

Reflect & Empower: What Black Lives Matter Means to Me

by Jacqueline T. Thomas

Many people look at the Black Lives Matter Movement as a whole and rarely stop to think of it on an individual level. What Black Live Matter Means to Me is securing safety for my two Black grandsons. My grandsons will soon transition into this world of an invisible separation of the races, unequal justice, a divided education system, and economic systems. Eight minutes and forty-six seconds was not the start of the injustice on Black Live but is the straw that broke the camel's back. A modern-day lynching on national television, and in the next moment justified not only by the police but some in the very social settings they encounter every day. Black Lives Matter did not start now, but now that it is here, it will continue to echo nationally and internationally. Not only hear Us! but Listen to us, listen when we seek justice, listen when we seek equality, listen when we tell you Something is Not Right! These issues matter, school to prison pipeline, private prisons, police accountability, education funding, and effective representation in federal, state, and local government. Public entities must look like America; the very America built on evil, lies, thievery, death, and destruction; inequality has gone too long, and the voices of Black Lives Matter is the voice of frustration. Everyone can do something. If you are not going to fight for yourself, fight for future generations. Leave the earth better than when you were on it.

The last five to six years have been trying times, and it has affected everyone differently. The preteens ages 13+ are confused; when they were born, we had an African American President. Next, they witnessed a woman running for President, so this generation has no idea race or female inequality was an ordinary day for some. To name a few of the most talked-about deaths, Sandra Bland, Mike Brown, Breonna Taylor, and countless others. To have Trump, Sean Hannity, Attorney General Barr, and others justified these deaths and expressed how they somehow contributed to their murders is not only confusing, it puts a value on Black lives. My

great-nephew asked, "when they kill a Black person, why do they talk about all the bad stuff they did, but when Bret Kavanaugh was in front of the Senate, they said his bad stuff was in the past?" the only way to answer this is with the truth, "Because he's a white person baby because he's white." At this moment, I have to tell his dad, "you need to talk with your son." For many who are not aware, Black parents have two "The Talk" with their children, the first use to be about sex, and the other about the color of their skin and how people will treat you, including the police who are supposed to protect you. Expectations are a guaranteed path to a letdown; I expect people to do what they want to do until you hold them accountable. Voters must hold elected politicians responsible and not just to their base. Elected officials cannot be held accountable without a list of demands. I cannot expect anything if I do not do my part and encourage voting, encourage trade school when college is not economically feasible, get involved in your local government because this is where it starts. Get involved. Everyone can do something.

What I envision and what will happen are distinctly different things. I imagine the Black Lives Matter Movement taking a breath and refocusing its energy. Continue their peaceful protest, focus on the legislature, hold politicians accountable, create lobbyists to ensure a voice is in Congress, focus on economic equality, and create a platform for Black people to develop financial agency for their families. Demanding government boards such as the postal service to have diversity and inclusion. Also, start a streamlined process for more African Americans to become teachers in the communities in which they live. The organization has already proven they are not a moment but a movement. Still, to be taken seriously by society, BLM would need to continue the fight for education, finances, politics, and agency. Thank you to the creators and sponsors of this Writing Reflection Contest, you allowed me to express and vent my frustrations without interruption, judgment, and I am so grateful for that. This essay, to some, may not be

scholarship material but allowed me to take an unknown, very needed deep breath and exhale my body has been longing to take. Thank you.