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VIOLENCE & INTIMIDATION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN YOUTH BY LAW ENFORCEMENT WILL NOT BE TOLERATED, LEADS TO 'STATE OF EMERGENCY'

The increase in reports of violence and overly aggressive prosecution against African American youth by law enforcement officials symbolized by the boot camp beating death of Martin Lee Anderson, the assault of Shelwanda Riley by a police officer and countless other recent dehumanizing attacks has led the NAACP to declare a ['State of Emergency'](#) that requires immediate action by local and state authorities as well as the U.S. Department of Justice and the U.S. Congress.

"The NAACP denounces overly aggressive handling of black youth by law enforcement entities a blatant disregard toward investigating hate crimes and racially discriminatory utilization of prosecutorial discretion," said Interim NAACP President & CEO Dennis Courtland Hayes. "We demand that the American criminal justice system live up to its Constitutional obligations to serve and protect all Americans with dignity and fairness irrespective of race, ethnicity, gender, religious faith and other differences. Violence and intimidation of our young people is not acceptable, is against the law and must end now."

The Florida State Conference of the NAACP is holding a march and rally today (Oct. 23) in Tallahassee demanding justice for Martin Lee Anderson, a black 14-year-old who tragically died while in custody at the Bay County Boot Camp last year. To add insult to injury, on Oct. 12 an all white jury acquitted deputies and a nurse who participated in the videotaped violent abuse of Anderson that resulted in his death hours later. The U.S. Department of Justice has agreed to review the case for civil rights violations.

NAACP units will be expressing outrage about the Anderson case as well as the apparent increase in violence and disturbing pattern of attacks against African American youth by law enforcement in their communities and nationwide. For example:

--On Oct. 4, 15- year old Shelwanda Riley was thrown around, punched and pepper sprayed by a Ft. Pierce, Fla. police officer, a man roughly twice her size, as he tried to arrest her for a non-violent curfew violation.

--Last month 14-year old DeOnte' Rawlings was fatally shot by an off duty Metropolitan Police officer in Washington, D.C. for allegedly stealing a mini-bike and shooting at the officer during a foot chase. An autopsy found no gunshot residue on the boy and several suspicious injuries to his elbows, knees and face.

--In January, Isaiah Simmons, 17, lost consciousness and died after struggling with five adult staff of the Bowling Brook Preparatory School, a privately run residential program under contract

with the Maryland Department of Juvenile Services. Witnesses said the staffers sat on the boy's limbs, chest and head. He was subsequently restrained for three hours. The state medical examiner's ruled his death a homicide.

--For a year now the NAACP has been engaged in activities seeking fairness for the Jena 6, six teens who have faced overly aggressive prosecution and extended incarceration for fighting with a white classmate in their Louisiana community following a series of racial incidents including the hanging of nooses in a tree at the local high school. One defendant, Mychal Bell, was jailed in an adult facility for nine months before being initially freed.

--In July 2006, videotape showed Donovan Jackson-Chavis, 16, being slammed to the ground, tossed into the air, bounced on the hood of a squad car and choked by police as they handcuffed him for supposedly not dropping a bag of potato chips at a convenience store in Inglewood, Calif. The officers were subsequently charged with assault and fired.

--In July 2003, Marcus Dixon, 15, a straight-A student with a scholarship to Vanderbilt University, was charged with rape, assault and other major offenses then held for over a year for having consensual sex with a white classmate. His 10-year conviction was overturned once jurors disclosed that the Georgia prosecutor had misled them.

--On April 7, 2001 Timothy Thomas was fatally shot by a cop during a foot chase in Cincinnati, Ohio. Police said the young man was reaching for a gun. Thomas, who was wanted on traffic violations, was unarmed and simply holding up his pants as he ran. The officer was cleared in the shooting.

National reports and statistical data also clearly illustrate the criminal justice system's disparate treatment of African American and other racial and ethnic minority young people.

According to the seminal report on racial disparities in the juvenile system, entitled "[And Justice For Some](#)," commissioned by the Building Blocks for Youth initiative, prepared by the National Council on Crime and Delinquency, the NAACP and other organizations using U.S. Department of Justice and FBI data, although minority youth are one-third of the adolescent population in the U.S., minority youth comprise two-thirds of the more than 100,000 young people confined in local detention and state correctional systems.

When white youth and minority youth were charged with the same offenses, African-American youth with no prior admissions were six times more likely to be incarcerated than white youth with the same background. Latino youth were three times more likely than white youth to be incarcerated.

Youth cases waived into the adult court system involve African American defendants at least 50 percent of the time; that number rises to 63 percent when the case involves drugs.

Nationally, custody rates were five times greater for African American youth than for white youth. Custody rates for Latino and Native American youth were two times the custody rate of white youth. Among all offense categories, white youth were more likely than minority youth

to be placed on probation.

“The problem of racially disparate treatment in our criminal justice system against must be address at every level of governance, from our towns, counties and hamlets to our major metropolitan cities,” said NAACP Washington Bureau Director Hilary Shelton. “Law enforcement recognizes that in order to be effective at preventing and solving crimes, police officers must have the trust of the community’s they serve. Until this scourge of abuse has been justly addressed they cannot be effective in racial and ethnic minority communities.”

The NAACP has called for hearings not only in Congress but also in every community around the nation in order to clearly understand the scope of this problem and most importantly craft viable solutions.

Founded in 1909, the NAACP is the nation's oldest and largest civil rights organization. Its members throughout the United States and the world are the premier advocates for civil rights in their communities, conducting voter mobilization and monitoring equal opportunity in the public and private sectors.

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