

Essay 5

A letter to myself:

It is finally time to declutter your mind and throw out those suitcases full of frustration. You swim in a pool of realism in order to function everyday. People ask, “Why are you so pessimistic?” and constantly remind you that it is your duty to fight the fight that your ancestors fought. They judge you for speaking your truth and saying no. That’s okay. This is not your fight, because you did not initiate the altercation.

You have this way of thinking that would probably upset people. You cringe when Black people attempt to educate those who have reached their learning cap. Those who know of the basic “problem and solution” formula but are unbothered by being the problem. You see debates disguised as condescending hissy-fits often. You wish that your brothers and sisters would just... stop. Stop dedicating themselves to a cause that was caused by the same group of people who are dedicated to turning a blind eye to *their* effects.

Think about it this way. A house, right? Winston has all the tools and materials he needs to build a house. He has access to construction manuals for different floor plans, and he can choose whatever floor plan he wants. The manuals are accessible and free, but Winston does not want to build the house. He wants Benny to do it for him. He wants Benny to lay the foundation, nail the walls, install the windows, plug in the appliances, connect the electrical wiring. Benny has been building homes for people like Winston his whole life, while maintaining his own home. He’s exhausted. He doesn’t understand why these Winstons won’t build their own homes. Everything has been handed to them. But Winston complains, calls Benny lazy, so Benny builds yet another house that is not his to build. It doesn’t make sense. This whole anti-racism movement doesn’t make sense. To me, at least. You can’t force a fish to swim. That’s what it does, that’s what it knows. You can’t force a racist to unlearn racism. That’s what he does, that’s what he knows.

You appreciate the passionate advocates of this movement. You love that they still have fire in their bellies to keep them feeling full, although this nation starves them, us, of dignity. Subpar education, absurd generational wealth gaps, organized police murders, segregation disguised as gentrification. Don’t get me started on gentrification. You understand, but... we can’t force the “majority” to care. We can’t force them to dismantle or even slightly adjust a system that will disrupt their comfortable lives in any way. Racism will always be here. It will always be a thing. You have accepted it, and they should too. Not accept as in “dive headfirst into a sea of victimization,” but accept as in realize that it is what it is.

As you think about your little Black niece. And your former little Black students. And the little Black babies that have just been born or have yet to be born, you feel uneasy. You know that they are deserving of a life that does not require them to defend themselves against societal and structural bullies. You want them to enjoy and bask in the greatness of their Blackness. They are

the reasons why you are here taking up an immense amount of space in an overwhelmingly white place. The law was not made with their futures at the forefront of policy making. These powerful little people are scientists, and engineers, musical lyricists, rappers and athletes. Yes, rappers and athletes—we can't deny these natural talents, no matter how much these negative, stereotypical threads have been woven into our societal blanket.

For the sake of the kids who have taught you about life, forgiveness, joy and curiosity... try to season your realism with a few sprinkles of optimism every now and then. Show your face at school board and city council meetings, school suspension hearings, special education meetings, in classrooms and in courtrooms. Tear apart legislation that fails to pour esteem into these kids, *our* kids. You can't force a fish to swim, but you can cut off its water supply or disrupt the calm waves it relies on to lazily glide from one end of the stream to the other. Help build the foundation for just a *handful* of Winstons. Do that for these babies.

Remember, your cycle of internalizing and processing must be balanced with healthy release. Stay afloat. Realism without optimism equates to destruction. You have too much work to do. Destruction is not an option.

Today's affirmations: The power I hold is astronomical. I am valuable, my experiences are valuable, my voice is valuable. One day, I will pass on this baton of advocacy, so I must not quit.

With love,

