

NBA Players Respond to Police Shootings of Jacob Blake and Other Black Youths

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Police in America kill over 1,000 victims annually, mostly Black and Latino youths.

Incidents without just cause happen with disturbing regularity nationwide in urban and rural communities.

US inner city minority communities are virtual war zones. Most often, cops act with impunity.

In stark contrast, communities like my Chicago Near North Side Streeterville neighborhood are well protected by police — comforting me and others when see them on patrol.

On August 23, 29-year-old African American Jacob Blake was shot seven times in the back at point-blank range by white police officer Rusten Sheskey in Kenosha, WI's Uptown neighborhood.

The city is about equidistant between Chicago and Milwaukee.

Threatening no one, the incident occurred when Blake tried entering his vehicle.

Three of his sons (aged 3, 5, and 8) in the back of his SUV witnessed what happened.

According to his father, Blake survived, but he's paralyzed from the waist down in critical condition — one of countless examples of racial injustice.

Cellphone video a bystander posted on social media showed Blake walking away from police when shot, his father saying:

"Those police officers that shot my son like a dog in the street are responsible for everything that has happened in the city of Kenosha," adding:

"My son is not responsible for it. My son didn't have a weapon. He didn't have a gun."

Since Sunday, Kenosha has been wracked by street violence — a counterproductive response in lieu of sustained peaceful mass protests against what happened.

On Wednesday, the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel cited Kenosha police saying two people were lethally shot, another wounded during street protests.

On the same day, Trump tweeted:

“TODAY, I will be sending federal law enforcement and the National Guard to Kenosha, WI to restore LAW and ORDER!”

Wisconsin Gov. Tony Evers declared a state of emergency in response to unacceptable violence and vandalism, along with setting buildings and vehicles ablaze.

In response to what’s going on, Blake’s mother Julia said the following:

“If Jacob knew what was going on he would be very displeased.”

“So I’m really asking and encouraging everyone in Wisconsin and abroad to take a moment and examine your heart.”

“We need healing...of our country.” Family attorney Ben Crump said it’ll be “a miracle for Jacob Blake to ever walk again.”

A bullet struck his spinal cord. Others damaged his kidneys and liver. His colon and small intestine were surgically removed.

On Wednesday, ESPN reported that NBA playoff games scheduled for that evening were postponed — following a decision by Milwaukee Bucks players not to leave their locker room for their game with the Orlando Magic.

In response, players for the Boston Celtics, Toronto Raptors, Houston Rockets, Oklahoma City Thunder, Los Angeles Lakers and Portland Trailblazers postponed their scheduled games.

Reportedly, LA Lakers and LA Clippers players support cancellation of remaining NBA playoff games for all teams.

Interviewed on ESPN, Bucks guard George Hill likely spoke for many others in the league, saying:

“We’re tired of the killings and the injustice,” adding:

“We can’t do anything from Orlando. First of all, we shouldn’t have even come to this damn place, to be honest.”

“I think coming here just took all the focal points off what the issues are.”

A statement by Bucks management said the following:

“We fully support our players and the decision they made.”

“Although we did not know beforehand, we would have wholeheartedly agreed with them.”

“The only way to bring change is to shine a light on the racial injustices that

are happening in front of us.”

“Our players have done that and we will continue to stand alongside them and demand accountability and change.”

Over 80% of NBA players are Black, including most of its super-stars.

For the NFL it’s around 70% — in contrast to MLB at around 8% with Latinos comprising about 27% of league rosters.

The National Hockey League is 98% white.

ESPN explained that all NBA players and coaches were invited to participate in a Wednesday evening meeting on “how they’ll proceed” following postponement of Wednesday and perhaps Thursday games.

Reportedly they packed a Disney ballroom in the Orlando bubble.

“(D)iscussion centered on whether to continue with the playoffs or end the season,” said ESPN, adding:

“Emotions are raw, players already were worn out in the bubble environment,” isolated from family and friends back home, an unnamed player saying:

“The season is in jeopardy.”

On Thursday, the NBA board of governors are meeting in the morning.

Players association executive director Michele Roberts said the following:

“The players have, once again, made it clear. They will not be silent on th(e) issue” of racial injustice.

“We stand with the decision of the players of the Milwaukee Bucks to protest this injustice and support the collective decision to postpone” Wednesday’s games.

Sportsnaut called Wednesday’s postponements “unprecedented territory.”

Various WNBA, MLB, and MLS Wednesday games were also postponed.

Where do things go from here? Justice, equality, freedom, and other slogans emblazoned on jerseys of players change nothing in society.

Nor does postponing a game or two and then resuming things normally.

Achieving long denied social justice requires longterm struggle.

It took a decade of anti-war activism in the 1960s and 70s before US aggression in Southeast Asia ended — involving students, workers, middle class households, academics, and others, including active duty military personnel.

The same was true about the struggle for civil rights in the US. Years of struggle preceded civil and voting rights legislation.

Earlier gains were lost because social justice and anti-war activism waned.

Because of their high-profile status, their actions capturing national attention, professional athletes for social justice can make a difference if other segments of society join them for sustained nonviolent activism for change.

Short-term actions won't work. They never do. Change always comes bottom up, never top down.

Self-liberated from slavery, noted abolitionist, statesman, and social activist Frederick Douglas long ago explained "(p)ower concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and never will," adding:

"If there is no struggle, there is no progress...Who would be free, themselves must strike the blow."

"The whole history of the progress of human liberty shows that all concessions...have been born of earnest struggle."

"This struggle may be a moral one, or it may be a physical one, and it may be both moral and physical, but it must be a struggle."

Longterm large-scale nationwide struggle is needed today to challenge the status quo that goes way beyond racial injustice alone.

According to Census data, around 76% of the US population is white, 18.5% Latino, and 13.4% African-American — Asians comprising another 5.9%.

Whites comprise the largest numbers of unemployed, underemployed, and overall disadvantaged.

Social injustice in the US cuts across all segments of society.

Privileged interests are served at the expense of most others. Both right wings of the one-party state operate the same way.

It's not a pretty picture. The US ruling class is indifferent toward the rights and welfare of ordinary people everywhere — at home and abroad.

At a time of economic collapse with nearly one-third of working-age Americans unemployed and little help from the nation's ruling class, the only solution is nonviolent revolution.

If NBA and other professional athletes are willing to sacrifice a little by an extended boycott for social justice when it's most needed, they'll be long remembered and greatly admired on and off their playing fields.

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