

Being Aware and Making a Difference is not a Trend; It's a Lifestyle

By Shawnta S. Barnes - August 21, 2017

Us watching the now woke white folks fighting against the racist white folks they are just now realizing exist.

Let us try to tear down some monuments while fighting racism...#whiteprivilege



Although I know the hatred spewed in Charlottesville, VA is deplorable and wrong, I carried on with business as usual. I spoke to an older Black gentleman about what took place and he said, "It's mostly racist white folks clashing with supposedly non-racist white folks." Even them being unmasked at their rally wasn't shocking because hatred and systematic racism has always been visible to me. If it took this event for you to realize we have a problem in this country, it's about time, but don't pat yourself on the back too soon. When the media surrounding this event declines and the next topic starts trending, will you still be concerned? Will you still be willing to fight the good fight?

This is why I was not up in alarm about this situation. There were many articles written about how to respond, how to cope, how to talk to children about this event, and how schools and educators should address it, but this is not a one time conversation. Before the Charlottesville's event on Saturday, August 12th, I was already having these critical conversations in the classroom and with family and friends. As my former students will tell you, I used to place a sign on my door which read, "Bring your textbooks to class." We rarely used them, so I had to remind them to bring them on the day when I wanted to use them. As a Black child, I wished I had more teachers that looked like me, but I also wanted my teachers to get away from the textbook and create a curriculum that related to me and what was happening in the world. Now, as an educator, I try to give what I did not receive.

Fighting for injustice and making our children, our neighbors, and our family aware this hatred is wrong has to become a way of life, not a one time response when these events pop up. These individuals who participated in this rally have co-workers, family members and friends. Has anyone tried to show them a different path? Which schools failed to educate them properly? These events will continue to occur and become more frequent if fighting injustice and educating others does not become a way of being.

July 2015, the Confederate flag on South Carolina's statehouse was removed. This removal took place after nine people were killed at the historic Black church in Charleston. This didn't sit well with me. At the time, Khari B., Artist-in-Residence for Haraka Writers, one of Purdue University Black Cultural Center's performing arts ensembles that I was part of when I attended Purdue was writing

#Haikus4Justice. Inspired by his ability to zoom into the many issues we are facing in 17 syllables, I decided to pen one about the flag removal on July 10, 2015.

removing the cloth

but the hatred is ingrained

racism soars on

It took nine people losing their lives for the flag to come down a couple years ago. Today, while some people are knocking over Confederate statues (*let us knock down some statues to protest racism, and see what happens*), I don't get excited. When I saw the spit flying from people's mouths onto the fallen statue, all I could do was shake my head. Removing symbols is the easy work. It might make you feel good, but what did it really change? The real work is daily and it's hard. Once people's hearts and mindsets are changed, statues won't have to be taken down during the night or by force and a debate about whether it should happen won't exist.

In school, I listened to the song, "We Shall Overcome" while learning about the civil rights movement. Part of the song says:

We shall overcome, We shall overcome

We shall overcome someday

Deep in my heart I do believe

We shall overcome someday

Not only can we overcome, but we can also eliminate hatred and racism in our society. Just like our forefathers who fought for freedom were committed to fighting as a way of life, it must become our way of life or history won't change and we won't leave a better future for the next generation.