



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Sunday, July 14, 2013

www.cbtu.org

For More Information, Contact:

Dwight Kirk (202) 257-3966

Terry Melvin (518) 436-8516

CBTU President Reacts to Acquittal Verdict in George Zimmerman Trial

“The Criminal Justice System Failed Trayvon Martin, his Family and his Supporters.”

Statement of Rev. Terry Melvin
President, Coalition of Black Trade Unionists
July 14, 2013

CBTU officers, chapters and members are stunned, repulsed and heartbroken by the acquittal of Trayvon Martin’s killer. How does this unarmed 17-year-old child end up dead and nobody gets punished? In fact, the gunman, George Zimmerman, got his weapon back after a six-woman jury found him not guilty of second-degree murder and manslaughter in a Florida courtroom over the weekend.

The verdict, whether intentional or not, sends an ominous message to the black community – that is, white fear still trumps the value of black life in America today – whether you wear a suit or a hoodie; whether you live in a struggling neighborhood or a gated-community; whether you are minding your own business or being stalked by a stranger armed with a gun and hostility toward folks who fit a negative racial profile. This is reality, not a reality show.

CBTU holds firmly to the belief that George Zimmerman deserves punishment for his actions that culminated in Trayvon Martin’s death. And we will stay on the battlefield until justice is done, not only for Trayvon and his family but also for all families of color who refuse to succumb to the destructive force of racial profiling.

The truth is, America, we still have plenty of work to do. The truth is that racial profiling, this despicable, dangerous instinct, still thrives among us, in the George Zimmermans of the world, in people obsessed by fear and the use of lethal force.

Our hearts and prayers go out to Trayvon Martin’s family. Their poise, their strong, silent dignity, and their strength over the past 17 months have been inspirational and extraordinary. But the criminal justice system failed them, terribly.

They had to listen to their son being stripped of his innocence and blamed for his murder. They had to wipe away tears as horrific photos of their dead son were shown to the jury, while Zimmerman’s lawyers made the preposterous argument that Trayvon used the sidewalk as a weapon to attack their client, raising the question, “Who was on trial – Zimmerman or Trayvon?”

[more]

Last year Trayvon's parents – Tracy Martin and Sybrina Fulton – spoke in St. Louis at CBTU's annual convention, where they received an emotional hero's welcome. As an active union member, Ms Fulton thanked CBTU and other labor groups for supporting their efforts to get justice for her son. We said then and we reaffirm today that the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists will stand with the Martin family in their pursuit of justice as long as it takes and wherever it goes.

Call to Action

We call upon all CBTU chapters and regional representatives to participate in community actions showing solidarity for justice for Trayvon Martin.

We also call on the U.S. Department of Justice to investigate possible violations of Trayvon Martin's federal civil rights and to file criminal charges if necessary.

Furthermore, CBTU calls on state and federal legislators to establish and enforce measures that prohibit racial profiling in the workplace and the court system.

Finally, CBTU calls for a mass mobilization to restore the civil rights of ex-felons, because African Americans, especially young males, are disproportionately represented in felony convictions and, thus, more likely to be excluded from jury service. For example, a study in 2011 by Darren Wheelock found that exclusion of ex-felons from jury selection in Georgia "dramatically reduces the pool of eligible African Americans by nearly one-third (33%)."

We agree with Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall, who noted that whenever a large segment of a community is excluded from jury service, the effect is to exclude their life experiences from jury deliberations and trial verdicts.

Can anyone reasonably doubt the absence of African Americans on the jury in the Zimmerman case impacted the consideration of evidence, arguments, witnesses and the application of law itself?

CBTU believes the fight to protect and restore civil rights must be fought on all fronts, because injustice never takes a day off.

-30-

For more information about CBTU, visit www.cbtu.org

CBTU, which was founded in 1972, is the largest, independent voice of more than 2.2 million African American workers in labor unions today. With more than 50 chapters in major U.S. cities and one in Ontario, Canada, CBTU is dedicated to addressing the unique concerns of black workers and their communities. CBTU President Rev. Terry Melvin is also the secretary-treasurer of the powerful New York state AFL-CIO.