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Commentary

Hoodies Up, SAHM! Preventing Adversity Because of Racism for the Next Generation

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As a mom now raising an African American preteen boy and a teenaged daughter, these recent cases in the media terrify me. However, I guess that is the ultimate intention of lynching and other threats of harm to control used for generations in the U.S. [1]. The Floyd case is awful because it was completely preventable, and the 9-year-old child who witnessed this now has an adverse childhood experience that will haunt their dreams forever [2]. The Arbery case brought us back to the time of our ancestors when justice was so blinded to protect assailants that it failed to protect the victims and serve as an expected equalizing leveler for society [3]. Finally, the Cooper case confirms that having your bootstraps pulled up, a Harvard degree, and the law on your side does not protect African American men without the video evidence. As seen in the Philando Castile case just 4 years ago, having proof may not even be enough [4,5]. Before his death in front of his girlfriend's 4-year daughter, he had already been stopped 49 times for minor infractions by the police [6]. It was if this final stop was inevitable for this man who spent his life ensuring that children in the public elementary school where he worked received nutritious meals every day. It all draws me back to the unrest in Baltimore after the death of Freddie Gray [7] and how now just as we seem to be recovering, the health disparities of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) hold the city hostage [8].

It would seem that during the hard-hitting COVID-19 global pandemic, we would all be kinder, gentler, and more supportive of one another as we are all in this together. Sadly, tribalism and its associated racism are so powerful to the psyche such that in times of distress, we see two extremes—the debasement of humanity alongside the absolute goodness and bravery of others. I am trying to be grateful for the latter while teaching my children how to protect themselves when they are without me. This is particularly critical now as we can no longer be protected by my late husband who saw this as his mission, and something our family we could always count on. Although my daughter is

emerging into womanhood with tremendous beauty and grace, she is also quick witted like her father. My precious boy still has that prepubescent baby face dotted with a dimple when he smiles, but I know these softened features may not protect him unless we work harder to change the world.

It has been tiring for a long time, but I learned as a child growing up in a different time to never forget and never give up. I have also learned that real change comes from both advocates and allies who bravely move in unison to create true change. I see the differential response to protests about discrimination by communities of color where officers are armed with riot gear and tear gas, while armed men storm government buildings untouched as they protest public health measures designed to protect us [9,10]. Our children see these differences, and it impacts their consciousness and their perceived self-value in society [11].

I am so grateful to the members of SAHM diversity committee who are actively tackling these issues while many of them are also hard at work on the front lines of patient care during the COVID-19 pandemic. My heart goes to the communities affected by these acts and the families these men leave behind. As a community, we must work harder to protect the current and next generation of youth we care for so that they do not fall victim to these experiences just “adolescenting” while black.

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