



## MEMORANDUM

**To: BSA General Body**

**From: Ernie Britt, Director of Communications**

**RE: A response to “All lives matter”**

I am writing in response to a recent article titled “[All lives matter](#)” which I found to be full of contradictions and false assumptions about race and racism in America.

The first three paragraphs of the article draw attention to the fact that black Americans have been, and continue to be, politically, economically, and socially suppressed. But in the same breath, the article says that racism today “lacks an element exhibited generations ago – the explicitly conscious intent to target individuals on the basis of race.” Although I do not agree with the implication that certain forms of racism (specifically the racism “of the past”) are more valid than racism in its present form, I do agree with the second half of this statement. Racism today is not *always* explicit nor is it *always* “conscious” – and that’s what makes it complicated. “Whites Only” signs no longer hang over bathroom doors, movie theaters, or water fountains. People in political power don’t shout racial slurs into bullhorns or block schoolhouse doors to prevent black students from entering. Lynched black bodies no longer swing from trees while the faces of their white assailants beam with pride in photographs. But let’s not pat each other on the back for acting like decent human beings just yet –Americans today do not deserve bonus points because we are not as blatantly racist as our forefathers were. Racism, ever-frightening and ever-harmful, has not died; it has evolved. It is still a part of our culture although it is not always conscious or fully “intentional.” But to compare today’s racism with the racism of the past is pointless at best, extremely harmful at worst. Such comparisons silence today’s victims and force them to not only “deal with” racism but also to “prove” that it is real. Because of the belief in the mythic “post-racial” society, we have characterized anyone who points out the presence of racism in this particular case as “the boy who cried racism.” While ignoring his cries, we have allowed the wolf to return, now unhindered, to devour all it sees.



The author of the article admits that racism “permeates our culture and our policies,” but also implies that the judicial system has remained untainted. Defending the justice system with regard to this case reaffirms the belief that the existing systems, legal or otherwise, are “fair” and “just,” when we all know (and the author admits) that inequality has permeated EVERY part of our society. How can the author praise a system that he also slaps on the wrist for its “decades-old policies [that] continue to disproportionately target black individuals”? How can this part of American culture be free from the ills of racism? This is impossible, of course, because even the subtlest forms of racism have affected policies and rulings long before and long after the Nixon administration (which is cited in the article, perhaps to demonstrate how racism has influenced the highest office in the land). In 1857, Supreme Court Chief Justice Robert B. Taney said “[Black Americans] had for more than a century before been regarded as beings of an inferior order, and altogether unfit to associate with the white race, either in social or political relations; and so far inferior that they had no rights which the white man was bound to respect; that the negro might justly and lawfully be reduced to slavery for his benefit.” 150 years later, this statement is viewed as horribly offensive, but the judicial framework the Taney Court implemented (the same legal framework that has influenced every Supreme Court and lower court since) remains today. The system the article praises was not created with black people in mind, so it should come as no surprise that it has failed us in the past and will continue to fail us in the future. Yet how quickly we judge the past with disdainful, unclouded eyes while plagued with the myopia of the present.

The article defends the justice system and the St. Louis grand jury’s decision not to indict Officer Darren Wilson by saying the majority of “*consistent evidence*” refutes the claims that Wilson did not kill Brown because of the color of his skin. I find two issues with this sentence – first, the use of the words “consistent evidence,” and second, [ignoring](#) (again) [the very real role of race](#). Racism does not show up in toxicology reports. It cannot be printed out and presented to a jury as evidence. But racism’s intangibility does not diminish its reality, and although we do not know the inner workings of Wilson’s mind, the inconsistent and bizarre account he provided should at least force us to question the intent of his actions. Additionally, there was very little “consistent evidence” presented to the jury: 16 out of 18 witnesses said [Brown had his hands up when Wilson shot him](#) (although Wilson disagreed). In his initial interview, Wilson said he did not know about the



convenience store robbery; [he later said he did](#), adding that Brown had the stolen cigarillos in his hand. Wilson's gun was not tested for fingerprints because an investigator argued before the grand jury that Wilson "never lost control of his gun" even though Wilson claimed "[I was not in control of the gun](#)" during a part of the altercation. Brown's body (perhaps possessed postmortem by the "[demon](#)" Wilson described "it" as) somehow moved from 35 feet away from the police SUV [to over 150 feet away](#), and the medical examiner took zero photographs of the body (that lay in the street for 4 hours) because the [battery in his camera died](#). According to Wilson, Brown punched him ten times, but this number was mysteriously reduced to "two" (with photos of his so-called "[injuries](#)" to back up his claim). St. Louis assistant district attorney Kathy Alizadeh presented an irrelevant, outdated, and unconstitutional law to the grand jury that allowed use of "such force as [a police officer] reasonably believes is immediately necessary to effect the arrest or prevent the escape from custody," [drastically lowering the standard by which Wilson could be judged](#). Finally, it is abundantly clear that [Prosecutor McCulloch](#) and his team [had no desire to indict Wilson](#) from the start. But all of these facts, though extremely troubling, are only part of the problem. The point is, the decision for "no indictment" was affected by more than just an autopsy, speeches from expert witnesses, Wilson's retelling of the story (which has been taken as irrefutable fact), and the individuals who made up the grand jury. The jury was not corrupt; the system is corrupt. The multiple eyewitnesses did not lie; the system is corrupt. I repeat: The system is corrupt. There is far more to this story, something evil that has been a part of the American story since this nation's inception – something we are afraid to discuss and would rather deny.

Additionally, the article's call for "peaceful protests" to achieve "public policy changes" falls on deaf ears. Time and time again, black people have been told to respond peacefully and "reasonably" to horrific injustices – to take the higher ground after being stomped on and assigned to the lowest depths of society, to react in a way that is appropriate (read: approved by white people). But to tell someone to "not fight fire with fire" is to admit that that person has been burned; to say "don't fight hate with hate" is to admit that that person is hated – either way, the onus to "fight" is placed on the shoulders of the victim. And now that the community of Ferguson (and protesters across the country) is fighting, they're being condemned for it (because some people are "rioting" and looting where the



media is there to film it). But how many peaceful protests remain untelevised? And why do some of us immediately associate the so-called “thugs” shown in the news with every black person? Forcing black men and women to solve the deeply-rooted problems of racism, police brutality, and discrimination serves one purpose: to let white people off the hook for having to do anything about this longstanding cultural divide. But when black people refuse to be complicit, we’re “not fighting how we’re supposed to be fighting.” Shame on us!

So the black community and its allies tried something else: a simple hashtag to promote awareness on social media, and now even a string of words is being condemned. The condemnation and reappropriation of the “Black Lives Matter” hashtag is not surprising, although it is dubious. When a marginalized group attempts to stand up for itself, the majority will swoop in to cry foul and demand inclusion (see #BlackGirlsRock ([White Girls Rock!](#)) and #YesAllWomen ([Not All Men!](#)), for starters). The Black Lives Matter hashtag makes people uncomfortable for two reasons: First, being forced to admit that black lives matter is uncomfortable because we’re all supposed to be living in a post-racial utopia where saying such a thing is unnecessary. Of course black lives matter! It should go without saying...but is it really true? I am sorry some people feel uncomfortable about three simple words and the centuries of an oft-ignored history behind those words. It is uncomfortable for black people to say “Black Lives Matter,” too, because the need to reaffirm our own lives, our very existence, in a society that doesn’t seem to value either, is sickening. The second reason why #BlackLivesMatter bothers some people is because they feel left out. But this hashtag is not for white people. White people don’t need to say #WhiteLivesMatter (or the more subtle and politically-correct “All Lives Matter”) because white people are reminded that their lives matter each and every day. In “superficial” (but still impactful) places like the media, white people are reminded that they are important when they see the brave, light-skinned heroes defeat the exotic-looking villains. In the judicial system, this specific case only reaffirms the value of white lives, because it is in this system that a white man can receive legal protection, hundreds of thousands of fans, and 1 million dollars, all because he killed an unarmed black teen (Michael Brown didn’t have the luxury of “innocent until proven guilty” and he never will). The affirmation “Black Lives Matter” does not mean other lives don’t matter, but it is a response to the overwhelming (and very real) feeling that black lives DO NOT matter in this country, and the grand



jury's decision not to indict Darren Wilson is just another deduction in the value of black lives in America.

“All Lives Matter” is a hollow form of pretentious colorblindness that completely misses the point. There is no time for pretentious colorblindness when the percentage of black people killed by police in the ten largest U.S. cities is [at least double](#) that of their share of each city's total population. There is no time for pretentious colorblindness when black Americans are searched more often during stops, even though police [don't find more drugs or guns on us](#). There is no time for pretentious colorblindness when from 2002 to 2008, black citizens encountering police received threats of force or use of force at least [three times more often](#) than white citizens. There is no time for pretentious colorblindness when in the past 7 years, a white police officer killed a black person [nearly two times a week](#). There is no time for pretentious colorblindness when young black males are [21 times more likely to be shot dead by police](#) than their [white counterparts](#). An indictment or conviction for Darren Wilson would not have “ended” racism, police brutality, or social injustices, but this case is another saddening symbol of what [has become an epidemic in this country](#) – black men and woman are being targeted and/or killed by the [people whose duty it is to protect us](#), and an invisible “Whites Only” sign seems to hang over the courthouse doors.

There is no time for pretentious colorblindness. It is time we open our eyes.