

Confessions of a Black Mom

Breonna Taylor. Ahmaud Arbery. George Floyd. These are just a few of the names of Black people that have died by acts of hate or police brutality.

While you may recognize these names because of high profile incidents that happened this year, I want to take you back a few years to 2016.

Philando Castile, was a 32 year-old young man who was pulled over for a routine traffic stop. After a brief conversation, the cop opened fire 7 times, striking Philando 5 times. His girlfriend and daughter witnessed his murder. They were in the vehicle as well. A woman helplessly watched the man she loved die. A daughter had her father ripped away from her permanently.

Now I'll admit, I've become a bit desensitized to Black Death. There are so many instances in the news and media that shows Black people dying due to violence. I don't know why. Maybe it was because we were the exact same age. Or the fact that he had a family and they were driving together, just minding their business. But, this particular case got to me.

I remember driving to church with my family and I just broke down crying to my husband. "What do we tell the Boys? How are we going to protect them?" Those scary thoughts ran through my mind then. My heart filled with pain.

Fast forward to 2020. The world watched the unconscionable killing of George Floyd. I chose not watch the video. However, after reading and listening to several new conferences, initial reports said the officer's knee was on his neck for 8 minutes and 46 seconds. **8 minutes and 46 seconds this man, this HUMAN, couldn't breath and begged for air...for life.** I told myself I wouldn't cry. This situation would not get my tears. However, I heard that George called for his mother. His mom is deceased. She passed away two years ago. I immediately thought of my youngest son, Cameron.

Cameron just turned 10. Luckily for me, he still loves to cuddle with his mama. At some point throughout each day, he finds me and lays on me for a while. He's still a bit scared of storms so when there's thunder and lightning, he comes and wakes me up. You see, I'm his safe place. I'm his refuge. What happens when I'm not there to protect him? What if he's somewhere where someone is violating his rights? What am I supposed to do then?

Those thoughts made me sick to my stomach. I was nauseous and upset for days. I won't sugarcoat it. It's hard being a Black woman in America. It's especially tough raising Black sons. There's a particular kind of anguish and fear a Black mom feels for her children. And it's NOT ok.

After much thought I came to a conclusion...This is not the earth I want my Sons to inherit. I resolved right then and there to do whatever it takes to make it a better place.

When Mr. Groom reached out and extended the opportunity to join the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Committee, it was a no brainer for me. I admit, the thought of being Chair was daunting at first. But I remembered how much Fenwick means to me. Knowing that there are some Friars who feel ostracized, demoralized and discriminated against fuels me.

I was shocked and saddened reading some of the stories on the *Being a BIPOC Friar* Instagram page.

One thing is abundantly clear, we, the entire Fenwick community, MUST do better! We are all human. And we are all part of one race...the Human race. Every member of Friar Nation deserves to be treated with dignity and respect. Fenwick should be a safe space for everyone to learn and grow.

My number one goal as Chair is to create effective, long lasting change in Fenwick's culture. We must lead with Compassion and Love. We have a long journey ahead of us. At times it will be uncomfortable and sometimes downright frustrating. However, we must stay the course and remember we're in this together.

If you have any questions, concerns you'd like to voice or simply want to connect, please feel free to reach out to inclusion@fenwickfriars.com.

I look forward to serving you and Fenwick community.

Here for You,

Shafondra Matthews

Shafondra Matthews
Chair, Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Committee
Class of 2001