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## “We Charge Genocide” and the case for grassroots organising

Andrew Small

*Shaka Lee is a black liberationist passionate about labour, the Midwest, co-ops and music. Shaka currently resides in Chicago, IL, and works as a researcher for a labour union that represents hospitality, airport and food service workers.*



*A makeshift memorial in Ferguson (Photograph: Jbouie/Flickr)*

On 9 August 2014, [Michael Brown](#), 18, was shot by Darren Wilson in Ferguson, Missouri.

On 24 August 2014, [Roshad McIntosh](#), 19, was shot by Chicago Police in Chicago, Illinois.

Every [28 hours](#), a black person is killed by the police, a security guard or vigilante (see [George Zimmerman](#)) in the United States.

Why? Police are more likely to harass, detain and kill black people regardless of what they are doing. The statistics are staggering. Even looking at Ferguson, Missouri, a city where two thirds of the population are black, over 80 per cent of the traffic stops are of black people, and almost 93 per cent of the arrests are of black people ([source](#)), the police department is almost entirely white.

But as an organiser, as a person of conscience, and a black queer person, where do I and others turn with this knowledge? The Department of Justice? The United Nations? Those most concerned with the civil rights and human liberties of black people find out that we must continue to turn to ourselves.

In November 2014, Michael Brown’s family, organisers and black and brown youth took a trip to Geneva, Switzerland to testify in front of the UN Committee Against Torture about police brutality and the increasing militarisation of American police forces. Organisations including [We Charge Genocide](#) and Millennial Activists United brought testimony, recommendations, [reports](#), and their truths about American policing. Leslie McSpadden, mother of the late Michael Brown, told CNN, “We need the world to know what’s going on in Ferguson and we need justice.” We Charge Genocide sent its [Youth Delegation](#) to make sure the UN recognised that the murder of black and brown people by the police was never unique, but a product of systematic American racism.

Almost 64 years ago, another group of black organisers petitioned the United Nations with similar claims against the United States government. In 1951, Paul Robeson and William L. Patterson submitted the petition, “[We Charge Genocide](#)” at the United Nations charging the US government with genocide against black people. The lead organisation in this campaign, the Civil Rights Congress, was founded in Detroit, Michigan and was best known for organising the prosecution of the murderers of Emmett Till. The petition documented hundreds of killings of black individuals, patterns of police brutality, and lynching between 1945 and 1951, as well as the economic apartheid occurring in the US. The petition includes the following statement:

*It is our hope, and we fervently believe that it was the hope and aspiration of every black American whose voice was silenced forever through premature death at the hands of racist-minded hooligans or Klan terrorists, that the truth recorded here will be made known to the world; that it will speak with a tongue of fire loosing an unquenchable moral crusade, the universal response to which will sound the death knell of all racist theories.*

The 1951 petition was controversial and those involved experienced political persecution tied to the Red Scare. However, after the 2014 trip, the United Nations’ panel [condemned](#) the US record on police brutality and other related issues including Guantanamo and the detention of child migrants. How will their condemnation weigh in this deeply divided American political climate? And more importantly, how will their words and recommendations prevent the death of more black people (when every 28 hours another black person is killed by the police)? How many trips to Geneva does it take to protect our communities in Chicago, Ferguson, St. Louis, Detroit, New York, Cleveland, Beavercreek, Los Angeles, etc?

I remain unsure. But what I am sure of is that the response after the announcement of the non-indictments of the killer of Michael Brown (and, subsequently, of Eric Garner) shows the inadequacy of the United Nations to provide real protection to Black communities in the US. Although the UN recognises the issue of police brutality, there remains an absence of action as police officers are still not being held accountable for racially motivated brutality. We, as a global community, are continuously reminded from the courtrooms to the streets that we will have to be the protection, love, investment and radical change we deserve in our communities.

As someone who has protested and supported organising in multiple cities, including Ferguson and Detroit, I have seen evidence that we are ready to be what we deserve. Those who have been organising for 60 years and 60 seconds are coming together in recognition that black life is just as sacred. But many are coming to the conclusion that our larger state, federal, and international governing bodies will only follow the change we create, rather than actually creating it. It took decades of protests, organising and action to secure the gains won by the American Civil Rights Movement. But all of those changes were attacked and only maintained by the aggressive presence of people power. When we testify to our larger governing structures, it is more of an opportunity for them to legitimise their relevancy than ours. Because we will stay in this struggle for the long haul no matter who agrees or disagrees with our indignant rage.

The US government may not listen to the UN but will have to listen to all those out in the streets. The US government may not listen to the UN but it will have to listen if both domestic and international communities continue to draw closer and challenge America's militaristic conquest on the vulnerable worldwide. So not only do we charge genocide, we will continue to charge, closer together, inside the halls of the UN, into police lines, on the picket line, in our classrooms, and on our street corners. As a worldwide community of conscience continues to arise from the West Bank to the West Side of Chicago, we will win. As organisations continue to build capacity for the movement that must occur – those for or against us will continue to show their true colours and commitment to the human family.

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