



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

James Sanders Jr.

## Black Lives Matter

JAMES SANDERS JR. November 24, 2014

On Tuesday night, I awaited the announcement of the grand jury decision on Officer Darren Wilson. Like many across our nation, I was saddened to learn that the grand jury did not find probable cause to indict Wilson. The purpose of the grand jury is not to determine guilt or innocence, but to decide whether there is probable cause to prosecute someone for a felony crime. Unfortunately, the grand jury decided that the shooting of Michael Brown was not even deserving of a trial. As we prepare to enter 2015, it is important to remember that this year has seen the death of numerous unarmed black young men at the hands of police officers.

The Ferguson case is a sad parody on our judicial system. Sad how many of us did not anticipate an indictment. The expectation that justice would not be served, casts serious doubts about the progress our nation has made. Black lives matter. As I watch the protestors and commentators on television describe what has already taken place in Ferguson and the sentiments of those citizens, I am left processing our nation's history of racial injustice. The lynching of black men dates back to the late 1800's, picking up in the period after Reconstruction and tapering off in the 1960's. After the decision of the grand jury was released, one of the news reporters asked District Attorney Robert McCulloch "[i]s there not a law against the killing of an unarmed black teenager?" Between the years 1882 to 1968, nearly 200 anti-lynching bills were introduced in congress. In 1921 Representative Leonidas C. Dyer a

Republican from St. Louis sponsored an anti-lynching bill that passed in the house but was filibustered by the democrats in the Senate. As we grapple with tragedy after tragedy and the victimization of black men at the hands of officers, it is up to our legislators and voters to put forth true reforms. There are no clean hands on the issue of race in America as we either play a part in perpetuating racial problems or we are working towards a solution. The baton has been passed to us to move America toward a more perfect union.

The legendary singer Billie Holiday in her song Strange Fruit sang " Southern trees bear a strange fruit, Blood on the leaves and blood at the root, Black bodies swinging in the Southern breeze, strange fruit hanging from the poplar trees." What will we sing for Trayvon, Eric Garner, John Crawford, Ezell Ford, Dante Parker, Amadou Diallo, Andre Dorismond, DJ Henry, just to name a few. Yes, black lives matter and our voices matter too.

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***The 10th Senatorial District includes: The Rockaways, South Jamaica, Rochdale, Rosedale, Richmond Hill, South Ozone Park and Springfield Gardens.***