

RECENT KILLINGS STRENGTHEN MOVEMENT FOR BLACK LIBERATION

On Various Fronts, Black Millennials Show No Signs of Backing Down

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Between videos of police officers killing of Black men and women, white supremacist rhetoric at the Republican National Convention, and concerted efforts to incite violence against Black activists and label them as terrorists, July proved to be a turning point in the contemporary fight for Black liberation. As signs of social injustice and inequality become more frequent and conspicuous, Black millennials in the D.C. metro area, many of whom are angry, confused, and eager to do something, have taken their fight for Black lives to new levels,

WI Bridge, she opened up an account at Industrial Bank, a D.C.-based Black-owned financial institution.

Spivey, and a significant number of other customers as she would learn upon visiting Industrial, made this move not long after Alton Sterling of Baton Rouge, Louisiana and Philando Castile of Minneapolis, Minn. died in encounters with police. These post-July 4th incidents, both of which people close to the victims filmed, reopened wounds from recent judicial and legislative

community. The teller told me the more people they get, the more opportunities they can make," she said.

Spivey counted among the legions of Black people from various walks of life, including the Hip-Hop industry, who either opened up an account at the Black-owned bank or transferred their funds there in light of the shooting deaths of Sterling and Castile. This recent act of resistance has made a highly noticeable impact; some sources estimate that as much as \$1 million Black dollars have

combined their chants of Black solidarity with calls for Black-centered advocacy and commerce at all levels that can financially cripple the entities doling out Black pain.

Kenneth Worles, Jr., a communications specialist and D.C. resident by way of Memphis, walked through the crowd that humid July 10th evening passing out sheets of paper outlining action steps that people could take after protesting. Tips on the one-pager included learning the names of and

"The Fraternal Order of Police and police unions operate like fraternities. They close ranks around the most horrible members. These organizations invested \$220,000 to ensure the acquittal of officers in the Freddie Gray case. We want to continue to confront the people and institutions that show us Black lives don't matter. As more people see how messed up the institution of policing is, the more it forces them to speak up," added Master, 28 from Southeast.

making moves that will not only benefit them, but their communities. Some have called it something reminiscent of the 1970s. "This is a good time for Pan-Africanism. Things have gotten more blatant and people are getting more enlightened. With Black August coming up, I hope more folks follow," Falani Spivey, a guerrilla filmmaker and native Washingtonian said in reference to the annual commemoration of martyred 1970s-era Black liberation fighters George Jackson, Jonathan Jackson, William Christmas, James McClain, and Khatari Gaulden. Days before talking to

disappointments and served as a painful reminder to Black America that the fight against institutional racism would require more than social media rhetoric and protesting.

"People want to talk and revisit history and not do anything," Spivey added, noting that consolidating Black dollars can strengthen neighborhoods and provide more economic opportunities for Black people. "We consume too much to not put our money in these banks. People ask where are the small business loans [for Black people] but Industrial Bank does stuff in the

been transferred in the last couple of weeks.

In D.C., Black millennials have coalesced on other fronts, converging at public spaces to peacefully protest as has been done before. In the past, many young people with radical leanings have criticized such course of action as soft and dependent on a system with no conscious to acquiesce to will of oppressed groups. However, during a recent gathering at the African-American Civil War Memorial in Northwest aptly named #BeyondtheHashtag, an intergenerational cadre of speakers

contacting local and state officials who could push legislation, collecting the contact information of fellow protesters, compiling and circulating information about the current grassroots movements, and raising funds that will keep local and statewide efforts rolling.

"D.C. is one of the only cities where people know how to make stuff happen. We can raise money and make change," said Worles, owner of the 3i Design Group. When he's not putting his feet on the pavement, Worles spreads information about what's happening nationally, and in D.C. and Memphis



Millennials Kenneth Worles and Jasmine Gales hold their fists up in solidarity during the Beyond the Hashtag protest at the African American Civil War Memorial in early July./ Courtesy photo

via "You Gon' Get This News Mane," a daily roundup of the top stories. Since its launch on Facebook earlier this year, it has been a critical tool in keeping Worles' friends, family, and colleagues abreast of the issues.

"You have a local government and the federal government. You can make a lot of moves in one city; scheduling meetings with congressmen and senators. I like how people maneuver. That's why I plan to take all the information I learn here and take it back to Memphis."

Across the Potomac River in Alexandria, Virginia, the Northern Virginia Urban League Young Professionals Network hosted an event at Shiloh Baptist Church during which millennials connected with community leaders and discussed action steps. A marketing and advertising professional by the name of Matthew counted among the dozens of young people in the audience on the night of July 14th. He attended the gathering out of a need to stay abreast and express what some may consider radical thoughts.

Though Matthew, who declined to give his last name, said he gained a lot from

participating in the discussion, he felt that more millennials should've been in the room. For him, alcohol and low-vibrating media impedes any effort to sustain a movement for Black lives.

"This is a town hall meeting but people would rather go to happy hour. That's the problem," said Matthew, 26. "They call it fake Negro outrage; when you're mad for a day and want to be up in arms but then Beyoncé drops a new album or Power comes on this weekend. So we'll halt something that should mean way more to us for something that's destructive. There's a time and place for everything. Right now there's an awakening but we're just a hashtag and a rally. That's all we are," said Matthew, a Glendale, Maryland resident.

But responses to police brutality have gone well beyond hashtags. In recent weeks, people took far more aggressive approaches to combating deadly policing tactics, sparking outrage, spurring calls for peace, and raising questions about what's to come next in the movement for Black lives.

Less than a week after Sterling and

Castile's deaths, a Black military veteran by the name of Micah X Johnson allegedly killed five police officers during a protest before officials used drone technology to blow him up. Days later, three officers also died during an attack alleged to have been carried out by Gavin Long, also a military veteran, on his 29th birthday.

Though Black grassroots organizers decried the acts of violence, media outlets, police organizations, and politicians have conflated these solo actors with Black Lives Matter, and more generally the movement for Black liberation. Additionally, the litany of "good-cop poem," as the videos that show police officers committing acts of kindness has been colloquially called, has become a distraction in the ongoing conversation about the institution that allows officers to commit acts of violence with impunity.

Despite criticism from pro-police conservatives that he hasn't done enough to quell violence against law enforcement, U.S. President Barack H. Obama has shared their police sentiments about recent events, notably

revealing his viewpoint during a town hall on race that aired on ABC on the night of July 14th.

Just as he had done during the Dallas officers' funeral, Obama showed his appreciation for law enforcement, attempting to dispel rhetoric critics of anti-police brutality movements say paints all officers in a bad light. For millennials perturbed by the nation's first Black president's lukewarm response to police-sanctioned death of Black people, his recent overtures to the boys in blue have been displeasing.

But some people, like freelance photographer and D.C. native Naomi Hawk, remain unfazed by the cop propaganda, describing it as part of an attempt by the government to absolve itself of any responsibility in the deaths of Black people, and more recently police officers who died in acts of retaliation.

"With brutality against officers, cyberbombs are getting raised but there's nothing new about police brutality, especially for those whose family experienced life lost the hands of police," said Hawk, 24, cousin of Rafael Briscoe, a young man