

I hope that this letter finds you well, and that you are finding this summer to be a time for reflection and recharging. As many of you have likely seen in the news, this summer has been marked by a number of historic moments in regards to the American dialogue on race and racial reconciliation. Trayvon Martin, a 17 year old African American teen who was unarmed, was shot and killed by George Zimmerman, a 29 year old neighborhood watch volunteer, in 2012 while he walked home from a convenience store in Sanford, FL. On July 13 George Zimmerman was acquitted (found not guilty) under Florida's 'Stand Your Ground' law. For more information about the trial, Florida's law, and updates on the aftermath of the verdict, you can visit [CNN's 'Fast Facts'](#) page and the [New York Times' Times Topic](#) page. While the finer details of the altercation that led to Trayvon being shot and killed have been discussed at length in the trial, the case has sparked a broader, nationwide, conversation about race and racial profiling. The Sankofa chaperones, while recognizing that it would be challenging to gather you all during the summer, wanted to reach out directly to you to address the case and the surrounding conversation. Some of our reflections are found at the bottom of this email, after the signature.

As we prepared our thoughts, President Obama shared his reflections on Trayvon and the case at large in a press conference on July 19. His comments were powerful, personal, and deeply moving (you are encouraged to read the [full transcript](#) via CBS News). As he spoke, our nation's President said, "Trayvon Martin could have been me." In his concluding remarks, President Obama calls for the nation to engage in "some soul-searching." He then went on to say that "in families and churches and workplaces, there's the possibility that people are a little bit more honest, and at least you ask yourself your own questions about, am I wringing as much bias out of myself as I can? Am I judging people as much as I can, based on not the color of their skin, but the content of their character? That would, I think, be an appropriate exercise in the wake of this tragedy."

This is precisely what we are doing. Sankofa *is* engaging in dialogue. It *is* seeking to be honest. And it *is* hoping to address the salient questions that the President states. After hearing President Obama's call to action, some of us have written a letter directly to him exploring what we have done. In it, we have included the collective memoir and the article from the Evanston Roundtable. The letter, as of tonight, is in the final stage of edits, however we will send the final copy to you in the coming weeks. In addition to what we have written to President Obama, we encourage you to record your own reflections and to share them with others.

Below are some of our thoughts on the Trayvon Martin case. As you all reflect personally on the profound questions that the case has raised, we hope that you will find our words meaningful. As always, we are available to speak individually with any one of you, or to help facilitate a group meeting or action if you are interested. While some of the chaperones will be out of town in the coming days and weeks, we are firmly committed to being strong allies and will respond as soon as we are able.

In solidarity,

**Rabbi Andrea London, Revrend Velda Love, Yoni Siden, Jerane Ransom, Emily Nidenberg,
Taurean Webb, Rachel Hudgens, Elliot Leffler**
Beth Emet Synagogue & Second Baptist Church
Sankofa 2013 Adult Allies

Sankofa Adult Allies: Reflections on the Trayvon Martin Trial

My heart aches for the family of Trayvon Martin. There are no words for the disappointment I feel that reasonable doubt led to the verdict in the final ruling. Every murder due to gun violence in Chicago and Evanston, and around this country, is a reason to be vigilant and active in creating viable solutions as to how we protect our children. Is the Spirit of the Lord upon us? If so, then now is the time to be engaged in our communities to acknowledge the losses, be in dialogue about what we can do to intervene, and create sustainable solutions that teach our young people about transforming their anger and conflict into constructive dialogue. May the God of healing and reconciliation be our guide each day to end the violence.

Reverend Love

Foremost, my heart is with the Martin family as they continue to struggle with Trayvon's tragic death, and now the verdict of this trial. I too am filled with a complex mix of emotions as I think about the case: the pervasiveness of racism in our society and the institutionalization of inequality, the reality of violence and profiling in the lives of so many. As I think about the death of Trayvon Martin, I am reminded of so many lives cut short due to gun violence. Every tragic incident of racial profiling or death at the end of a gun barrel profoundly implicates all of us – it is a call to action. What we have begun to create in Sankofa is a community of understanding. I hope that as we strengthen the transformational relationships that we can begin to explore meaningful responses and action to bring about racial reconciliation and a more just world.

Yoni Siden

My heart is heavy and pained. We live in a remarkable country, where the law is intended to rise above individual bias and create an equal playing field for every human being. Intentions are noble and often just, but these past few weeks I cannot seem to find any solace in the law. While I can understand the particularities of the case, juries and laws and legal strategy, I struggle with the broader message that the case conveyed.

How can young men, out for a walk, be so unsafe in their home community? Where are the discussions we all know must take place? Where is our national moral GPS? Can our jurisprudence bring the weight of the constitution to truly affect the equal safety of all of its citizenry? Whom in our national leadership, will risk the potential political damage and steward the kind of thoughtful, painful, truthful conversations that are so long overdue in this country? In 2013, how can we allow ourselves to be so blind to our own racism, arrogance and judgmental behavior? Our system of justice and our lip service to equality have made it too easy for white America to feel satisfied with our collective efforts and vindicated by the statistics of black males in America.

Eventually, I turn my thinking inwards. Have I failed to articulate, to embrace, to teach, to be part of, to speak out, to speak in, to understand, to invest my emotions? Or am I just now coming to understand how much more work/effort is needed? My heart is heavy and pained, but my actions can be part of better future.

Emily Nidenberg

After the verdict of the Trayvon Martin case was delivered, commentators of all kinds jumped in to speculate on the fairness (or lack thereof) of the trial and our criminal justice system. Since I wasn't in the courtroom, I felt like I couldn't comment on the particulars of the case, but the nagging question that plagued me was, "If Trayvon were not Black, would George Zimmerman have ever pursued him?" It seemed to me that if Trayvon were White, George Zimmerman would never have gone after him and Trayvon would be alive today. Last Friday, in an unusually candid speech, President Obama spoke openly

about what it's like to be a Black man in the United States today—being watched on streets, followed in stores, car doors locked as he would walk by, purses clutched closer on elevator rides. In order to confront the racism in our society, President Obama suggested that we need to convene a conversation on race. He said that we need to do some soul-searching as a nation and that families, churches, and workplaces would be the best places for these conversations to occur. “Sankofa,” I thought! “That’s what we are doing in our community,” talking openly and honestly about race and racism. If the kind of conversation we’ve been having and the relationships we’ve been developing could spread, what a difference it could make in our country. “Sankofa,” I thought. We had to ‘go back and get it’ so we can lead the way forward to the racial healing that needs to happen in our country.

Rabbi London

As an African American Women, Mother, Grandmother, Aunt and speaking from my human side; I am outrage and deeply angry with the outcome of the Trayvon Martin/Zimmerman case. Justice was not served, not at all! When I calmed down and let my Christian side emerge. I realized that there is a purpose for everything and the thorn in my side is a remainder that our work is not done.

Deacon Jerane Ranson