



Date: Tuesday, April 14, 2015
To: Mayor Frank Jackson
From: Puncture the Silence—Stop Mass Incarceration

This initial Summary of the Testimony at the People’s Tribunal on Police Brutality serves as a searing indictment of the criminal “justice” system in Cleveland, Ohio.

We hereby deliver the findings to the Mayor of the City of Cleveland on April 14, National Shut Down Day, when people across the country are saying no more to giving a green light to killer cops.

The People’s Tribunal on Police Brutality, organized by Puncture the Silence- Stop Mass Incarceration, Saturday, April 11, in Cleveland, Ohio, revealed the tip of the iceberg of the kind of outrageous treatment people of color endure on a daily basis in our society.

The panel that received the testimony included: Dr. Ed McKinney, Social Work Professor Emeritus, Cleveland State University; Writer/activist Rev. Leah Lewis; Shemariah Arki of Excellence Management Group, Cephus “Uncle Bobby” Johnson, Uncle of Oscar Grant; Public Policy Consultant, Edward Little; Bill Swain of *Revolution* newspaper; and Genevieve Mitchell, Dir., The Black Women’s Center.

Family members of stolen lives, including the father of 18-year old unarmed Brandon Jones, killed by police in Cleveland on March 19 after allegedly stealing a pack of cigarettes and some coins from a corner store, gave wrenching testimony, saying through his anguish, “He shouldn’t have stolen, but he wasn’t bad.” If all Black kids are bad, all cops are bad. My life will never be the same. I hurt. I hurt for my wife; I hurt for my kids.” He told how the woman who called 911 was so remorseful, saying, “I had no idea they were going to kill your son.”

Other family members told of a sister, a brother, and 2 more sons (1 Black, 1 white) being killed by Cleveland police. A black woman who lost her son in 2007 said, “It’s getting worse. You can’t heal because of the pain when the killings are going on and on...I have to put on a disguise. When your child has been taken away, you can’t watch the same things, eat the same things, cook the same things.”

Other men and women of color and a white long-time activist told of growing up with, and still experiencing, constant harassment, vicious beatings, playing dead to get it to stop, serious permanent physical damage, terrifying armed threats, false allegations and charges, uncalled-for arrests, trials, jail-time, hospitalization, ongoing surgeries, PTSD, juveniles put in with adults, corruption, starvation, and torture. In only one case was there an acquittal following a jury trial. Throughout the testimony, it was clear that those with mental problems get even worse treatment at the hands of the police.

The panel was made up of a powerhouse of people of conscience. As they listened to often excruciating detail of police assaults and murder, they offered support to help the victims cope with their pain, saying “We’re here to lift you up.” They expressed militancy in calling for resistance, participation in the ShutDown actions on

April 14, the need for all to say, “No more!” and that we can’t keep not hearing the stories of those who have been killed. They stated that we are in a state of emergency and the time for action is now, if we are going to stop police murder.

They and some testifiers did exposure about the system that produces these atrocities, one calling for revolution, saying socialist police will not shoot down young people of color. Another, citing the importance of stepping up to take videos of incidents, called for an economic boycott and self-education on our 2nd amendment rights and the law. Another, so moved by the testimony, called for regularly scheduled Tribunals. Others called on all to educate ourselves and our youth about the history and current role of white supremacy and state-sponsored terrorism in the development of American capitalism, about their African heritage/identity and about the Prison Industrial Complex. One panelist stressed the need to find the ways to reach the youth. Many said we need to show the young people that we care about them and their future.

The 22-year old African American female MC cited the transformative moment that propelled her into the struggle around racist murder—when George Zimmerman was not convicted for the racist murder of Trayvon Martin. Last fall she and others spent 3 nights in the Beaver Creek police Station following the police murder of John Crawford in the Walmart there.

Panelists and testifiers alike agreed the settlements are a pittance, given the brutal loss of a loved one, while the cops almost always are allowed to kill with impunity. There were several references to the modern day Cleveland police execution of Malissa Williams and Timothy Russell with 137 gunshots, and their ignoring women’s complaints against Anthony Sowell until 11 bodies were discovered buried in his yard. Panelists also called for an end to defending the police, citing how dangerous it is for a group to have such power without having to answer to anyone.

After several victims had testified, a panelist active in providing support to family members across the country since the police murder of his nephew, thanked them for testifying, saying, “It is critical that you not expect those in powerful positions to do what you need to do with your pain”, as he offered to help guide them, based on his and others’ experience with such losses. Others offered to assist with finding attorneys and standing with people in court, adding that people of color often do not get the benefit of arrest, trial, and if convicted, diversion, the way whites routinely do.

After a white activist testified to a brutal beating, leaving him with very serious injuries, a Black panelist was moved to thank him for his testimony. She cited the need for us all to identify people on the basis of moral character, saying, “It will take a multicultural army to deal with these issues.” She went on to say, “Let us not think this is only racial; this is about the righteous being willing to take on the unrighteous.”

Testifiers, one after another expressed, sometimes tearfully, thanks for the opportunity to share their stories and their pain. Along with a number of the panelists, some said that marching is beautiful, but we need some new solutions. One panelist stressed we need to apply pressure on every front, citing positive changes in the Seattle and Portland police departments. She said elected officials can do more. Another panelist stated he had been hearing similar stories for 80 years, and he didn’t want the toddler in the audience to have this in her future. He and others called on those present to take things to another level, perhaps with higher risks. The young people present were called upon to become leaders in the movement for justice. A black activist said his sister should be here, instead of having been murdered in 1989. He works with the Stolen Lives Project, and has spearheaded the reading of the names of unarmed people murdered by police as we stand together, rejecting the culture of fear on April 14.