



December 19, 2014 - *This is NAPD's statement on the recent events in Ferguson, Staten Island and Cleveland, submitted with the full support of the NAPD Steering Committee.*

The recent deaths of African American males in Ferguson, New York City and Cleveland at the hands of the police are deeply disturbing. Michael Brown, Eric Garner and Tamir Rice have, sadly, in death, become household names. Their deaths have fueled a national conversation that is long overdue. The disparate, and in these cases deadly, impact experienced by people of color in our criminal justice system has gone unchecked for far too long. It should come as no surprise that people have taken to the streets all over America to express their outrage.

To consider these tragedies only as a result of brutally disparate policing practices is to ignore the racially biased locomotion of our criminal justice system at every stage – from the moment of arrest through charging decisions, appointment of counsel, determination of bail, plea negotiations, jury selection and sentencing. Beginning pre-arrest, and at every step in the process thereafter, men, women and children of color are treated differently, and more harshly.

That neither Officer Wilson in Ferguson or Officer Pantaleo in New York City was indicted by the grand jury, while literally hundreds of thousands of African Americans are indicted each year, all across the country, on far less evidence, is a national disgrace.

That people of color facing criminal charges overwhelmingly depend on public defenders for their constitutional right to counsel, and that virtually every single public defender office in the country is so severely underfunded that it is in a state of crisis is but another manifestation of the inherent racism of the American justice system.

Our system of justice is broken. It is racially biased to a degree that it is unworthy of public confidence. This lack of confidence is now being experienced on a grand scale in jurisdictions across the country, creating an urgent need to address the many unfair policies that oppress all people of color and every community of color in this country.

The deaths of two black men and a black child in Ferguson, New York City and Cleveland – and the lack of accountability for the white officers who killed them – have stirred our national conscience. We must now turn our outrage and anger into meaningful and lasting reform. This reform must address the endemic racism throughout the system, including grand jury reform, over-criminalization, racially selective policing and profiling, and police militarization, while also ending the practice of government and private companies profiting from the assessment of crushing fines and fees, disparate bail and sentencing treatment, and prison policies that devastate entire communities of color, all but ensuring their perpetual subjugation by edict of an unjust system.

Public defenders are the most consistent witness to the individual and systemic unfairness of our justice system. The nearly 9,000 public defenders and defender-advocates of the National Association for Public Defense stand ready to join with others fighting for justice in furtherance of a fair and equitable criminal justice system.

