Statement:

AAPF Statement On The Dismissal Of The Charges For The Officers Involved In The Killing Of Breonna Taylor

Last week, a federal judge dismissed felony charges against two former Louisville Metro Police Department officers, Joshua Jaynes and Kyle Meany, for a no-knock search warrant related to a botched narcotics investigation, which ultimately resulted in the killing of Breonna Taylor by fellow officers inside her home. No drugs were found in the apartment and one other officer pleaded guilty to falsifying the search warrant and conspiring to lie about it after the fact. Despite this, the judge ruled that Breonna's boyfriend, Kenneth Walker, was responsible for her death because he fired his legally owned gun at what he believed to be an intruder when three plainclothes officers forcibly entered the property.

The disregard for Breonna's well-being by the Louisville police is emblematic of the ways in which Black women are rendered collateral damage in the racist War on Drugs. The judge's decision compounds this by effectively blaming Breonna for her own death. Breonna and other Black women like India Kager—who was killed by Virginia Beach Police on September 5, 2015–are reminders of how Black women are treated as unfortunate but acceptable casualties of the state's war on men suspected of engaging in criminal activity. In these cases we see police using warlike tactics, randomly deploying lethal force with little restraint, all with the knowledge that there was a risk of innocent lives--Black lives--being lost.

At the African American Policy Forum, we have consistently sounded the alarm about how police officers continue to evade responsibility for the killings of Black women. Breonna's death is yet another example of how the lack of police accountability is a symptom of larger systemic failures and the continued and blatant disregard of the lives of Black women. Once again the legitimate response of defending ourselves is the pretext for our killing, a sinister dynamic which stretches back to the many tragic histories

of Black people being lynched for having the temerity to defend themselves. It is telling that the decision to find Kenneth Walker culpable for the use of his legally owned gun in a “stand your ground” state has not elicited the support of the powerful gun lobby. Their deafening silence—as we also saw in the case of Philando Castille, killed by Minnesota police on July 6, 2016 while carrying his licensed firearm—reveals the racial contingency of what is seen as a legitimate claim to self-defense.

Although nationwide protests in 2020 in response to the killing of Breonna Taylor helped to break the silence around how the deaths of Black women at the hands of police go largely unacknowledged and unrecognized, it still did not stop this judge from allowing her killers to escape accountability. It is this persistent and endemic evasion of police responsibility that is one of the biggest hurdles in effecting the fundamental changes that would prevent the senseless death of Breonna and hundreds of other Black people in this country.

Four years later, we remain steadfast in our pursuit of justice for Breonna Taylor and her loved ones. Now, as ever before, we will continue to fight for Breonna and #SayHerName.

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