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A TIME FOR JUSTICE

When our actions are neutral to community social justice, you are on the side of the oppressor –Bishop Desmond Tutu.

As the National Black Law Students Association (“NBLSA”), we have a responsibility to our community to address the legacy and ongoing manifestations of racial injustice in our country. Social justice requires that we do away with the systems of oppression, focus on undoing institutional inequity and find proactive strategies for social inequalities. The Southwest Region is working to combat the injustices of police brutality and the shootings of innocent unarmed black men and women. Presently, two officers from the state of Texas shot and killed an innocent black man and woman. The nation is watching closely to see how Texas responds to these acts of injustice.

On October 2, 2019, former Dallas police officer, Amber Guyger, was convicted of murder for fatally shooting her unarmed neighbor, Botham Jean. A murder charge in Texas carries a sentence between five and 99 years in prison. Since 2005, just three other officers in the entire country have been convicted of murder and had their convictions stand.

Botham Jean, 26, a native of the island nation St. Lucia, moved to Dallas for a job with Pricewaterhouse Coopers. Amber Guyger, defendant, is a five-year police veteran. On the night of September 6, 2018, Jean was at home in his Dallas apartment watching television and eating a bowl of ice cream in his living room. Guyger was coming off a 13-hour shift when she walked into Jean’s apartment, allegedly thinking it was her unit. Guyger claims she believed Jean was a burglar and feared for her life. Guyger then fired her gun twice at Jean, hitting and killing him. Jean was innocent, defenseless and the victim of an intruder. After realizing her mistake, Guyger called 911 while simultaneously texting her partner, a fellow officer, to come over. During the trial Guyger testified she attempted to administer first-aid, however there was no evidence of blood found on her uniform.

During the trial, Guyger’s legal team attempted to raise the *castle doctrine* as her defense. The statute passed in 2007, applies in cases where the shooter believes someone is trespassing on their property, they cannot provoke the victim during the confrontation, they cannot be committing a related crime when they pull the trigger, and they must believe deadly force is necessary. This is believed to be the first case in which the castle doctrine has been applied to a killing that took place in the victim’s home. The prosecution responded to Guyger’s defense by arguing the castle doctrine was not in place to protect intruders like Guyger, the law applies to homeowners like Jean. Lee Merritt, one of the attorneys representing the Jean family, told the Associated Press, “the jurors will be deciding the value of a black life.”

Days later, on October 12, a black woman, was fatally shot in her Fort Worth, Texas, home by a white police officer performing a welfare check. Twenty-eight-year-old Atatiana Koquice Jefferson stood in her bedroom with her eight-year-old nephew playing video games, when officer Aaron Dean fired his weapon

at a window shortly after entering the home's backyard, striking and killing Jefferson. Aaron Dean resigned hours before the Fort Worth Police Department fired him. That same evening Dean was booked into the Tarrant County Correction Center on murder charges. The city of Fort Worth acknowledges the anger and disappointment felt as yet another black person is killed by law enforcement. Dean failed to follow the Police Department's policies on the use of force and de-escalation, along with unprofessional conduct.

NBLSA stands with the families of Botham Jean and Atatiana Jefferson. These charges and convictions represent a form of social justice for our community. We recognize that this is just one step towards police accountability, and hope conversations concerning police use of force and racial bias continue.

Additionally, NBLSA stands with civil rights leaders, the Oklahoma County Commissioner, Witness to Innocence, Oklahomans for Criminal Justice Reform, the Oklahoma NAACP, the Congressional Black Caucus, and Oklahoma Representative George Young, supporting Julius Jones' clemency application. We are asking NBLSA members to sign the petition online at change.org (Julius Jones: A Matter of Justice and Mercy in Oklahoma). You can also go to #JusticeForJulius and sign up to be an Ambassador who will post on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and LinkedIn. We also encourage members to go to justiceforjuliusjones.com and download/sign/mail the support letter that you can send to Oklahoma Governor Keven Stitt.

Founded in 1968, the National Black Law Students Association (NBLSA) is a national organization formed to articulate and promote the needs and goals of Black and minority law students to effectuate change in the legal community. The South-West Black Law Students Association (SWBLSA) is a sub-region of NBLSA encompassing Arkansas, Louisiana, Oklahoma, and Texas. As one of the largest student-run organizations of its kind in the United States for Black law students, NBLSA has thousands of members across America and is also comprised of more than 200 chapters and affiliates from six countries, including the Bahamas, Nigeria, and South Africa.

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