

## COMMENTARY - A mother's silent cry for her black son

May 12, 2020 | Brattleboro Reformer (VT)

Page: A04 | Section: Opinion

882 Words | Readability: Lexile: 1280, grade level(s): 11-12



---

BY MIKAELA SIMMS On Mother's Day, I awoke to the images of the protestors that gathered in downtown Indianapolis in response to the fatal shooting of Sean Reed. Reed was a young black man, who live streamed while police chased him, many witnessing his death in real time. Earlier in the week, I first heard of Ahmaud Arbery's assailants being charged with murder months after Ahmaud was shot while jogging outside of Brunswick, Ga.; these charges only coming after the graphic video was released to the public, two months after the actual murder.

As a mother of African descent, this is close to home; it seems as if we are powerless and cannot protect our children. The reality of the painful loss of our children is hidden as victims are criminalized and murderers go free, sometimes for decades. Our cries for justice and our voices drown in media storms.

Sometimes, in the pursuit of "racial justice," people call for intimate stories of our experiences: some are solicited to prove that racism exists, or as if listening to the story, cleanses the listener of racism. The reality is that listening to stories, or signing petitions, is meaningless unless each person takes responsibility for their actions and their participation in the system that necessitates racism.

Many years ago, I was part of the "commentary expansion program" for Vermont Public Radio. The goal was to bring more diverse voices to the radio and I was excited at the prospect. I wrote, rewrote and edited my commentaries, yet I could not meet VPR's requirements. One piece was entitled, "The First Tears," that I submitted to VPR, a year after the birth of my son in 2014. As it was never accepted into VPR's commentaries, I have decided to print it today, on the heels of the tragic, avoidable killings of these young black men. Many people talk about how we can get more people of color to Vermont. The question is, how do we respect the voices of the people who are already here? Even writing these words brings tears to my eyes.

'THE FIRST TEARS'

(originally written in 2014)

Last winter, my life changed. I became a first-time mom. The miracle of motherhood came with plenty of

questions and even more advice. Lots of advice. Mothers have told me plenty of stories about crying: crying at the sight of their newborn, crying uncontrollably and not knowing why, crying because the baby would not stop crying. One of the nurses passed on some essential advice that a doctor gave her after she gave birth: "The shower is a good place to cry. Being a new mother is overwhelming," she said.

"Don't be hard on yourself."

My little boy's birth was a labor of love, a long labor. But there were no tears. He emerged with a whimper and an audible from me that I cannot repeat. Biko was put on my belly and he looked up at me, eyebrows raised, forehead wrinkled, sheer joy but no tears.

I waited impatiently for my tears to fall, for frustration and exhaustion to take over.

Before I was released from the hospital, I asked the midwife how would I know if I have postpartum depression - one of my biggest fears. She scheduled my next appointment and told me that the people around you will notice. I enjoyed my family, invited friends over and had an amazing meal train to sustain us. I was slowly adjusting to having a son and I felt mostly like my pre-mommy self.

We went out to our first doctor's appointment, our first meal out, a small party, his first crying fit ...

Still, I shed no tears. Biko had minor surgery for tongue tie, which produced some blood and a loud snap. He barely blinked, while my eyes welled up with tears at the thought of his potential pain.

When it was over, he was just fine and my tears dissipated.

One night, after a late feeding, I could not get back to sleep. I lay awake looking at the moonlight on his face. Words cannot express the joy that this one person brought into my life. In an instant, elation turned to fear and sadness. I cried silently that night realizing that I cannot protect my son from the world. A world that is against the poor and is plagued by racism.

This beautiful black baby that people find so precious and cute will grow up to be that black boy or man that may be feared.

I thought about the mothers of Amidou Diallo, Sean Bell, Trayvon Martin and Oscar Grant, whose sons were tragically slain.

In the last year, more than 15 unarmed black men have been killed; most recently, Freddie Gray of Baltimore died in police custody. Their mothers must have looked at their baby boys, wondering about their futures.

They watched them reach, crawl and walk, kissed their faces and hands. They sang songs to their babies, not knowing they were going to fall in the crosshairs of a society that still has so much to learn and struggle through.

Everyone wants the best for their child, even when the statistics don't seem to be on our side.

Mikaela Simms is a mom and social justice educator who lives in Brattleboro.

She serves as diversity coordinator in Windham Southeast School District and teacher educator for Marlboro Graduate School's Social Justice Program (Spark).

The opinions expressed by columnists do not necessarily reflect the views of the Brattleboro Reformer.

© Copyright New England Newspapers, Inc., Brattleboro Reformer, 2020. All Rights Reserved.