



January 6, 2021

Statement by the Rev. Dr. Starsky Wilson, President and CEO of the Children's Defense Fund

The End of Innocence about America

Just before 11:00 am today, January 6, the President of the United States rallied his disappointed, but determined, supporters in the Northwest section of Washington, DC at a rally promoted to "Save America" from the results of a free and fair election. At the same time on the Northeast side of town, my son Dallas and I were shocked when an older, unhoused white gentleman fell faint and face-first on the asphalt in front of my car. Seeing him convulsing and vulnerable from hitting his head, I positioned the vehicle to keep others from passing and joined two other men aiding him by calling 9-1-1. It was a scary scene I wish my twelve-year-old empath had not seen. And yet, it wasn't the worst thing he saw today.

All our children, home for virtual instruction, watched on television today as violent, anti-democratic white supremacists were allowed to storm and briefly occupy the U.S. Capitol—just as they watched this summer as activists for racial justice were met with tear gas, shot with rubber bullets, and arrested. Today's events in Washington, D.C. are clear examples of the existential threat and trauma of white supremacy to our children, our country, and the world. Images of the home of our federal legislature under siege by domestic terrorists signify the extent to which the future of our democracy is much more a contest over power than a principled debate about public policy.

In this way, I find hope in the providential coincidence that these events unfolded on the same day that my friend, the Rev. Dr. Raphael Warnock, pastor of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s Ebenezer Baptist Church, became the first Black senator elected from Georgia and only the 11th Black senator in our nation's history. Catapulted by impeccable character, years of preparation, and the work of faithful community organizers to build political power, his victory inspires hope for progress in the face of racialized resistance. And in the same moment, today's violence reminds us of the immense mountain we must climb to overcome the hatred and racism that permeates our society and political reality.

To build a world where marginalized and traumatized children flourish, leaders must prioritize their well-being. Today, this means countering and condemning the actions of the people engaged in violence at the Capitol and the president who incited it. All those who played a part in fomenting the rioting, including Josh Hawley, the junior senator from my own state of Missouri, must be held to account. Then, we must swiftly confirm the results of the most recent election, execute a peaceful transfer of power, and allow the new administration to begin to move us forward from the atrocities of these past four years.

Our children are watching. Today, they saw America – that older white man, dressed in a red jacket, blue jeans, and long white socks soiled from sleeping outdoors and exposed – seething from blunt force. They were traumatized and robbed of their innocent belief in the "idea of America." But they will remember who called for help, who rushed in to aid, and who stood up to build power for their future at this moment when our very democracy was at stake.

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