

Being Seen, or Rather, a Lack Thereof

by Maamle Adjoka-Nartey

To be black in America has surely got to be one of the strangest experiences to ever occur. You go about your life and one day suddenly, you become aware of your complexion. You become aware of the person you are in the eyes of many. You begin to see yourself the way others see you, and it gets you thinking of who you are. What is it you identify as, and how will the way others see you affect the ways in which you see yourself?

Surviving each day in America as a black woman is a battle on its own. We battle society trying to prove that we have so much to give. In that battle we must fight harder than our white counterparts, but we must not forget that society sees us as aggressive, loud, or the “mad black woman” if we get too passionate about a topic. But still we must fight. We must fight the unrealistic standards placed on us, whether it be with our natural hair not being seen as professional enough, the hyper-sexualization of black women, the disregard for the pain we feel, or having to live up to the title of “strong black woman”, we must continue to fight. As tired as we are of having to always be strong, we must fight. We must fight for our black men who are deemed as predators and are constantly on the watch from society, waiting to make a wrong move, proving that the negative stereotypes placed on them, on us as black people, are in fact true. Each day we get up and we fight to survive.

All we desire is for our voices, after hundreds of years of suppression of our lives and our voices, to be heard. It breaks my heart to see that such extreme measures must be taken before people are able to have a glimpse of the struggles we face every day. Why must history continue to repeat itself before we are seen even in the slightest bit? It took the Civil Rights Movement, which many don't seem to comprehend was a mere 60 years ago, for there to be some movement of integration and a taste of equality for black people. Sixty years later, we are having another Civil Rights Movement, labeled as the Black Lives Matter Movement, to get people to see the

pain we endure on a regular basis. Why, why must it take a measure so drastic to be seen? We talk and complain day after day, yet it takes an uproar, a worldwide unrest to get people to see the pain we endure on a regular a basis.

Our people are dying. Our people are dying at the hands of those meant to protect us. And for what? Because they fear for their lives. They fear for their lives due to the implicit bias they have towards our people. Why it that our lives are seen as so easily disposable? Why is murder the first option? Why are our lives, seen as so easily disposable? Even as we wail in the streets, screaming for justice to be served, seeking for the injustice to be seen, we are being ignored. With every guilty officer acquitted of their murder, we are being silenced. It is a slap to the face each time. It is as though we are being told that our lives do not matter. We can shout from the rooftops in pain, but we are deemed as thugs, ruffians, and people who play the victim, but what else is left to do but to raise our voices and fight.

Even in our pain many white people see us as selfish people who do not see other lives as important. I cannot stress this enough, everyone's life matters without a doubt. The problem at hand is that black lives are being taken away, and haven been taken away for hundreds of years and we are tired. We feel as though society doesn't seem to care for our lives and we must bring attention to that. We must acknowledge the trauma caused to black people by this country, not simply deciding not to see color or being uncomfortable by the topic. We want to be seen. We want to be heard. Until change is made, we will continue to shout from the hilltops: Black Lives Matter.