same time, reactionaries are mobilizing to defend Zimmerman portraying him as the victim while dehumanizing Trayvon. But from all sides, with the arrest of Zimmerman, there are efforts to shift the focus and defuse people's anger, to turn people's heads down and into the fight in the legal arena. People are being told that now is the time to put our "faith in the justice system" and to take the spotlight OFF all the searing issues brought to the surface by this horrible murder and the nationwide protest it ignited.

Zimmerman has been arrested now, but this doesn't mean he'll necessarily go to trial. He will now have two chances to try to prove he shot in self-defense. He can ask a judge to just throw out the case before it ever reaches a jury on the basis of the Stand Your Ground law. The Stand Your Ground law was cited as the reason Zimmerman was not arrested in the first place. This—which encourages vigilantism—says someone can basically get away with murder on the basis that they had a "reasonable belief" that it was necessary to kill the person "in order to prevent death or great bodily harm to himself or herself or another or to prevent the commission of a forcible felony." And then if the judge goes ahead and allows the case to go to trial, Zimmerman's attorneys can assert this self-defense argument again. And citing the Stand Your Ground law, Zimmerman's lawyers could argue not that his life *actually was in danger*—but that he had the *belief* that he feared for his life. And of course... the person who supposedly threatened his life cannot testify.

Put our faith in the system? Let the system work? It HAS been working!! The workings of this system of INjustice are exactly what compelled people to take to the streets in protest. The U.S. legal system doesn't have anything to do with getting justice. The whole set up of cops, laws, courts and prisons is in fact an essential part of the way the powers-that-be rule over and enforce the oppressive economic and social relations of capitalism.

The Bigger Picture

The oppression of Black people has been essential and deeply woven into the very fabric of U.S. society—even as the different forms this takes have changed throughout the history of this country: from the first day an African slave was dragged in chains to these "shining shores," to the days of Jim Crow segregation and KKK lynching, to tonight's six o'clock news, when you'll hear about the latest police murder of a Black youth in Anytown, USA.

For many, it brought to mind the 1955 murder of Emmett Till—how the gang of KKKers who murdered this 14-year-old Black youth were easily found not guilty and then openly bragged about their heinous crime. For many it fanned embers of anger at how, today, an endless list continues to grow of Black and Latino youth gunned down by cops or racist vigilantes who

almost always go free. From 1865 to 1965, 3,446 Black people were lynched. Such is the ugly history of this country that went on for a long time, even after slavery ended.

In the time of Emmett Till, Jim Crow laws and “KKK justice” meant *all* Black people walked around with a death sentence over their heads—knowing they could be dragged out of their homes, or could accidentally run into some men in white sheets—and then your life would be over, your body mutilated, strung up on a tree, burned.

And now, in the time of Trayvon Martin, *all* Black people, especially the youth, still face an ever-present death sentence—where being in the “wrong neighborhood,” wearing “suspicious clothes” or just being Black can make you the target of a trigger happy cop or racist vigilante. Now today, we get the official police policy of Stop-and-Frisk that targets *hundreds of thousands* of Black and Latino youth for unconstitutional harassment and searches—feeding a big pipeline for arrests and mass imprisonment.

What created the kind of racist, vigilante mindset of people like George Zimmerman, who see a Black youth wearing a hoodie and immediately consider him “suspicious” and literally, fair game to be hunted down and killed? Why has it been over 50 years since the murder of Emmett Till, yet a Black youth can still be lynched for the crime of walking down the street wearing a hoodie?

For decades now, the government’s “war on drugs” has systematically targeted Black and Latino people, especially the youth—arresting and imprisoning hundreds of thousands. And an integral part of all this has been an ongoing and insidious ideological campaign to convince the population at large that this section of society are nothing but dangerous thugs to be feared, who are beyond rehabilitation, and need to be locked up and kept away from everyone else.

As Carl Dix has said:

This kind of racial profiling [in the murder of Trayvon] is what leads into the kind of horrific numbers of people who are warehoused in prisons across the country and the millions more who are treated like second-class citizens even after they have been punished and served their sentences. And the backdrop to this horrific reality is that this capitalist system has got no way to profitably exploit this generation of Black youth, and their response to that has been criminalization and incarceration. This is why I say: Mass Incarceration + Silence = Genocide. This system has no future to offer this generation of Black youth. Its approach comes down to a slow genocide that could become a fast one. But we could break up this deadly equation by stepping up with resistance, and increasingly powerful resistance, and that’s what people need to do.

Continuing, and Taking the Struggle Higher

We need to fight for justice for Trayvon Martin. And we need to link that to and wage a struggle to change the whole *horrific reality of mass incarceration in society*—from the sheer unacceptable number of people being kept behind bars; to the way police brutality and policies like Stop and Frisk function as pipelines for prisons; to the constant demonization of Black and Latino youth; and to the caste-like treatment of people who get out of prison and are denied jobs, education and housing.

The powers-that-be need to convince the population at large that the Black and Latino youth

are to blame for all the horrible things that are happening to them—that it is NOT the system. This is important for them, in terms of keeping society together and getting people to accept things the way they are. And this is why there has been such a systematic and conscious effort, for decades, to stigmatize and demonize a whole people—and justify the brutalization, murder and incarceration of this section of society. All that has come to the surface in the wake of the murder of Trayvon Martin—threatens to unravel this, which underscores the importance of why we need to not only continue this struggle, but take it higher.

Tens of thousands have been moved—in their hearts, in their minds, and with their feet—to take a stand, to come together.

This is a moment when many people can begin to question the legitimacy of the whole system responsible for the murder of Trayvon—which is NOT an isolated incident but only the latest of an endless chain of such acts that are perpetrated, condoned and covered up by the powers-that-be.

We need to **Fight the Power, and Transform the People, for Revolution.**

We need to step up the struggle against the oppression of Black people in this country—as an integral and extremely important part of building a movement for revolution. And right now, a key concentration in this is the battle to end mass incarceration.

Mass incarceration + silence = genocide. But we can and we urgently need to break this up through mass, determined resistance.

All out for April 19—The Day to Break the Silence. Say No to Mass Incarceration!

Go to: <http://revcom.us/a/265/april-19th-say-no-to-mass-incarceration-en.html> for information.

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