



October 3, 2018

Laquan McDonald and the Future of Chicago

16 shots. The shooting of Laquan McDonald by Chicago Police Officer Jason Van Dyke on October 20, 2014 on South Pulaski Road has changed Chicago. Coordinated police reports from that evening which conflicted with the dashcam video of the shooting have eroded the confidence Chicago residents have in the Chicago Police Department. The city approved a \$5 million payout to McDonald's family before a wrongful death lawsuit was even filed, part of \$642 million the city has paid out in police misconduct cases from 2004-2015. Withholding the video until after the mayoral election has led to charges of a cover-up and the mayor not running for re-election.

16 shots. Now we are nearing the end of the jury trial of Jason Van Dyke, who is charged with two counts of first-degree murder, 16 counts of aggravated battery and one count of official misconduct, the first time in decades that an on-duty Chicago police officer has been charged with murder.

16 shots. When it goes to the jury, what will the jury decide? No matter what the jury decides, how will Chicago react?

I know many people who knew Laquan McDonald when he was growing up in Austin, just a few blocks from my mother's house. Laquan did not have an easy time growing up, but was known as a fun-loving and goofy kid.

Like many black men, I have had my own encounters with Chicago police when I felt targeted and was on the receiving end of an excessive reaction not because of what I had done but because I was black.

The unfortunate death of Laquan McDonald should and can make Chicago better. There is little question that race and how blacks are treated are at the core of the Jason Van Dyke case. As Dr. Martin Luther King stated, "The value in pulling racism out of its obscurity and stripping it of its rationalizations lies in the confidence that it can be changed...A people who began a national life inspired by a society of brotherhood can redeem itself. But redemption can come only through a humble acknowledgement of guilt and an honest knowledge of self."

And race issues do not just involve how Laquan McDonald was perceived or treated when he was gunned down with 16 shots on the night of October 20, 2014. What opportunities for education, health care, social development, or growing up in a vibrant community were denied Laquan because the West and South Sides have been so long neglected? Again, Dr. Martin Luther King states, "I cannot see how the Negro will be totally liberated from the crushing weight of poor education, squalid housing and economic stagnation until he is integrated, with power, into every level of American life...And if the word integration means anything, this is what it means: that we, with love, shall force our brothers to see themselves as they are, to cease fleeing from reality and begin to change it."

It is not only by police misconduct payouts that the whole city affected by what happens on the West and South Sides. A lack of economic, social, and educational opportunities and investment on the West and South Sides

affects the whole city, affecting the base of tax-paying citizens, and affects overall economic development and social development of all people.

So, what happens when the jury's verdict in the Jason Van Dyke case comes out? We must be constructive, and not destructive. We are still struggling and are impacted by riots that occurred 50 years ago – we don't need any more destruction. Chicago has experienced so much destruction of communities and lives that now it is time to unite behind young people who are mobilizing, like the consistent efforts of William Calloway. In the name of Laquan McDonald, we must fight for more opportunities for people to be successful in vibrant communities all over the city, especially rebuilding the South and West Sides of Chicago. Let's give young people opportunities that Laquan didn't have. Together as one city – North, South, West and East – let's show our love for Chicago and come together as brothers and sisters to heal and grow and rebuild one Chicago.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'LSK', written in a cursive style.

La Shawn K. Ford
State Representative-Eighth District