



**National
Urban League**

To Be Equal #18

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NBA Commissioner Slam Dunks His First Crisis

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"Effective immediately, I am banning Mr. Sterling for life from any association with the Clippers organization or the NBA...I will urge the Board of Governors to exercise its authority to force a sale of the team and will do everything in my power to ensure that that happens." NBA Commissioner Adam Silver

Last week, Adam Silver, who has only been Commissioner of the National Basketball Association (NBA) for three months, made a bold leadership statement when he took swift and tough action in response to hateful and racist comments made by Los Angeles Clippers owner Donald Sterling. We applaud Silver's lifetime ban of Sterling and his unambiguous insistence on respecting the racial diversity among players and fans for which the league is known. First a quick recap.

On April 25, TMZ, the celebrity news website, aired the audio tape of a conversation between Sterling and his girlfriend. During their conversation, Sterling said in part: *"It bothers me a lot that you want to broadcast that you're associating with Black people. Do you have to? ... You can sleep with them. You can bring them in, you can do whatever you want. The little I ask you is not to promote it ... and not to bring them to my games."*

This sparked an instant firestorm of outrage among the general public, the NBA, the Clippers organization and team sponsors. The National Urban League called on Commissioner Silver to take an "uncompromising stand against any form of prejudice in the NBA," where more than 75% of the players are African American. We also called for Sterling's lifetime ban.

After a quick and thorough investigation, Commissioner Silver took decisive action. In a widely anticipated April 29 press conference, he announced that he was imposing a lifetime ban on Sterling, fining him the maximum \$2.5 million and setting in motion the process to force Sterling to sell his team. In announcing his decision, Silver said, "I am personally distraught that the views expressed by Mr. Sterling came from within an institution that has historically taken such a leadership role in matters of race relations and caused current and former players, coaches, fans and partners of the NBA to question their very association with the league."

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The National Urban League joined a coalition of civil rights organizations in immediately applauding Silver's actions. At a time when racial divisions are being obscured or denied in such areas as voting rights, income inequality, affirmative action and criminal justice, Silver displayed the kind of leadership on tough, uncomfortable issues that is defining and legacy-building. This was his first crisis as Commissioner, and he handled it exceptionally well. He did not run from the issue of race and racism as many might have advised him to do. Instead, he confronted the issue with compassion and common sense and opened a much-needed dialogue about a path forward for the NBA.

We are encouraged by Commissioner Silver's demonstration of courage, especially at this early juncture in his tenure. We look forward to working with him to deepen diversity and inclusion in the league, especially in the ownership ranks.

This controversy was also especially disruptive to Clippers head coach Doc Rivers and his players, who were in the midst of a first-round playoff series with the Golden State Warriors. But Rivers, too, displayed extraordinary judgment and dignity as he found the right balance between allowing his players to express their outrage while keeping them focused on winning.

Now, with the Los Angeles Clippers' victory in their seven game play-off series with the Golden State Warriors, it's on to the second round. With the Sterling controversy behind them, the players can focus all of their attention on the NBA championship – and as fans of the game, we can be even more proud of the league in which they play.

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