



Statement on Activities related to the Tennessee Three

April 10, 2023

On April 6, 2023, democracy was attacked in Tennessee. On this tragic day, the Tennessee State House of Representatives voted to expel two young Black state representatives, Justin Pearson and Justin Jones. They were expelled for exercising their Constitutional right to participate in a peaceful, nonviolent protest advocating for stricter gun laws after yet another mass shooting, this time in Nashville.

This action amounts to a political lynching. It was an attempt to silence the passions of two young leaders, and, more importantly, suppress Tennessee's multiracial democracy. This act of voter oppression and political aggression is the latest example of Black people being unjustly attacked by a state legislature because of our willingness to stand up for justice and equity.

To paraphrase brother James Baldwin, "The past is always present." From Jim Crow laws of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, to current regional legislative actions seeking to turn back the clock, our democracy...and very lives, are under siege. Since 2021, Georgia, Florida, Arkansas, Mississippi, and other states have introduced measures ranging from prohibiting conversations about race (under the guise of attacking critical race theory), and seeking to end affirmative action, to penalizing companies taking a stand on diversity, climate change and other progressive issues. The South of the present is slowly looking more like the South of the past.

Our fight for racial equity is urgent, timely, and relevant. We applaud the Tennessee Three: Rep. Justin Jones, Rep. Justin Pearson, and Rep. Gloria Johnson for standing up and speaking out to advance policy capable of healing, restoration, and liberation. They uphold the legacy of trailblazers like John Lewis, Ella Baker, Fannie Lou Hamer, Rev. C.T. Vivian and other courageous leaders who did not accept the dimming of freedom's light. We cannot sit on the sidelines while our democracy and our leaders are under assault. If we do, this act will serve as a precursor to further erosion of our liberties.

This urgency of now requires courageous action. Now is not the time for complacency. We all have a responsibility to fight racial injustice in all forms and continue to lift up one another and the communities we serve. By working together, under the spirit of equity and freedom, we will persevere and win against the forces who believe our voice does not matter. It has, it does, and it will in the future.

#Tennessee3