

Coalition for Police Transparency and Accountability

Statement on the License to Use Violence
December 8, 2021

Expressing outrage about a travesty one day, and then moving on to express outrage about a new travesty the next day has become the American way. For example, many people were outraged about the not guilty verdict for Kyle Rittenhouse – and with good reason. He intentionally travelled to another state to a public demonstration claiming he was there to “protect property.” He openly carried a fully loaded assault rifle. After killing two people and shooting a third, he walked up the street, passing dozens of police who allowed him to leave the scene. He returned home and was not arrested until two days later. Now a jury has acquitted him of all charges on grounds that he was “protecting” himself and his gun when he decided to shoot. It’s enough to make any justice-loving human being sick with anger.

However, with the passage of only a few weeks, Kyle Rittenhouse has faded from our collective consciousness because in the interim, there have been new events that have captured our attention and our rage; but the Coalition for Police Transparency and Accountability (CPTA) believes we should not let the Rittenhouse verdict slip easily away, because it has such profound implications for longstanding, ongoing racial contradictions when it comes to the use of guns.

For generations, white men have taken license to use violence to uphold white power and privilege. This vigilante impulse is fundamental to the creation of the American nation, beginning with the bounties offered for the scalps of indigenous people, through the slave patrols that evolved into modern day policing, to the ongoing white support for laws enshrining the right of white people to “stand their ground.” Such practices have been romanticized and celebrated in popular culture. Images of John Wayne-type gunslingers, valiant white soldiers, and noble white police officers are indelibly imprinted into the society’s collective mind, so that a white man with a gun is a magnet – everyone rushes to his orbit to say: “Thank you for your service.”

What does America say to a Black man with a gun? Although the mission of the Black Panther Party for Self Defense was to protect innocent Black residents of Oakland, California from violent, sadistic cops, when Panther members showed up at the California State Legislature in 1967 to object to

proposed legislation that would disarm them and leave them defenseless, legislators declared they had to “protect society from nuts with guns,” and they passed the first comprehensive gun law outlawing the open carry of firearms in California. Then governor Ronald Reagan signed the measure into law saying, “I don’t think that loaded guns is the way to solve a problem that should be solved between people of good will. And anyone who would approve of this kind of demonstration must be out of their mind.”

What does America say to a Black child with even a toy gun? Twelve-year-old Tamir Rice was simply shot on sight immediately after he was observed playing in a park.

CPTA was organized to protest the police killing of a young African American man, Hakim Littleton. Littleton shot a gun out of fear for his life. In response, a policeman pinned him to the ground, as additional police officers shot him four times, including one execution-style shot to his head. He was given no chance to surrender or to explain his desire to protect himself.

When we compare that police officers killed Littleton with impunity -- when it was possible to arrest him and save his life -- yet Rittenhouse walked free after killing two persons and wounding another, we see clearly the racial injustices that are routinely perpetrated in the American legal/justice system. CPTA continues to seek justice for Hakim Littleton and his family, calling for an independent investigation into the use of deadly force, as we demand changes in the legal system towards ensuring true justice for all.