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Press Release of Texas NAACP in the George Floyd Matter And Criminal Justice Reform

The torture and killing of George Floyd, along with a recent wave of similar violence against African Americans in Texas and elsewhere, has again exposed deep injustices in our democracy.

“We are calling for justice in addressing the George Floyd case, as well as other injustices and their root causes,” Texas NAACP President Gary Bledsoe said this week. Dr. Richard Watkins, Texas NAACP Chairman of the Criminal Justice Committee stated “It will take the collective effort of all those who want to fight oppression to get this right and beat back the forces of those who want to continue oppressing African Americans.”

“The world now sees what our people have been enduring for far too long. African Americans still aren’t free, still aren’t equal citizens in their own country.”

Bledsoe said such racist violence against our sons, daughters, mothers and fathers not only stoke anger in our communities, but feelings of vulnerability that our families can be traumatized or our lives suddenly ended doing the normal things everyone does, such as driving, shopping, sitting in Starbucks, sleeping in our beds, jogging in the neighborhood or bird-watching in a public park. We live with the reality that a traffic stop could end our life.

Bledsoe, an attorney and member of the National NAACP Board, said “Floyd was killed in what should have been a minor incident, allegedly — and I emphasize, allegedly, as no crime had yet been proved, nor had he formally been charged with trying to pass a counterfeit 20-dollar bill.”

Gary L. Bledsoe, *President* **Bob Lydia**, *1st Vice President* **Alisa Simmons** *2nd Vice President*
Ericka Cain, *Secretary* **Lawrence Myers**, *Asst. Sec.* **TaNeika Driver-Moultrie**, *Treasurer*
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Press Release: Statement of Texas NAACP in George Floyd Matter and Criminal Justice Reform

Despite that, the unarmed father was pinned face down to the ground by Minneapolis police officers, one of whom pressed his knee into Floyd's neck for nearly 9 minutes, even as Floyd pleaded for his life, saying, "I can't breathe," and calling out to his deceased mother to save him.

Subsequently, the whole world watched videos of Floyd's life slipping away as he struggled to breathe. We watched as he took his last breath, even as Officer Derek Chauvin continued pressing his knee on Floyd's neck. Even as Chauvin, with three other officers who watched and helped hold Floyd down, taunted him to "get up and get in the (patrol) car."

That horrific image, now burned into the hearts and minds of millions across the nation and world has triggered global protests, racial strife, and unfortunately, looting. The Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., said it best: Riots are the language of the unheard.

Floyd's killing was the straw that broke the camel's back, but it was preceded by others that illustrated similar use of lethal force and violence against African Americans by law enforcement or white residents who believe they are authorized to police black bodies. In Georgia, Ahmaud Arbery was hunted down and shot to death by gun-toting white men in a pickup truck; Medical worker Breonna Taylor was shot to death in her home by Louisville, Kentucky police, using a no-knock warrant, in search of drugs, which were not found in her apartment.

Under pressure from the public, arrests have been made in the cases of Floyd and Arbery, with investigations of police ongoing in the Taylor case.

But the list of killings of African Americans by police or white vigilantes under unjust circumstances is long and getting longer. Here are just a few of the names of those who lost their lives; Trayvon Martin (Sanford, Florida), Tamir Rice (Cleveland), Philando Castile (Minneapolis), Botham Jean (Dallas), Rhogena Nicholas and Dennis Tuttle (both in Houston), Atatiana Jefferson (Fort Worth) and Larry Jackson, Joseph David and Michael Ramos (all three in Austin).

Nelson Linder NAACP President of the Austin Branch and Co-Chairman of the Criminal Justice Committee stated "It's time to stop the killing and violence against People of Color just because of their race. Now." Bledsoe said.

What's it going to take?

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“It’s going to take a collective effort of diverse people, leaders, clergy and corporate and business leaders acting as anti-racists.” Bledsoe said.

In the immediate future, dramatic reform of police departments — and laws that apply to them — needs to happen. “We soon will be releasing comprehensive recommendations to address racist injustice in the criminal justice system.”

He added that the longer-term, larger challenges will be addressing the root causes of inequities that lead to the over-representation of African Americans in infection rates and deaths due to COVID19; unemployment now and prior to the vast layoffs due to the coronavirus, as well as over representation in jails and prisons. Blacks also are over represented in the ranks of Americans without health insurance and drop out rates in high school.

And African Americans continue to lag behind in wealth, again harkening back to racism and the nation’s underpinnings that prevented African Americans from owning property and accumulating wealth over generations. The median income for black families in the United States is \$17,600 compared to \$171,000 for whites.

Again, we need your help. Our organization fights for all who are oppressed regardless of race, creed, gender or sexual preference because all Americans are entitled to equal justice under the law and equal opportunity. To volunteer, donate or become a member contact www.txstatenaacp.org or call (512) 985-9151.