

It's Hard to Be Woke: Reflections on Race in America

What's the Point?

(I wrote this after the killing of Alton Sterling in 2016. Unfortunately, it is as relevant today as it was then).

It has been a week since our country was broken – again – this time by back to back tragedies. In one week, I have almost completely morphed into a total news junky. I have desperately devoured each commentary, reflection, eulogy, and promise. I guess I'm not much different from most people, and it doesn't matter which side of the debate makes your heart beat faster. Most of us just want answers and the most hopeful among us might even be wishing for a solution.

Today I let myself fall into the normal distractions of everyday life – sat outside and let my thumb do the hard work of scrolling through Facebook posts. I can't stay angry forever, right? The sun is shining, and my happy dog still needs someone to rub his belly. One of my daughter's friends made a joke about killing a spider. She described being terrified for days because the spider had invaded and hidden in her car. She punctuated her triumph about finally killing it with #Spiderslivesdon'tmatter.

Too soon? Maybe, but I laughed anyway.

I rationalized that it's OK to laugh! I can't stay angry forever, right? My Facebook feeds are filled with weddings and anniversaries, Pokeman posts, silly videos of babies and cats, pictures of summer squash and beans in jars.

It didn't take much for 6x2 inch screen of my phone to draw me into the alternate universe of other people's thoughts. And just when I was beginning to feel relaxed– I mean really relaxed in a way I haven't felt in... well, a week, I scrolled unto a live video of Alton Sterling's funeral. The moment carried the same sensation that follows upon waking from a dream.

Real life. A real man – dead. Real babies crying because they will never again see the flash of their father's smile. Real singers and preachers, doing their best

to bring comfort to loved ones, and me sitting on a deck absorbing the rays of the summer sun, feeling so uncomfortable – again.

Alton Sterling probably never dreamed that selling cds would result in thousands of people saying his name. His name has become part of the troubling roll call of men and women, mostly African American, whose legacy is the hashtag: gone too soon. As tragic and soul-crushing as it is each time our lives are interrupted by another video that the reporters remind us, “might be disturbing,” it seems like less and less façade is required to go back into the theatrical performance of normal life.

I know – I can’t stay angry forever, but Alton, has reached up from the grave to get my attention, and I know it’s too soon to forget! Too soon to go back to “as usual.” But what am I supposed to do? What’s the point?

The point for me is to do exactly what I am doing right now. To write and write and write because certainly my life (and maybe someone else’s) depends on it. The point for the doctor is to heal and heal and heal! The point for the singer is to sing and sing and sing! The point for the runner is to run – and maybe some days the destination will be uncertain, but we have got to keep running – all of us! And we have got to be ever mindful that there is a purpose, so that we won’t be tricked into thinking that there is no point. After all, something as simple as selling cds in front of a corner store could result in thousands of people saying your name.