

# The Virgin Islands Consortium

## Understanding Freddie Gray's Baltimore: Black Lives Matter And So Does Personal Responsibility

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144 vehicles burned. 15 structural fires. 244 arrests. 20 police officers injured. 6 police officers hospitalized. Numerous looted and damaged businesses. No school in the City of Baltimore, and Johns Hopkins University, Towson University, and Loyola University Maryland, closed early on Tuesday, April 28.

The Baltimore Orioles canceled Tuesday night's game and played Wednesday's game behind closed doors, without fans, marking the first time this has been done in the history of the franchise and Major League Baseball. The Baltimore Ravens cancelled their NFL draft party.

Maryland Governor Larry Logan declared a state of emergency after a request from Baltimore Mayor, Stephanie Rawlings-Blake at 6 p.m. 2000 National Guardsmen and more than 1,000 police officers from Maryland, New Jersey, and other neighboring states were deployed to the streets of Baltimore.

All of this violence and its implications following the funeral of 25 year old Baltimore native, Freddie Gray who died on April 19, a week after he was arrested by the Baltimore Police. May he rest in peace.

The anger and the upsurge of violence in Baltimore comes in the wake of protests across the country over the deaths of black men after their happenstances with police officers.

In the case of Freddie Gray, we know that he has a criminal history with as much as 20 arrests, and a life of hardship and drugs, and we know that his mother was a heroin addict. We also know that any attorney defending his interests will have Freddie Gray's previous arrests and criminal activity suppressed to a jury.

On Friday, May 1, Maryland State Attorney, Marilyn Mosby ruled Freddie Gray's death a homicide and brought charges against six Baltimore police officers. Mosby positions there is probable cause to file criminal charges.

The criminal charges by Mosby set in motion the beginning of what will be a long haul to prove her case. As the case unfolds before our eyes and we learn more, there is a lot of heavy lifting each of us—specifically African Americans must do in urban communities across America.

Brandon Scott, Baltimore City Council Member said the violence that we saw on Tuesday was driven by "a long, long, longstanding issue with young African Americans."

"We're talking about years and decades of mistrust, of misfortune, of despair that it's just coming out of anger," Scott said. "No, it is not right for them to burn down their own city. But that is what's coming out of these young people."

The council member's position is substantive: "A lot of what they need is human capital from caring adults. It is not just the failure of the government, not just the failure of the system, it is the failure of adults and us not leading our children for generations," Scott said.

Statistically, the criminal behavior seen in West Baltimore, and the generation we are seeing it from, is tied to a lack of education and education funding, education truancy, gangs, drugs, and other socio-economic issues that create neighborhoods with 47.6 percent of children living below the poverty line and 50 percent unemployment.

In the wake of the Baltimore riots, while public and private partnerships work together on issues of education, housing, labor, health, and technology investment, African American parents must also do the hard and urgently needed work of getting back to personal responsibility and focusing on the family.

In Baltimore, 67 percent of fathers that should be in these residences are in jail and absent. As a result of this family breakdown at home, the police are standing in as authority figures in the streets. Families matter. As long as this statistical fact is rejected,

denied, and sugar coated in urban America is as long as it will take to change the stakes and stop contributing to the statistic.

N.W.A. started the culture of Gangsta Rap with the production of "F\*\*\* The Police" in 1988, with their album Straight Outta Compton. Its lyrics promote hatred and violence towards police officers and details that police officers are all racists.

According to the Pew Research Center, crime is at a 20 year low in the United States. However, crime is at a 20 year high in Black urban areas. The crime in urban areas is mostly Black on Black crime and Black ownership and the use of illegal guns is at a 20 year high. The public perception of crime and crime rates among certain demographics is at odds with reality.

CNN's Victor Blackwell interviewed teenagers in high school in Baltimore who say that "They have no exposure and feel the hardship in Baltimore." Seventeen year old, Terry Brown says "I want to get away from all the shootings and mess." Seventeen year old, Jamel Phillips says "In Bodymore Murderland we have lived with rats and roaches for 17 years and we dream about leaving."

It is time to hold the mirror up. The real dance starts when the music stops. At this precise moment in history, the time is ripe for the Divine Nine to step up and win the most important step show in history because black lives and personal responsibility does matter. Baltimore Mayor, Stephanie Rawlings-Blake is a member of the Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, and State Attorney Marilyn Mosby is a member of the Delta Sigma Theta Sorority. This week they have shown us they are working feverishly to do their part.

Each of us, whether we are part of the Divine Nine and PanHellenic Council or not, must step up and do the same. Instead of just talking about it, be about it. Vote and lobby our elected officials on all sides of the aisle to vote for funding that supports all children. If they don't, vote them out and put up and vote for your own candidates. It's that simple.

Mentor a few kids. If we can afford it, finance the tuition and Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) education of a child in urban America that is not our own, pay for their books, invite them to our homes for dinner, take them to church and art museums, tutor them at the library, introduce them to the symphony and Broadway, and commit to a coaching conversation where we call them every week or two, track their growth, and help them move from ground zero to success.

Show urban America kids by example there is much more to life than gangs, drugs, and Gangsta Rap. It is imperative that African American parents and their children reject Gangsta Rap and its "Fuck tha po-lice" and "Das jus my baby daddy" lyrics and portrayal of gangs, guns, sex, drugs, violence, and misogyny. These lyrics and their images promote violence and criminal activities in commonplace ways that has become standard and acceptable in urban areas. African Americans should be outraged about Gangsta Rap to the point of pushing back and rejecting the criminal behavior the music fosters.

On Monday, the Baltimore City Police announced that they received a credible threat that gang members of the Bloods, Crips, and Black Guerrilla Family partnered to wipe out the police. The Crips and Bloods were founded in Los Angeles, California in 1969, and are responsible for the distribution of PCP, marijuana, and amphetamines in African

American communities. Fast forward ten years from 1969.

There were approximately 45 Crips gangs in LA and the Bloods weren't far off that number. In 1980, the Crips and Bloods were warring against each other in the midst of crack cocaine hitting the streets. In addition to PCP, marijuana, and amphetamines, that was already deeply embedded in urban areas, the Crips and Bloods started selling crack in their own African American communities.

The Crips and Bloods were making so much money from selling drugs they were able to move east and south across the US to the tune of approximately 50,000 Crips and 50,000 Bloods selling drugs, ruining lives, and damaging African American communities. Their numbers are considerably higher in 2015.

It is in this mix, coupled with and driven by poverty, unemployment, family breakdown, and high dropout rates that the disintegration of the African American family increased.

It is disingenuous for African Americans to pretend the police and other demographics are wholly responsible for the problems in urban communities. There is no excuse for violence. The people who looted CVS are thieves and the people who burned down the Senior Center are arsonists. They are criminals.

And yes, there are serious problems with police brutality, crooked cops, stop and frisk, and other key issues that include holding police officers accountable and providing them with body cameras that are operable and those that stay on from the beginning to the end of a work shift. These chronic problems need to be addressed firmly and swiftly. As these important issues are addressed and remedied, African Americans must hold ourselves accountable too, by not turning a blind eye, crying foul, or pulling the race card in cases where it is a known fact that the criminal element and culture of Gangsta Rap is what the police are up against in the streets. Start neighborhood watches, assemble cameras, report criminal activity, and take back the streets.

After Freddie Gray's death, T.I. and Kap G produced another angry rap, "La Policia" that blasts police, and on CNN T.I. said, "Our music historically has been a reflection of our circumstances. So if you don't like our lyrics, you must then change the circumstances that inspire them."

Here's the rub.

The "You" that T.I. references in his statement meaning the police and government, should actually be "Us" as in African Americans and Blacks and not anyone else. African Americans and Blacks must change our own circumstances. Instead of producing rap songs about killing the police and "F\*\*\* tha po-lice", T.I. and other gangsta rappers need to use their talent to support and encourage a culture of people that obey the law.

Gangsta rappers ought to consider transforming their lyrics to educate the communities in which they are from, educate all areas under siege, and course correct the criminal behavior which has fostered their supporters "F\*\*\* tha po-lice," "Das jus my baby daddy," and "La Policia" mentality. Responsibility walks hand in hand with capacity and power. Black lives matter and so does personal responsibility.