

## **\*\*A Call to Action: To Our Young Kings and Queens\*\***

To the young men and women of our community, our kings and queens, I stand before you today not as a stranger, but as someone who believes in you—someone who knows that you are capable of greatness. I see in you the power to change the world, to lift your communities, and to lead the future. But to do that, we must first address something that threatens everything you can become: the violence that is stealing too many lives, too many dreams, and too much potential.

You are more than what the world sometimes tells you. You are not the violence that tries to trap you. You are not the fear that others may see. You are strength. You are intelligence. You are the future, and it's time we all act like it.

### **Why You Must Choose Peace**

I know that life is hard sometimes. The challenges you face—whether it's in your neighborhoods, schools, or even within yourselves—are real. But understand this: violence is not the answer. It never has been, and it never will be. Every time we pick up a weapon, throw a punch, or tear each other down with words, we lose. We lose not just to the violence, but to a system that wants us to fail. A system that counts on you fighting each other instead of fighting for yourselves.

**Violence does not make you strong; it makes you vulnerable. The strongest people are those who can rise above the challenges, who can solve conflicts with their minds, not their fists, and who can show love and unity in the face of division.**

### **You Hold the Power to Change This**

You, young kings and queens, are not victims of circumstance—you are the leaders of the future. And leadership means taking responsibility. It

means understanding that the choices you make don't just affect you, they affect your families, your friends, and your entire community.

I'm asking you to choose peace. I'm asking you to be the generation that breaks the cycle of violence. When you feel anger rising, find another way to deal with it. Talk to someone. Walk away. Write down your feelings. Use your voice for good. You have the power to change the story, not just for yourselves but for everyone who looks up to you.

### Look Around: You're Not Alone

You are never alone in this fight. There are people in your life who want to see you succeed—teachers, mentors, coaches, family members, and friends. We are all here to support you. You have resources, people who will listen, who will guide you, and who will stand by you. All you need to do is reach out.

The Columbia Branch NAACP, along with many others in this community, is here for you. We are working to give you the opportunities, the safe spaces, and the tools to succeed. But none of this will work unless you take that first step and choose to live for something greater than the streets, greater than the anger, and greater than the violence.

### Your Legacy Starts Now

Every single one of you has the potential to be great. To be remembered not for what you did in a moment of anger, but for what you did over a lifetime of greatness. You can be the leaders we need. You can build businesses, lead movements, create art, and change laws. But to get there, you need to stay alive, and you need to stay committed to peace.

Let today be the day you make that decision. Say no to the violence that has taken so many of our brothers and sisters. Say yes to life. Say yes to peace. Say yes to your future. The choices you make today will define who you become tomorrow.

So, to my young brothers and sisters, kings and queens—stand tall. Be proud of who you are and where you come from, but also be committed to where you are going. We need you. Your family needs you. Your community needs you. And most importantly, **\*\*you\*\*** need you.

Stop the violence. Start building. You are the future, and it's time to start acting like it.

**ON FIRE FOR JUSTICE ON FIRE FOR PEACE**

Thank you.