



Strengthening Public Defenders.  
Transforming Public Defense.

## **THANK YOU TO ATHLETES, ACTIVISTS, AND ADVOCATES**

Seven shots to the back of an unarmed black man. The attack on Jacob Blake by law enforcement officers is the latest in a parade of recorded and publicized acts of violence against black people by government representatives. This violence is as old as our nation. It has garnered greater public attention as cell phones make it easy to record. This visible violence that shakes us to our core is connected to a more routine, less visible, deeply normalized violence that happens to black and brown communities in courtrooms across the country every day.

Thank you to those with platforms who take a stand to shine a light on the fact that some lives are seen as less valuable. Thank you to the tens of thousands of people without extensive platforms, who have taken to the streets in unity to amplify the intensity of this light. And thank you to everyone who has devoted your lives to resisting the routinized injustice in those spaces where there are no cameras, where there is not light, and where the devaluing of black lives is most normalized.

All of these efforts are connected. Thank you to everyone who uses whatever platform they have to resist the pressure to normalize inhumanity. Thank you to celebrities who use their platforms to raise awareness. Thank you to the activists who flood the streets demanding change. Thank you to the advocates who continue to resist in courtrooms across the nation where no one is watching and injustice has become far too accepted.

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Four years ago, Colin Kaepernick decided to kneel during the national anthem to protest state sponsored violence against black communities and people. His peaceful and respectful chosen method of resistance cost him his career. He was vilified by faux-patriots across America, intolerant of anyone shining a light on the racial oppression woven into the nation's fabric. The few courageous players who would continue to kneel, aware of the fate that befell their colleague, would be called "sons of b—ches" by the President of the most powerful nation in the world.

The hostile response to Kaepernick's attempt to be heard was, sadly, as American as the act of protest itself. Throughout our nation's history, every effort to shine a light on ways in which our actions fall short of our rhetoric has been met with backlash from those who prefer that injustice remain normalized. The Declaration of Independence declared that "all men are created equal," but the United States Constitution subsequently explicitly valued every enslaved African as three-fifths a human being. When the pledge of allegiance, which proclaims "liberty and justice for all," was formally adopted by Congress in 1942, Jim Crow was the law of the land. Today,

there are far too many people who claim that “all lives matter,” but cannot even bring themselves to utter the words “black lives matter.”

And so, for those of us who have committed their lives to resisting injustice, this morning was inspiring. We awoke to a collective and forceful call to action by athletes across the country. In response to the horrific shooting of Jacob Blake, the latest publicized act of police violence against a black person, the entire Milwaukee Bucks team refused to take the court last night. This led to the postponement of three playoff games and a push from a couple teams to end the season in protest.

The WNBA – whose players have continually led the way in using their platforms to push for social justice – joined the NBA players and cancelled all playoff games scheduled last night. Elizabeth Williams of the Atlanta Dream read a powerful statement declaring the players’ consensus to “kneel, lock arms, and raise fists during the national anthem.”

In Major League Baseball, when Mookie Betts – one of the few black players on the Dodgers - told his teammates he was sitting out last night’s game in protest, they backed him and collectively declined to take the field. Three games were postponed as other MLB teams also opted out of playing in protest.

As these collective displays of support for the movement to value black lives unfolded across the country, others continued to resist in isolation. Several MLB players sat out games yesterday while their teammates took the field. Jackie Bradley Jr. kneeled, alone, as his teammates stood during the national anthem before the Red Sox played last night, a powerful visual reminder of the work that still remains and the courage it will take to push forward. And 22-year-old Naomi Osaka withdrew from the semi-finals of a tennis tournament to protest racial injustice, declaring “before I am an athlete, I am a black woman.”

Even in lacrosse, a sport not known to have many black athletes, the handful of professional black players were vocal as they pushed their colleagues from every team to wear BLM patches on their uniforms throughout an abbreviated two-week season, and launched the Black Lacrosse Alliance to amplify their voices in a space where racial discord is more easily overlooked.

These athletes are reminiscent of activist athletes like Tommy Smith and John Carlos (who famously raised black gloved fists on the medal stand at the 1968 Olympics), Muhammad Ali (who sacrificed the prime years of his illustrious boxing career to protest a war he believed was blatantly racist), Wilma Rudolph (an Olympian who joined demonstrators in the streets to protest segregation), and Rose Robinson (a track and field star who refused to stand for the anthem in 1959 and whose vocal protesting led to her being targeting and imprisoned by the government).

Just as the violence that happens to black people in the streets is part of the systemic violence that has been visited upon black people since America’s inception, so too are today’s activist athletes are part of the direct lineage of activist athletes who have always used their platforms to protest.

THANK YOU to all those with platforms who are using them to raise awareness.

However, it is also important to understand that these athletes do not exist in isolation from activists whose names we will never know, who fight against injustice every day. Activists who have taken to the streets from Kenosha to Seattle to Atlanta to Washington, DC to Portland to

Detroit to far too many cities and towns to name, made this moment possible. These activists refused to allow the nation to turn away from the mirror that reflects our reality. The longer we were forced to look at the image, they more inclined we became to call it the truth. These activists laid the foundation for others to use their platforms to further amplify injustice.

THANK YOU to activists across the country dedicated to speaking the truth.

Lastly, we must shout out those who have devoted their careers to toiling in the darkness, those crevices of a system of injustice where light has yet to shine. These are the spaces where millions of people are processed each year. These are people who survive police encounters. They are deposited into the system when no cameras are turned on. Each day they are quietly processed into jails and prisons. They are stripped of basic civil and human rights. They are subjected to a body of laws that often justify the most inhumane treatment. Thousands of public defenders meet these men, women, and children in these dark spaces every day. They do not always succeed in making justice prevail but they commit to ensuring a fight. They fight to make sure no one goes through that darkness alone. They fight to force those who administer the system to hear the stories and see the people behind the accusation. They are forced to do this with too few resources and too little support. Our nation allows these advocates to fight this battle so woefully ill-equipped because they serve lives that do not matter.

THANK YOU to our public defenders for resisting in the darkest spaces.

This morning left us hopeful. The movement for equality, for justice, for black lives is gaining momentum.

Thank you to those who help shine a light. Thank to those who continue your important work where illumination has yet to reach. Our work is deeply connected. Together we move forward. Thank you for giving hope during these seemingly hopeless times.



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