

"SHELL IS CLOSED"

INDIFFERENCE, CHAOS, AND LIES AT SHELL

By Kartel West, president of ONE TEAM ONE PLAN ONE BRAND

When the thought of ONE TEAM ONE PLAN ONE BRAND came into existence, we had an overabundance of ideas. Our mentoring, S.T.E.M., and foreign language programs would change the community. So, we designed every program to help our community in the present and the future. The instructors would teach our curriculum and become positive mentors in the lives of the youth in our programs. I am not the face of O.T.O.P.O.B. That would be my brother and founder, Carlos West. But as president, I must openly express the values and teachings we wish to give our mentees. Bearing that in mind, I know that every working member of ONE TEAM ONE PLAN ONE BRAND must be a positive role model around our mentees and, more importantly, not around them. Many of our youth lack the most basic concepts of life, like the complete understanding of right and wrong. If we plan to take our male youth from boys, to teens, to productive men, the first concept they must learn is right and wrong. If we can instill this in them in conjunction with the tools our curriculum offers, the end product will be productive members of society. With this result, we succeed in our goal and mission as a nonprofit helping our women, our children, and our community.

On July 19, 2021, Nakeyah Smith, daughter of Tee Nay Smith, went into the Shell station located at 1445 E Sibley Blvd. in Dolton, Illinois. She only desired to use the restroom. After initially being denied entry by Richard Williams, Keeyah asserts that a female employee gave her access. The store refutes her assertions of the story. However, the aftermath of what happened is beyond denial. Richard Williams brutally and viciously attacked Keeyah. First, he choked her, depriving her airway of the oxygen needed to breathe. Then, with a closed fist, this coward clubbed her over and over again until she was almost unconscious. If her family did not break the glass doors to let her out, there is no telling what could have happened next. Richard Williams, you are a coward and disgrace to all black males that genuinely call

themselves men. As a father of beautiful girls, what I witnessed in the video is the most appalling act of cowardice I have ever seen. Women should never have to go through this. My lifelong mentor is my Dad, Charles West. He is what I have always strived to become. I've always looked up to him as a black man, father, and husband. He never raised one finger to my mother. God bless her soul! While watching this video, the only comparison I can think of is the Ray Rice video over five years ago. I have not met Keeyah personally but have talked to her on facetime. She is a beautiful young black woman with so much promise and potential. I, Kartel West, on behalf of all men, especially black men, would like to personally apologize for the hideous act perpetrated by someone of my gender and race. If anyone reading this Op-ed watched any of our protests at the Shell station, I consistently professed that I could say "Shell is closed" in three languages. So I will give you, Nakeyah Smith, the respect to make my apology in the three languages in which I am fluent. Keeyah, I am sorry (English.) Keeyah, lo siento (Spanish.) Keeyah, sinto muito (Portuguese.)

Common sense tells me that Keyah will be forever traumatized. She has gone through some mental health counseling and will probably need more from talking to her mom. She will be permanently affected by this act. Adding insult to an already horrible act is how this Indian-owned gas station has handled the situation. Before I talk about how the owner and store manager, an Indian national, have entirely mishandled this situation like two misfits from the Island of Misfit Toys, I must first give the lay of the land. According to the 2020 U.S. Census, Dolton village has a population of 21,426 people. 92.5% African American, 4.8% White, 1.8% Hispanic or Latino, 0.5% Asian. For those of us that were not good at Geography, the country of India is considered part of Asia. Why is this important? Businesses must have knowledge of and compassion for the communities in which they choose to function. They should not or can not operate in such a manner that they are entirely indifferent to the very people of which they monetize.

"Chaos At a Local Station Has Community Displeased" is the title of the letter John Kottoor, the store manager, left as an apology. It is my opinion that this letter highlights how shamefully indifferent

this owner, store manager, and employees are to the feelings of the Smith family and community they monetize as to what happened on that dreadful night. The letter reads:

"CHAOS At a Local Station Has Community Displeased"

Dolton, IL- M.V.K. Corporation, d/b/a Dolton Shell gas station, 1445 E. Sibley Blvd, Dolton, IL is under fire after an employee and a young woman in their store got into a physical altercation. Monday night, June 19th, a young woman entered the gas station and asked to use their public bathroom. The employees explained that the public bathroom was closed because of their COVID-19 protocols. The woman insisted, then proceeded to the back of store and urinated on the floor. When one of the employees caught her, he locked the door to wait for police to arrive, which caused the altercation between them.

Since then, the community has been protesting in front of the gas station, attempting to block drivers, deterring business. John Kottoor, the manager of the gas station, explained that he is very sorry about this unfortunate event, and that he did not agree with the extreme, aggressive actions of that employee. "He was immediately fired. I do not condone that type of behavior from my employees, ever. That was not handled properly, and I apologize to that young lady and her family."

Kottoor, who has been the manager there for years, explained that there has never been a problem like that at his gas station and that he has always showed kindness whenever he could to the community. "I would tell kids to show me their good grades to get free candy and snacks and based out food to the homeless that would be standing around the station." The manager is hoping that his neighbors will understand and not take the employee's appalling behavior as a reflection of the manager's views towards the community."

W.O.W.... As I copied this despicable attempt of an apology, I, in truth, had more desire to return to Shell and reinitiate our protests, or as we call it, their complete economic castration. Instead, I will go from start to finish to explain the lack of common decency by these representatives of, based on 2020 revenues, the fifth-largest company in the world. The first sentence is misleading. They call this a "physical altercation" between two people. They should deem it a physical attack by a spineless man perpetrated against a beautiful, defenseless young woman. He should have been immediately

terminated. He wasn't. I will get to that later. The second sentence reads, "Monday night, June 19th, a young woman entered the gas station and asked to use their public bathroom." WRONG!!!! According to google's dictionary, the definition of the word 'indifferent' is "having no particular interest or sympathy; unconcerned." In this case, what better example of indifference is there than a store owner and manager not even taking the time to get the date of this assault correct in their apology? Was this just a mistake because they didn't care to take the time to write the facts? Or was this done intentionally to mislead the public by suggesting it happened long ago, and as such, it should be forgiven and forgotten?

I work for a company that genuinely worries about COVID-19 protocols. Not following them is a fireable offense. Yet, during 29 days of protests, not one time did I witness an employee walk out of the store, come to a window, or greet customers with a mask dawned. COVID-19 protocols? I question that.

Now, here is where the stories vary. First, the store refutes Keyah's claim that she was allowed to use the bathroom. Then they suggest that Keyah, with malice and forethought, went to the rear of the store to urinate. They then allege that Richard Williams' act of securing the door was to make sure she stayed in the store until the police arrived, and this act is what caused "the altercation between them." Let's first set the record straight. Mr. Coward Williams nor anyone working in the store that night called the police. The family contacted the police after his attack against Keyah. Next, I was not there to see where she used the bathroom. But I do know that this in no way justifies a man brutally beating a woman, as I saw in the video. I mentioned earlier in this op-ed the comparison of the 2014 Ray Rice video. In my opinion, this brutal act perpetrated upon Ms. Smith was worse in comparison just by the sheer number of blows she took from this coward. During my time protesting this act, I heard that Keyah deserved what she got from a handful of African American men who broke our protest line and went into the store. They suggested that a woman urinating on the floor in their homes would have resulted in a much worse beating.

As a black man, my response to them during our protests and to you now is 'shame on you.' Shame on you for not giving our women value. Shame on you for making our women feel unprotected within their own community. Isn't it bad enough that we as a black race already have to deal with other races looking down on us because of the actions of a few rotten apples? I don't care if Keyah defecated in the aisle. One act does not justify another. And honestly, after seeing the extent the representatives of this store will lie to hide the truth, I believe Keyah.

Next is the horrible attempt at an apology. In a complaining tone, it starts with how we were protesting in front of the Shell as if they had done nothing wrong. Then, it suggests that we were attempting to deter business from their establishment. To the owner and manager, I will say, yes, we were. Unfortunately, your store does not deserve our financial support or business until you learn to respect the same community for whom you wish to make money. I genuinely do not understand how the remaining employees, all African American, can remain employed by an owner and manager that not only allowed such an atmosphere of indifference toward black people but enabled it. There are thousands of jobs out there. COVID has created a job market unlike any other in my lifetime. There is no excuse to remain employed by someone that openly shows distaste and resentment towards the very people they wish to become enriched.

"He was immediately fired. I do not condone that type of behavior from my employees, ever. That was not handled properly, and I apologize to that young lady and her family," said Mr. Kottoor. Really? Is this truly your sincere attempt at an apology? Let's break this down. First, you did not terminate this coward immediately. He only was fired after the protests started. Second, it came to our attention from an employee of your store that this was not Mr. Williams' first act of violence toward a woman within the walls of this Shell station. It was the second. It was confirmed to me by the lawyer of the first victim. The funny thing is that this confirmation came on the same day that I sat down with you, Mr. Kottoor, the store owner, and someone calling himself "only a mediator." We talked about relations within the community

and what I thought you could do to better them. I mentioned this first incident to you, sir. You looked me in my eyes and swore it did not happen—shame on you.

Do you think I or members of my race are so inept that we cannot do simple things like research? The notion that you "do not condone that type of behavior from my(your) employees, ever" is a bald-faced lie. And to the actual apology, which is apologizing for the way the incident was handled and not apologizing for a representative of your Shell family savagely attacking Ms. Smith, is an insult to her, her family and friends, and the entire black community. Shame on you. Your feeble attempt at trying to explain what Mr. Kottoor does in the community was pathetic. Should we applaud you for your claim that you gave free candy and snacks to kids with good grades? In my opinion, giving our youth poison is not praiseworthy and does not excuse you for your lack of human decency in dealing with Ms. Smith and her family.

I talked about my dad early in this op-ed and referred to him as my mentor. He mentored kids in the communities of which he had businesses and my twin brother, Carlos. His calm, laid-back demeanor gained him respect from everyone. People in the community praised him, referring to him as a godfather-type figure. He was successful in business because he was the embodiment of a person of character and kindness. No one could ever question his word. His loyalty endured, maybe to a fault. In my opinion, Carlos overlearned this lesson of loyalty.

Against the advice of others, Carlos entered the store in the early stages of our siege to film the store's conditions. In a live feed on Facebook, he showed how dirty it was. He showed broken tile. He showed mold. Carlos demonstrated to the public how this store had no regard for our community just by showing the conditions of this place. Management again showed its lack of character at the end of our twenty-nine-day siege of this Shell station. From their private footage, management altered the video and attempted an attack against Carlos' character and loyalty to the cause. The video shows him entering the store and going to the counter with his phone. It shows him walking around the store. From one person's

account, the poorly edited video stops here. They then falsely accuse him of purchasing a lottery ticket. This lie was shown to the few customers that entered the store. They showed the video to some of our fellow protestors. They showed the edited footage to Destiny, the sister of Keyah. When she questioned to see the rest of the video showing Carlos purchasing the lottery ticket, they could not produce it. He is my twin brother. I know him better than anyone. I have NEVER known him to play the lottery except for purchasing tickets for my parents years ago. He was personally at this location protesting every day for 29 days, except the few days we stood down to talk to the representatives of this store. Does it make sense that someone who sometimes protested for 16 hours a day, in the rain, by himself on occasion, yelling to the very top of his lungs "SHELL IS CLOSED" to cross the same line he drew not to cross? You cannot question the loyalty of someone that lives loyalty on their sleeves, as my brother does. He nor I gained monetarily from our supporting of this family and the community. We did it to show our O.T.O.P.O.B. mentees the difference between good and bad, right and wrong, just and unjust.

This edited video was the last of many attempts to stop our protest. A few days prior, the store manager openly lied about Carlos being on the store grounds. Dolton police instructed us as to where we could protest. Being the face of our ONE TEAM ONE PLAN ONE BRAND's presence at the protests, Carlos was personally given a heads up by excellent honorable officers of that department. Less than a few hours later, six to eight police patrol vehicles drove into the Shell station. A Caucasian officer entered the store to talk to the store manager. Exiting the Shell store, he approached Carlos, who was on the sidewalk. The officer demanded my brother turn around and put his hands behind his back in a very assertive tone. "You are under arrest," the policeman said. Carlos complied. The angry policeman told him he was going to jail, claiming that the store manager accused Carlos of going on store property. Seeing this injustice transpire, two officers approached this white officer, and in a very aggressive tone, told him to "get him out of those damn handcuffs. He has not done anything wrong." On behalf of my brother and myself, I would like to thank these African American officers, who know who they are, for standing up for what is right. Why did the word of this Indian manager mean more than the word of my

brother, a college-educated black male? This attempted showing of entitlement or privilege did not go unnoticed by these brave black officers nor us.

During this twenty-nine-day economic castration, I found a mole planted into our protest. After relaying my suspicions of this mole, Carlos discovered this individual offering money to protest with us. He put up misleading flyers offering \$25.00 per protestor. This spy also had a sign that read "F... Kim Foxx." Let's make it clear. He was not with us. Mrs. Foxx, I apologize for the actions of this mole. We in no way condone what he attempted to do. In my opinion, someone sent this mole to delegitimize our protest. I don't know if this was the Shell store's idea or someone else's. I do know that it didn't work.

The store finally hired a licensed and bonded security company as we demanded; however, this demand was only met after attempting to insult our intelligence by first hiring a Barney Fife-type security guard moonlighting from his regular job. He wore his uniform, badge, and sidearm from his primary employer to work, on the side, at this Shell. He hit on women. He openly expressed that although hired as a security guard, he was not going to provide security. Finally, on day three of his employment, he opened his uniform shirt, lit a cigarette, and joined the protest. He even got on the megaphone and bellowed, "Shell is closed." With this embarrassment being broadcast live on Facebook, the Shell station finally met our demand and hired a licensed and bonded security company.

In general, the public stayed on our side. Our slogan, "SHELL IS CLOSED," was used strategically. We used the slogan in conjunction with full explanations in English and Spanish as to why we were there. When prospective customers asked why the Shell was closed, we explained in detail and showed the horrible video. Most were so horrified that they thanked us and quickly left the property. They left at the dismay of ownership, knowing the financial impact we were making on them. According to Omega West Virginia Oil Marketers & Grocers Association and quora.com, the average gas station sells 4000-6000 gallons per day. The price of gas was \$3.56 per gallon at the beginning of our protests. That comes out to \$14,240-21,360 per day. These are the losses of an average gas station location. This Shell station is

not in an average location. Upon exiting Interstate 94 Sibley Blvd exit, this Shell is the first store seen. It is also located at a major intersection. It is one of only two gas stations within a 5-mile radius located directly off the interstate. It also has name recognition. SHELL. If I were to guess from my research, I would think this single station grosses at least \$30,000-35,000 per day in gas sales alone. This does not include lottery, liquor, or food & snacks sales. Not the average gas station, in my estimation.

This atrocious act of cowardice happened to Nakeyah Smith. She will forever be affected by it. I offer my knowledge and service whenever I can to help you and your family heal from this ordeal. But now, just as in the George Floyd case, it is not only about Keyah but all women that face violence at the hands of cowardly men. It's about how we are treated as a community by white privilege, Indian privilege, or any people that feel as if they are privileged at the expense of African Americans. It's about how they come into our neighborhoods to line their pockets but remain indifferent to the community. It's about how we can no longer allow it to go unchecked. It's about a societal problem of normalizing untruths, not calling out these untruths as lies, and not treating these lies as alternative facts.

People ask why ONE TEAM ONE PLAN ONE BRAND, an organization founded to help our women, children, and community by giving children the resources needed to succeed in life, would get involved in this case. It's about how we must value our most precious resource, the woman. These are the morals we plan on giving our mentees. If you don't know the value of the thing, abuse is inevitable. We can teach our mentees the difference between right and wrong, but wouldn't it be better to give them a real-life experience? When I studied Spanish and Portuguese, I did not learn by only reading the material. I learned by actually using the language. The many lessons shown within this single Shell incident are just as powerful as being immersed in a foreign language—excellent lessons for our kids.

My best friend, Aljean Lewis, sent us a message on our Facebook page. He said, "be the miracle." He didn't know that this was the nickname given to me by my mom as I defeated death at birth and again in college. It could be my mom speaking from heaven thru my friend, or just his thoughts. But I will say,

Aljean, mom, we are the miracle. I did learn those teachings of right and wrong. One Shell station at a time, I will pass on those teachings. One Shell station at a time, we will take all of society from boys, to teens, to productive men. One shell station at a time.

"SHELL IS CLOSED!!!!"