

Black mothers are drained by worry over their sons, police

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If either of my sons runs late returning home from work or a night out with friends in Kansas City, I start texting him and then I start pacing. Anxiety sets in.

I'm wondering: Where is that boy? Did he get into a wreck?

Is he lying on the pavement somewhere with a department-issued bullet in his chest? I'm imagining the world watching through shaky body cam footage as my beautiful boy's promise and life are blown from his body by some scared, racist police officer who has no business asking him to prove he's worth a damn, much less from behind the sheen of a badge.

Call it a crazy exaggeration. I wish it were. But it's real, and if you are a mother of Black sons you know what I'm talking about. Black people make up 13.4% of the U.S. population, but make up 22% of police shooting fatalities, according to the latest NAACP Criminal Justice Fact Sheet.

An explanation of how it feels to be a mother of Black sons in America should not also have to

include a defense of my pain.

If your sons are white, let me assure you, this ain't no average mama worry thing. I got that too. This is on top of that.

If I don't hear back from my child right away, a hot feeling of dread washes over me, starting with a tightening in my chest, then shortness of breath and a pounding heart.

He's 25, a college graduate, a working engineer and as he likes to say, "a grown ass man."

And none of that matters because he's a Black man first. And unless you've been living in a cave somewhere, you know that Black men, no matter what their station in life, die at the hands of police regularly in this country. They have been since the slave catchers were deputized — and those laid the foundations of American law enforcement.

It's a lesson I've been sharing with both of my sons ever since they were old enough to leave my side. Ever since they were old enough to notice their father's shaking hands tighten on the steering wheel any time he saw approaching police lights flashing in the distance from his rearview mirror.

Of course we had the talk about what to do if you are ever stopped by police — open hands on the steering wheel, yes sir, yes ma'am. They know the drill. They recite it like a nursery rhyme — passed down generation after generation.

Yet every time I hear about another young Black man killed at the hands of police that nursery rhyme sounds a little less comforting, and I'm having the talk with them all over again.

My oldest is nearly 30, a college grad, a newspaper editor and a law-abiding citizen. And yet, I worry.

It's exhausting. Like hauling a 50-pound sack of potatoes on your back — every day, all day — exhausting.

DAUNTE WRIGHT ANOTHER NAME ON LONG LIST

Even after all the sign-toting, marching, chanting, Facebooking, tweeting and Instagramming about the unjust police killing of unarmed Black men over the last 12 months, there doesn't seem to be any end in sight.

I mean for goodness sake, while the whole country is watching a police officer on trial for

murder, for killing George Floyd in broad daylight, on camera, on the streets of Minneapolis, another officer just a few miles away shot and killed 20-year-old Daunte Wright — another unarmed Black man — for a simple traffic violation. And those in caves will cry, no, it was the warrants! Because a misdemeanor warrant is a license to kill?

Seriously? I weep as I write.

Eric Garner, Michael Brown Jr., Tamir Rice, Walter Lamar Scott, Freddie Gray, Philando Castile, Alton Sterling and so many, many more. The killed list is way too long to include all the names here.

I can imagine the pain their mothers experienced because I know the debilitating feeling that comes over me just fearing the possibility that this could happen to one of my sons.

They have just been lucky. Both of them have had scary run-ins with police, and not because either of them did a thing wrong, but rather because some believe that being Black and male adds up to probable cause.

I'll never forget the phone call from my youngest. He'd taken his viola — oh yeah, I forgot to say he's a musician who used to play with the Youth Symphony of Kansas City — to play on the Independence Square for folks during the Pokemon Go craze. Most of the time the square is nearly deserted and business owners there are begging people to visit, for some activity that will generate economic growth.



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Mara' Rose Williams knows firsthand what it's like to be terrified when her sons have encounters with police.

Before my son went, he researched city ordinances to make sure playing an instrument on the square is allowed. It is. Still while he was there, and children were dancing around his feet as he played, an officer approached him and told him to leave. He refused to listen to my son explain that it was OK with city officials. That he wasn't soliciting — even though ordinances don't forbid that. My son called me, and in the background I could hear the officer yelling, "Pack up your stuff and get out of here."

My chest draws tight. I struggle to breathe. My heart pounds.

I pleaded with him, just leave. Don't argue. Come home. Talk to city officials later. Then I jumped in my car and headed to the square, talking to myself the entire 10 minute drive — please let him be OK, please let him be OK. Thank God he was OK and the next morning, in a suit jacket and tie, he marched down to the city to complain.

This is how we live. I know some will read

this and ask why this newspaper, or any news outlet for that matter, is writing about this again, because it's not news. That's true, actually: The killing is so frequent, the pain and protests that follow have become normalized.

The tears we mothers shed could fill buckets. But this killing didn't just start in our lifetime. A well of Black mothers' tears came before ours.

I'm tired of praying, pacing and weeping. I'm angry, pissed off.

We can put men on the moon, fly a tiny helicopter on Mars and develop not one but four COVID-19 vaccines in warp speed to battle a pandemic and yet we can't seem to come up with a battery of tests that detect the lack of empathy, humanity and morality in racist wannabe cops? There are plenty of great officers on police forces in this country. Get rid of the bad guys. Better yet, don't hire them in the first place.

Having Black sons should not have to be a burden we bear from the moment they are born.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Opinions, not affidavits

The letter writers are different since 2005. I wrote my first letter in 2005. It was in the opinion column, defending former St. Clair County Clerk C. Barney Metz.

Now we have some overly educated, zealous people who read BND letters to the editor and try to research, analyze and debate your letters, either by changing the context or the wording.

By replacing them with conflicting, demeaning letter responses that are usually not true.

Most letters are opinions, not affidavits. They

are to be brief and to the point. Not one thing at a time. It's for everyday, down-to-earth people to understand that. Probably not the Republican Party good ol' boys and poor losers that live in sundowner towns.

So, I hope you can follow this letter and don't get lost or burn your bridges. Remember, mental illness is on the surge.

— Pauline McCottrell, East St. Louis

Deteriorating IL infrastructure

Recently, the White House confirmed what most of us in Illinois already knew: our infrastructure is deteriorating. In a new report on the nation's infrastructure needs, the White House graded Illi-

nois' overall infrastructure condition a C-.

Illinois should be a national leader on infrastructure, but we can't lead if our infrastructure isn't planned, designed and engineered by the most qualified professionals. That's why HB 680, proposed legislation in Springfield is such a threat to the safety and dependability of Illinois' infrastructure.

HB 680 would deprioritize professional qualifications and instead prioritize cost and time savings in the procurement processes of local governments — the government bodies responsible for a significant amount of infrastructure spending.

By gutting Qualifications-Based Selection standards, the important work of planning, designing and engineering our public

infrastructure could be awarded to less-qualified teams that dangerously cut corners in the name of saving time and money but end up costing us more down the line. When infrastructure projects are planned, designed and engineered by the most qualified professionals they last longer, require less maintenance over time and are safer overall.

With Congress considering a package that would dedicate billions to infrastructure investments throughout Illinois, legislators in Springfield should be working to ensure that the most qualified professionals are always hired to work on our infrastructure projects.

If we want Illinois to lead the nation in infrastructure once again, we must demand that legislators in

Springfield protect QBS standards. While a C- isn't failing, we must do better. HB 680 would be a failure for our infrastructure and for Illinois.

— Linda Moen, President of EFK Moen of Fairview Heights

Time to break ties with China

My dad fought in World War II. And he always said one of the most incredible things about the Holocaust was that it occurred in modern times while the world looked on. Of course after the death camps were liberated many claimed they had no idea it was genocide.

A holocaust of Christiana, Wiegiers and anyone not worshipping the Chinese Communist Party is happening right now in

2021. Wiegiers are either killed or used as slave labor. Young girls and women are being raped.

American Media institutions like The New York Times and The Washington Post are not reporting on the rampant human right violations. CNN and its ilk are running specials on lynchings and Black Lives Matter. When Joe Biden was vice president, he took his infamous son to China, which gave his son \$1 billion for his investment firm.

China has even bought the pope. The Vatican will not disclose how much money it took and is taking from China. People, students and governments need to protest. For one, the 2022 Olympics should not be held in this disgusting totalitarian regime.

— Anne Hannigan, Shiloh

Supreme Court expansion? Biden should remember his own words



BY KATHLEEN PARKER
Washington Post

In 1983, then-Sen. Joe Biden of Delaware called "court-packing" a "bonehead idea," and warned in 2019 during a presidential primary debate that restructuring the Supreme Court by adding more justices would destroy "any credibility the court has at all."

During the 2020 campaign, Biden declined to say whether he'd support expanding the court.

Now, it seems, President Biden has developed a fondness for boneheaded notions. Last week, he named a big bipartisan commission to study the future of the court. A few days later, Democrats in the House and Senate announced a forthcoming bill to add four more justices to the high bench.

Will we wake up one day soon to find 13 justices on the court? No. But Biden is slowly mainstreaming the idea of a larger court.

Nothing has changed since Biden's 1983 assessment — oh, except that the court today leans conservative — and liberals don't like it.

Justice Stephen G. Breyer has said, "If the

public sees judges as politicians in robes, its confidence in the courts — and in the rule of law itself — can only diminish." And even the late justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg didn't see the logic of making more justices.

"If anything would make the court appear partisan it would be that," she said in 2019 about court-expansion. "One side saying, 'When we're in power, we're going to enlarge the number of judges so we would have more people who would vote the way we want them to.' So I am not at all in favor of that solution to what I see as a temporary situation."

The movement to restructure the court enjoys

deep pockets, thanks in part to a nonprofit fundraising behemoth called Arabella Advisors. Arabella is an umbrella organization that manages four major nonprofits that, in turn, host more than 300 policy projects, some of which are laser-focused on the federal judiciary. It's noteworthy that when Republicans organize themselves to support conservative judges, the left writes furiously of "dark money." But when the left does the exact same thing, why, it's just a lighter shade of gray.

Biden is uncorking the commission to keep his left flank happy; and few people who follow these things believe it will finish its work by cooking up more justices on the bench. But it is likely that he is laying the predicate for such a move years from now.

You might even call this

the "Never You Mind That Now" strategy, in which the Democrats are raising the prospect of a bigger court today only to seed it in our brains for their later use. This is a little like an arsonist who sets a fire so that he can put it out and become a hero. In the liberal version of this opera, a monster is created — the legislation to increase the court — so that the party can then kill it this round.

But the commission, if nothing else, serves the purpose of making something once unimaginable at least a topic of conversation. Basically, you get people talking about something, back it up with evidence (or commissions) and, gradually, the idea becomes less unpopular. People even forget why it was once objectionable.

Thanks to Sen. Bernie Sanders, I-Vt., a far-left '60s radical who for most

of his career was taken seriously by no one outside of Vermont, we now have lesser, mainstream socialists in public office. And Sanders is now a snugly, flannel-clad grandpa beloved by America's young. He's not scary at all — and neither is socialism.

Ideas that once seemed crazy can, in time, sound almost reasonable. And when the balance of power in our nation is so closely divided, a foot in a door here can have an enormous impact later.

Meanwhile, the objective has been achieved. The threatening sword of restructuring the court is aloft and hangs over the third branch of government. This alone is enough to undermine trust in the court's independence and poses a threat to democracy itself.

Boneheaded was — and is — the correct word.

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