

May 21, 2010

From: Stephanie Y. Evans, Gainesville Florida

To: Clifford Stearns, Congress 6th District; George LeMieux, Senator; Bill Nelson, Senator; Charlie Christ, Governor; Debra W. Boyd, District 11 State House; Steve Oelrich, District 14 State senator; Charles E. Van Zant, D21 HOR; Larry Cretul, D22 HOR; Charles S. "Chuck" Chestnut IV, D23 State House; Cynthia Moore Chestnut, Chair of Alachua Count Board of Commissioners; Rodney J. Long, Alachua Count Board of Commissioners; Mike Byerly, Alachua Count Board of Commissioners; Paula M. Delaney, Alachua Count Board of Commissioners; Lee Pinkoson, Alachua Count Board of Commissioners; Craig Lowe, Mayor; Scherwin Henry, City Commissioner (District I); Lauren Poe Term, City Commissioner (District II); Jack Donovan, City Commissioner (District III); Thomas Hawkins Term, City Commissioner (At Large); Jeanna Mastrodicasa, City Commissioner (At Large)

Re: Kofi Adu-Brempong Shot at the University of Florida

Dear Public Official,

I appreciate you taking time to read my letter. Being a public representative must be a demanding and stressful job. Thank you for your work.

I hope that by now you are aware that a student was shot on the campus of the University of Florida on March 2, 2010. Kofi Adu-Brempong is an international student from Ghana who was shot in the face with an assault rifle while unarmed in his own home. Kofi was having a mental breakdown due to fears of his student visa not being renewed. The University of Florida Police department (UFPD), fearful that Kofi was going to harm himself, broke down his front door and attempted to taser him twice, shot him with 3 bean bag rounds, and finally shot him in the face and hand with two rounds from an AR-15 assault rifle. When watching the video account, the shooting happened within 1 minute of the officers entering Kofi's apartment. One of the bullets entered through his nasal cavity, destroyed maxillofacial tissue, and became lodged in his spine. After much surgery Kofi is expected to live but he faces many more surgeries in the future including the removal of the bullet from his spine. As of mid-May he is reported to have 'recovered' and is out of critical condition, but he has forever lost part of his chin and tongue. *Here is a metaphor to contemplate: the community activism surrounding this case demonstrates that we who support justice for Kofi offer a chin and a tongue in his stead.*

Many student, faculty/staff, and community members feel that UFPD used excessive force in dealing with Kofi. We have also raised the concern over the possibility of race playing a factor in this farce. The shooting officer, Keith Smith, has previously participated in actions of racial intolerance against African Americans in the Gainesville community. Over 500 people have rallied and thousands more have signed petitions in support of Kofi but our concerns have fallen on deaf ears. The chief of UFPD Linda Stump and UF president Bernie Machen have done little to assuage our concerns.

I implore you to contact Bernie Machen and Chief Linda Stump and let them know that you stand with your constituents in making sure both that justice is provided to Kofi and that incidents like this do not happen again. It is in everyone's best interest that transparency and justice prevail in this case. Local, state, and national communities are watching closely and, as the slow and deliberate process thus far indicates, implications will be far reaching if justice is not served. Understandably, there will be much fallout because of the precarious position of the powers involved. Regardless of the decisions made by those in the present, as always, the future will be the final judge. History will vindicate the just. We are asking that you stand on the right side of history and ensure that excessive force is eliminated in Florida.

I also encourage you to join the Coalition for Justice Against Police Brutality. Please have staffers in your office take time to consider the ample collection of events and commentary on the Justice for Kofi Adu-Brempong Facebook page:

<http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=336549896343#!/group.php?gid=336549896343>.

The page is an excellent example of citizen speech in motion. The page has over 2,000 members--local, state, and national. The description of the Justice for Kofi Facebook group is as follows:

On March 2nd, graduate student and teaching assistant Kofi Adu-Brempong was shot in the face with an assault rifle by officers of the University Police Department. Adu-Brempong was mentally-distressed, and the police were called in response to noise coming from his apartment at Corey Village on-campus.

Adu-Brempong is 5'5", less than 150 pounds, and severely disabled from a childhood case of polio. The shooting occurred less than a minute after the officers entered the apartment. In an interview with Adu-Brempong by the Gainesville Sun after the incident, Adu-Brempong said that the police began firing a high-powered assault weapon at him without ordering him to stand down or making an arrest. "They should have told me to put up my hands," he said. Student and community groups are calling for an independent investigation of the entire incident because of the conflicting accounts of the night given by Adu-Brempong and UPD.

When evidence emerged that the shooter was University Police Department Officer Keith Smith-who had previously been implicated in throwing eggs at African-Americans while off-duty-student groups began organizing for a rally to demand justice. The students suggest that a rigorous investigation needs to be conducted in regards to the shooting of an unarmed disabled man in his own on-campus apartment. The Coalition for Justice Against Police Brutality was formed out of groups including Students for a Democratic Society, the Student Labor Action Project, the NAACP, the African Student Union, and the Alachua County Democratic Black Caucus. Together, the Coalition is calling for another rally of students and community members on April 6th.

We of the Coalition for Justice Against Police Brutality believe that it is unacceptable that we have waited over four weeks for the investigation results to be announced. The administration and investigators are stalling in releasing the truth because there are only three weeks of spring classes left at UF. In the coming weeks, the Coalition will escalate their actions and demand that those involved in the investigation release findings immediately.

There are six demands laid out by the Coalition:

- 1. UPD drops all charges against Kofi**
- 2. Independent Grand Jury investigations into the shooting**
- 3. Implementation of an independent review board for the UPD**
- 4. Indefinite unpaid suspension for the shooter, Keith Smith, pending investigation**
- 5. Improvement of mental health and crisis services on campus to prevent future incidents**
- 6. Elimination of UPD's Critical Incident Response Team (CIRT)**

As a concerned citizen and rational human being that values compassion, freedom, professionalism, and justice I am writing in support of the demands outlined by the Justice for Kofi Abu-Brempong group, a part of the Coalition for Justice Against Police Brutality. I am afraid for my safety because of police brutality in my community; this is not paranoia. Rather, my fear is a logical response to the lack of restraint demonstrated by those officers who entered Kofi's apartment. But I understand that, as Audre Lorde and many others have said, "your silence will not protect you" so I join others in speaking out for change.

As a historian and African American woman, I write to support the Coalition's demands because I am aware of the many instances, particularly in the southern United States, where might makes right. There are numerous cases past and present that reflect poor oversight of thinly-masked, racially-fueled, institutionally-sponsored oppression. Given historic and lingering inequities in justice, it is not irrational for Black communities to distrust police. Given the wide chasm in treatment, Black anger is well-grounded. When biologist Dr. Amy Bishop at the University of Alabama (<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/02/21/us/21bishop.html>), an armed White woman who open fired and killed three colleagues in a faculty meeting in February 2010, can be 'talked down' and taken in without a scratch, but Kofi, a 5'5" Black man with polio is delivered near-fatal force for allegedly wielding a rod at intruders in his own home in March 2010, race is an obvious explanatory culprit of outcome. Despite the many attempts to decry a 'post-racial' society because of a Black male president of the United States, Keith Smith's actions reveal traces of race mythology, antagonism, and assumed need for deadly force clearly present in too many officers' mindset. Social fear of Blackness has not gone away; racism is evidently a part of our social DNA and we must deal with it accordingly. We must study racism in order to better understand and lesson its negative effect, not deny the existence of socially-created concept of race--and the potentially negative interpretation--when racism so clearly and continually rears its ugly head. Scholars from Anna Julia Cooper and W.E.B. DuBois to Joy James and Cornel West clearly state that race matters; lived experiences of people all over the world show this statement to be undeniable. However, Kofi's case is not about race alone. The April 2010 police beating of John McKenna at the University of Maryland (<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/04/15/AR2010041505461.html>)--and the attempted cover up--illustrates that Kofi's case is clearly about the need for honesty and balance of power in policing agencies. A close reading of some of the comments on the Facebook page and a consideration of the predominantly White demographic of the rallies reveals that scores of non-Black citizens have suffered under police misconduct and when speaking about what happened to Kofi are mad as hell as well.

As a collaborator with teen crime-prevention programs sponsored by the Gainesville Police Department, I write in support of the Coalition's demands because I understand and appreciate the vital service that police officers provide. I know that an active citizenry ensures that enforcement officials have the best and most sustainable support for their proper action and I understand that community partners provide the critical oversight necessary for a change in training, policy, and procedures toward a greater ideal of 'protecting and serving' our neighbors. Police are essential to society...of course, I hope heroic and dutiful officers arrive when and if I ever need them (on or off campus) and I respect that they put their lives on the line every day. I also know that police brutality must be faced head on because when it is not, many people--including other police officers--are inevitably and increasingly placed in the line of unnecessary fire.

Please join the growing collection of voices to ensure that this case and those involved are weighed and measured in a way that bears the internal and external scrutiny which has and will continue to surround the shooting of Kofi Adu-Brempong.

Thank you again for taking time out of your very busy day to read my letter.

Sincerely,

Stephanie Y. Evans, PhD

Member, Coalition for Justice Against Police Brutality

*Template for Kofi letter: http://docs.google.com/View?id=dfbw5z9b_10fvp6shg2

* List of representatives: http://docs.google.com/View?id=dfbw5z9b_8cxgw56fb