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Emmett Till. Malcolm X. Martin Luther King Jr. Fred Hampton. Trayvon Martin. Miriam Carey. Tamir Rice. Eric Garner. Freddie Gray. Alton Sterling. Philando Castile. Atatiana Jefferson. Breonna Taylor. Ahmaud Arbery. Micheal Ramos. George Floyd.

These names represent only a fraction of the many unarmed black people murdered by police officers or racist “vigilantes.” As a country, we pride ourselves on ideals of equality and justice, yet to this day we allow racism and white supremacy to run rampant. Something must be done.

There is a time and place to call for voting. University Democrats is a political organization and the work that we do primarily focuses on getting college students involved in the electoral process. Voting is an incredibly sacred duty in our democracy, but it is important to realize that going out and voting should be considered the bare minimum when it comes to civic engagement.

These past few days have been a testament to the fact that voting, by itself, is not activism. It is necessary for us to take direct action to create the changes that our country desperately needs. Callous calls from our leaders and representatives telling us simply to “go vote” ignores the incredible work that unelected black community leaders have done throughout our nation's history to make real change in our communities. Simply voting for Democrats on election day will not save our country.

It is clear at this time that our elected leaders have failed us. In Minneapolis, where George Floyd was murdered, almost all the elected officials are Democrats. In Austin, where Michael Ramos was murdered, almost all of the elected officials at the municipal level are Democrats. The people of Austin elected our mayor and city counselors to represent us, not silence us.

The University Democrats value our relationships with elected officials. However, we also must hold them accountable for what they were elected to do: represent us, their constituents. The democratic system does not work when peaceful protestors are tear gassed, injured, or killed for simply exercising their freedom of speech. When members of the UT community and members of our own organization are tear gassed or otherwise injured by police officers while peacefully protesting and our elected representatives are unwilling to speak out against those injustices, it is impossible for us as an organization to continue to support these representatives.

We are calling on the entirety of the Austin City Council and Mayor Adler to denounce the actions of APD, if they haven't done so. We are also calling on City Manager Spencer Cronk to fire APD Chief Brian Manley who has continued to abuse his power after countless scandals. We know that the firing of Chief Manley will not solve APD's long history of racist policing practices, but it is the bare minimum. This is not about politics. This about being on the right side of history.