

Jacob Blake and the Repeated Cost of Black Pain In America

The tragic shooting of Jacob Blake continues to highlight that the reoccurrence of Black pain in America is still as apparent and dire as ever.

Murjani Rawls
2 hr



Courtesy Adria-Joi Watkins via AP

Sigh. When I first wrote about George Floyd’s death back on May 28th, I wrote these words: “Can I sit here and honestly say to you that instances like this won’t happen again? No. I give you a resounding no. More than likely, I’ll be right back in this chair typing another version of this again.”

Guess what? I was right. I’m right back in the same chair writing about another instance of police brutality. I wish I wasn’t. It’s like a cruel reoccurrence of Groundhog’s Day. To be Black in America is to have a splinter of hope that it won’t happen again, but knowing it will. It’s sitting in this chair and typing my feelings about it happening again and hoping that myself or people I care about are not next.

This time, it’s in reference to Jacob Blake who lives in Kenosha, Wisconsin. As per his attorney, he was breaking up a fight between two women. The police were called and walking back to the driver’s seat of his car, he was shot seven times in front of his three children. Now recovering in the hospital, he is partially paralyzed with very little hopes that he will be able to walk again.

The video has been seen on the internet nine million times. That’s nine million times of people seeing a Black man getting shot in the back seven times which damaged Blake’s spinal cord and liver. All Black people want is progress. We want to live because our lives matter, too. However, we are still greeted with videos of our deaths and tales of our injuries that didn’t have to happen. They never have to happen. Don’t you think that there is something wrong where instances like Jacob Blake and Breonna Taylor happen and no one gets held accountable for them? There’s a slap on the wrist, a suspension, maybe a firing - but there are very little prosecutions. We win civil suits in court because people have decided that Black lives lost have a monetary value and not worthy of justice.

What has happened since I wrote in May? Well, some have doubled down on keeping the systems of systemic racism in place. We’ve posted Black squares, corporations posted their statements and donated money, and book lists were shared. Yes, the protests continue. Some people have continued to share documents and petitions on social media. A good amount of people continues to fight the good fight and realize that this is a problem that has been engrained in American society for too long.

Also, we got our sports back. NBA playoffs march on. MLB plays to empty stadiums. NFL is gearing up to come back on our TV screens. Some people have thrown caution to the wind during the pandemic (that’s a whole other complicated issue). Yet, these murders continue to happen. It’s as if the cries and screams of Black Americans get further pushed to the side as the vestiges of what we consider normal life come back. Or is it the problem that Black pain is the normal way of life. The protests and fights for change are not popular in the algorithms of social media.

Again, I wish I didn’t have to write this. I wish I didn’t see a man get shot in front of his three children seven times. Those children have to live with that image for the rest of their lives. Ask any Black friend, spouse, or family member - they all have racist trauma they have to live with. Instances like Jacob Blake are tacked on to a debt that we don’t deserve to carry. When the Black squares are gone, the reading is done, and the people go home - Black people around the country have to wrestle with the sinking feeling in their stomach when they get pulled over by police.

All we want is reform. We want accountability. Most of all, we want tangible action on those two fronts. Not just lip service. Not just Photoshop fonts with good wishes and prayers. Until this country decides to get serious, many Black people like me will sit exasperated and drained - wondering if we’re next. Black people do not grow numb to this. You shouldn’t either.

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