

# SURJ Department of Justice Action Kit

Below you will find an action planning created by SURJ (and friends) to help you plan your action on the Department of Justice or US Attorneys office. We put what we thought are the most critical items at the top. Thanks for being brave, bold and supportive.

Please let us know if you have any feedback, comments or questions at [info@showingupforracialjustice.org](mailto:info@showingupforracialjustice.org)

## **SURJ Action Kit - How to Organize a Department of Justice Action**

### **Overall Framework:**

The Department of Justice (DOJ) is a critical target in the struggle against police brutality. The DOJ can sue local police departments and win consent decrees that force significant reform. The DOJ can also arrest cops who have brutalized and/or killed unarmed Black people (and other people of color) on civil rights violation charges. Additionally, given the President's commitments recently, continuing to engage the federal government can keep the pressure on for executive orders that can win national policing reforms.

In Ferguson particularly, local activists are continuing to demand that the Department of Justice arrest Darren Wilson.

### **Where is the Department of Justice locally?**

In most cities, US Attorneys (who work directly for Attorney General Eric Holder) have offices in the main federal building in town. You can find out where the nearest US Attorney is through a google search. There are many lawyers at a typical US Attorney's office. If there is not a local US Attorney's office nearby, then the nearest federal office building is also a target.

### **Action Frame:**

For newer groups or groups with a lot of new people keep the actions as simple as possible. The main idea is to keep the group together, occupy space, stay peaceful and courageous. Here is a play by play.

### **Scouting:**

The main organizer (s) should go in advance to the survey the building. Go inside to get the layout of the space. Locate the offices that you are trying to occupy. Most likely, the farthest you will get in any action is to occupy the lobby. It is also good to think about where you might want

to have the crowd for the best visuals for press purposes. Also use this time to decide where a good meeting place and march route will be.

### **Advance Work:**

We want the greatest possible number of people participating in these actions, so pick a public meeting place a couple blocks away, and publicize a time to meet up. Get the message out via social media and good old-fashioned phone calls, and put the event on Fergusonaction.com, and the SURJ facebook page. Make sure you are coordinating with the Ferguson Action media team on press work, and tell the press to come 15-30 minutes later than you are telling people to gather. Make sure you have a meeting in advance for anyone who is risking arrest.

### **Have the Action Team meet an hour early:**

There is a separate document with roles to consider. But have everyone in leadership assemble earlier at the meeting spot to go over the details and plan for the action. Leaders include press people, those who are peacekeepers, police liaisons and others. Please note that we have a definition of Leadership roles and responsibilities later on in this document. Please review carefully to ensure a safe action.

### **As People Arrive:**

Have people going around with clipboards to sign them in. If you have chant or song sheets, as well as any action agreements, hand them out to people.

### **Starting Program:**

Start the program by having the host introduce between 1-3 speakers that you have pre-selected (make sure you tell them how long they have to speak. Keep it brief). Also make sure that you have chants and songs to fire up the crowd. Make sure everyone knows what the plan is, and also what the contingencies are. The people who have agreed to risk arrest should be at the front of the group. Once you have fired up the crowd and you have gained critical mass then begin marching. Do not be afraid to take the street. Keep chanting and singing. You might choose to have someone who is liaising with the police about the march route, you might not. REMEMBER WALK AS SLOWLY AS YOU CAN, KEEP THE GROUP TOGETHER.

### **Getting to the Federal Building:**

There are a few possibilities here. Your job is to get as close to the building or inside the building as you can while still keeping the crowd together. You might be able to get into the lobby and be stopped. They might offer to let everyone through the metal detector to meet with someone. Most likely, you will be met with police and possibly barricades out front, that is perfectly fine.

Initially, you want to stop at whatever the line is and keep chanting or singing. That could be in the lobby, outside at the barricades, or at a police line. Do not be afraid, and do not feel like you have to move quickly, you have all the time in the world.

At that point you will have two or three options. First, they may send someone down and offer you a meeting with the US Attorney (choose whether or not you want to do that in advance. Make sure you have spokespeople who are ready with their message to the US Attorney). Second, you can have people sit down and occupy space for as long as you think people can. If it is a public space, they may give you the opportunity for a longer occupation. If you are thinking about that you may want to have prepared that in advance. Third, you may slowly want to build the tension, and put people at risk of arrest. This could involve:

Announcing that you are slowly and deliberately crossing the line, refusing to leave the lobby, or pushing over/climbing over the barricades. At that point, you will most likely be arrested after a warning or two (though it could happen faster than that.) Remember to keep it peaceful at all times.

They may choose not to arrest you, and let you advance, in which case you slowly take the space and keep up the energy or keep occupying the lobby.

There is a possibility if your crowd is big, they may choose not to arrest, and use tear gas or pepper spray on you. That will be very hard for people, but again if people are willing to sit through it, it sends a very powerful message to the DOJ and beyond.

### **Winding Up:**

Unless you somehow win a permanent occupation, the action will wrap with the crowd dispersing, either through arrests or other means. You should do the following:

- 1) Move remaining people onto the sidewalk, and watch and cheer as arrestees are led to paddy wagons.
- 2) March together back to original meeting spot and lead a debrief, keep people energized, and have next steps you are announcing.

## **SURJ Talking Points for Media & Messaging**

Media spokesperson should identify themselves from an organization (such as your local chapter of SURJ, a sponsoring church, etc.)

Be ready to make one point (over and over again) – Justice for Michael Brown and Eric Garner is essential for justice for us all. We are speaking out for racial justice because as white people we can no longer stand by complacent to black suffering and the disproportionate burden of police violence on black people. This must change now.

1. **CONTEXT:** What happened in Ferguson, and with Eric Garner is not the exception but the rule in a system based on white supremacy. People of Color have endured hundreds of years of systemic racism and oppression. Today one of the main sources of oppression is the mass incarceration system that disproportionately targets Black people, and other People of Color, and a judicial system that does not offer all of us equal protection under the law. At SURJ, we believe that the level of anti-black racism and violence endemic in our system didn't allow for a fair grand jury hearing in Ferguson or for the Eric Garner case.
2. **SOLIDARITY:** What is happening in Ferguson, NYC, and around the country through an increase in police violence impacts all our struggles. When government (via the police) is allowed to kill without consequence, Black people and other People of Color carry the brunt and all our civil liberties are at risk. This puts a chill on all activism. White people need to identify our mutual interest with Black people and other People of Color and what our stake is in making deep and systemic change.
3. **NATIONAL CRISIS:** People of Color have called for White people to act. Black people and other People of Color are putting their bodies on the line and it is time for White people of conscience to do the same. White people need to make a choice, right now. All over the country, White people are already taking nonviolent action, from marching in the streets to creating legal defense funds. These issues affect us all.
4. **WHITE SILENCE:** White silence stokes the racism that divides People of Color and White working class people, who have every reason to stand together for better wages, better air, affordable housing, and an end to war. We need to stand together with communities targeted for police abuse, because otherwise, we cannot build the unity we need to move forward. It is in the interest of white people to stand against this repression for our own lives and those of people we love.
5. **MUTUAL INTEREST:** White people and people of color share a mutual interest in racial justice. White people are not "helping," "doing something for," or even "being an ally" to People of Color. White people are in the struggle because our freedom is linked to the freedom of Black people and other People of color. It is in our mutual interest to break the bonds of racism and oppression.

### **SURJ Action Checklist**

*(Include cell and email next to each person's name)*

Name of Action:

Date of Action:

Location of Action (Address, City, State, Zipcode)

Turnout Goal:

Tactical Team:

Scout(s):

Police Liaison(s):

Peacekeeper(s):

Press Wrangler (Sign Up and Greet):

Press Spokespeople:

Chant Leader(s):

Greeter(s) (Ensure All Sign In)

Sign/Banner/Flyer Maker(s):

Medic(s):

Legal Observer(s)

Photographer(s):

Videographer(s):

MC for Program:

Problem Solver

Jail Support Team:

Detailed Program:

Time	Agenda Item	Who
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## **DEFINITION OF ROLES**

Tactical Team: Leaders (usually 3-4 people) of the action who are the key decision-makers

Scout(s): Scope out site of action, map it out, identify entrances/exits, location/type of security personnel, location of action targets; Also, shortly before action go ahead of time to assess situation and report back to tactical leaders

Recruiter(s): Recruit people to attend the action through social media, phone calls, email, and /or meetings

Leafleter(s): Hand out flyers during the action to passersby

Police Liaison(s): Serve as point of contact with police, identify and speak to the highest ranking officer in charge, communicate and share/gather information based on action plan and interests of protesters

Peacekeeper(s): Group of people identified and prepared in advance to support participants in action to stick to our plan, to de-escalate when necessary, to address needs that may arise, to communicate messages between our police liaison(s)/key organizers and action participants ; often peacekeepers wear something to be easily identified eg arm band/vest

Press Wrangler (Sign Up and Greet): Identify, greet, sign up and connect to our spokespeople all press that arrive

(Click Here for to [DOWNLOAD](#) the Press Sign In Sheet)

Press Spokespeople: Prepared individuals who can speak to the press to deliver our messages. Media spokesperson should identify themselves from an organization (such as your local chapter of SURJ, a sponsoring church , etc.) Be ready to make one point (over and over again- see messaging above.)

Chant Leader(s): Prepped individuals who lead chants (often with bullhorns) and chant sheets to pass out

Greeter(s) (Ensure All Sign In): Sign up all attendees so we can followup with them. Sign up sheet should include name, cell, email, action name, date

Sign/Banner/Flyer Maker(s): Those who prepare and make signs/banners/flyers and bring to action

Medic(s): Those who are trained to help people who have health issues (often have water/granola bars and other items to help those in need)

Photographer(s): Take photos including people holding signs/banners, speakers, crowd shots, upload photos to designated email/website

Videographer(s): Take video of action, speakers, arrests; send video to designated email/website

MC for Program: Lead the program, introduce all speakers/performers, keep energy up

Legal Observer(s): Lawyers who attend the action to observe, take notes and document any police misconduct and to inform tactical team about legal matters

Jail Support Team: Distribute the jail support number, ensure everyone who intends on engaging in civil disobedience fills out and turns in an information sheet; this team goes to the jail to provide support and be present when arrestees are released.

Problem Solvers: Someone whose job it is to deal with unforeseen circumstances. This could be keeping the crowd together, dealing with people who try to interrupt, making a plan for counter-protestors, etc

### **SURJ Action Chants**

Black Lives Matter!

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No Justice! No Peace!

No Racist Police!

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What do we want? Justice

When do we want it? Now

--

Hey Hey, Ho Ho, Racist Cops Have Gotta Go

Jail killer cops

Tell the truth

Stop the lies

Mike Brown didn't have to die

--

Turn up don't turn down

We need justice for Mike Brown

--

Indict, Convict, send the killer cops to jail

The whole damn system is guilty as hell

--

Nobody's free until everybody's free. (fannie lou hamer)

--

White silence equals violence

**Song:**

I can hear my neighbors

Saying I can't breathe

Now I'm in the struggle saying

I can't leave

Calling out the violence of these racist police

We won't stop the struggle, 'til our people are free (2x)

--

which side are you on? which side on are you on?

justice for mike brown is justice for us all

**SURJ Step by Step Action Plan**

**This is an example of what a detailed action plan can look like. Each plan must be geared to local needs/conditions and plans**

10am: Meet at Designated Location Near Department of Justice Office



- Sign up all attendees on sign up sheet
- Review action plan with all participants
- Have all those who plan on engaging in civil disobedience (getting arrested) write jail support number on their body and fill out information sheet.
- Hand out signs and banners
- Scouts go ahead and scope out action site
- Sign up press

10:30am: March to DOJ office

- Peacekeepers spread out and space themselves evenly some in front/middle/end; ensuring marchers stay on route, are safe from traffic
- Chant leaders lead chants
- People hold up signs/banners
- Hand out leaflets to passerbys

10:45am: Arrive at DOJ office

- Those willing to get arrested sit down and lock arms in front of entrance to DOJ/Federal Building
- Police liaison engage police
- Tactical team guiding action and directing peacekeepers
- Each arrestee has signs and messages on shirts that can be seen by media
- Others gather in front of them chanting and singing and holding signs
- MC runs program including chants, short speeches/testimony
- Photographers/videographers documenting action
- Press wranglers continue to identify/sign up/connect press with spokespeople/arrestees

11:15am: Police give first warning that people are trespassing and are subject to arrest if they do not move (police liaison can sometimes determine exactly how many warnings police give until arrests)

- All those who do not intend on getting arrested move to sidewalk where they are not subject to arrest; they keep chanting
- When police move in to arrests, people chant and support arrestees; take pics/video

11:20am: Jail support team goes to jail and works to pay bail and to get people out as soon as possible

11:30am: Action ends

- Documenters upload photos and video to designated website/email
- Press points keep working press and share press articles/spots as they come up
- Quick debrief of action
- Schedule longer phone or face to face debrief within a few days



## **Legal Support**

Legal support can be as simple as being accessible by phone or hotline, logging information on arrests and arrestees' legal status, and finding legal representation for people who get prosecuted.

Here is some more info on the nuts and bolts of providing legal support:

Basic primer by the Austin People's Law Collective on what it means to provide legal support:  
<http://vimeo.com/48911058>

Info on how to provide legal support at the affinity (small) group level:  
<http://midnightspecial.net/files/legalsupportperson.pdf>

Info on forming a larger legal support apparatus and legal office:  
[http://midnightspecial.net/files/Office\\_Setup\\_9.01.pdf](http://midnightspecial.net/files/Office_Setup_9.01.pdf)

If you have any questions at all, please don't hesitate to contact:

Sarah Coffey at [coffey529@gmail.com](mailto:coffey529@gmail.com) or Kris Hermes at [krisherme@earthlink.net](mailto:krisherme@earthlink.net)

## **About SURJ**

### **Mission**

SURJ is a national network of groups and individuals organizing white people for racial justice. Through community organizing, mobilizing, and education, SURJ moves white people to act as part of a multi-racial majority for justice with passion and accountability. We work to connect people across the country while supporting and collaborating with local and national racial justice organizing efforts. SURJ provides a space to build relationships, skills, and political analysis to act for change.

For more information please visit our website: <http://www.ShowingUpForRacialJustice.org/>

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