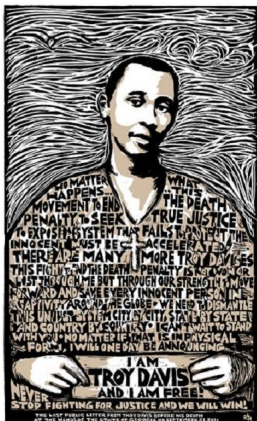


## The "I Am Troy" Call to Action

Written by Benjamin Todd Jealous

Tuesday, 24 September 2013 10:59 - Last Updated Tuesday, 24 September 2013 11:05

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Two years ago last week, the state of Georgia ignored the facts, doubts and pleas of hundreds of thousands of people and killed Troy Anthony Davis. On the anniversary of his execution, we rededicate ourselves to ending the immoral, biased and ineffective practice of capital punishment.

For 15 years, we fought alongside Troy to clear his name for the killing of Savannah Police Officer Mark Allen MacPhail. Troy remained adamant about his innocence to his last breath. As explained in the new book *I Am Troy Davis*, by author Jen Marlowe and Troy's sister, Martina Davis-Correia, the case against Troy lacked conclusive evidence after many of the key witnesses recanted testimony from the time of the original trial.

In the last weeks of Troy's life, the Georgia State Board of Pardons and Paroles received 663,000 petitions from people imploring the group to reconsider the execution given the sheer amount of doubt surrounding the case. World figures, including Pope Benedict XVI and former U.S. President Jimmy Carter, human rights groups and commentators urged the execution to be halted -- all to no avail.

In the hours before his death, the NAACP held a rally and lobbied the Department of Justice to intervene on the grounds of a civil rights violation. The glimpses of sadness and quiet resolve I

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saw on the faces of Troy's family when his death became imminent will stay with me forever. The last time I saw Troy, he told me "This movement started before me, and it needs to continue, no matter what, until we destroy the machinery of death."

While many of the supporters who stood in solidarity with Troy have put away their signs and returned home, the battle to end the shameful practice of capital punishment wages on in his name. Side by side with Troy's family, we remain on the frontlines of this fight to abolish a system that is ineffective and steeped in racial bias.

Racial disparities pervade every component of the justice system. A report from Amnesty International concluded that 77 percent of people executed since 1977 were people convicted of crimes involving white victims, compared to only 15 percent of people executed for killing blacks. A full 42 percent of the 3,100 inmates on death row are people of color.

Furthermore, we know that the death penalty is a poor deterrent of crime. FBI data shows that all 14 states without capital punishment in 2008 had homicide rates at or below the national rate.

The only effective way to deter killings in our streets is to ensure justice is swift and certain. In order to do so, we must ensure both that we have police leadership that builds strong partnerships and trust with all communities and also that they have enough officers and detectives to ensure every homicide in every community is responded to with the requisite resources to find and catch killers quickly.

Since Troy's death, we have made definitive strides in our effort to end the death penalty. We have worked with a diverse and multifaceted coalition of advocates including Amnesty International and the National Coalition to Repeal the Death Penalty fix our nation's broken justice system. Last year our work led to Connecticut repealing the death penalty. This year, Maryland became the first state south of the Mason-Dixon Line to do the same. Those two states now join New Jersey, New York, New Mexico and Illinois as the fifth and sixth state in six years, and the 17th and 18th in the nation to abolish the death penalty.

Our strategy is clear. Our strategy is simple. We will outlaw capital punishment in a majority of states, and then we will go to the United States Supreme Court and make the argument that the

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punishment is cruel by its very nature but also unusual because most states have passed laws against it.

"I Am Troy" reminds us that each year September 21 will serve as both a solemn anniversary and a call to action. It is and will continue to be an annual reminder that justice and common sense we end this brutal practice of capital punishment.

*Benjamin Todd Jealous is the president and CEO of the national NAACP.*