

WHY?

As a child, I always wondered **WHY**
WHY all of my friends ran
whenever the police came riding down the street.
Not a single illegal activity was taking place,
but as soon as 5-0 turned the corner,
it was an Olympic sprint to clear the vicinity,
and I don't know why, but I was running right with them.

"**WHY?**" I ask.

"**WHY** are we running from them? Aren't they here to help us?"

And as soon as I asked that question, was
I felt like the dumbest little boy in all of Rochester.
Scowls from little black Jaquan,
muttering under brown Shaniya's breath;
I was the outcast of the entire playground.
I was seen as a punk,
a wussy,
a coward,
a snitch,
when in reality, all I wanted to know was **WHY** we were running from our protection.

Now, older and more knowledgeable of myself and my surroundings,
I realized that the sad part about my question is that
none of the children were able to answer it.
An unfortunate truth about our black youth is that
we learn to run from the police, to hide from them,
to deceive them,
all too early to understand the concept itself.

I find it pitiful that many of my black brothers and sisters
were brainwashed into fearing authority
well before they were afraid of monsters under their beds.

The harsh reality is, I may have the talk to my son about the corrupt police
long before we have the talk of the birds and the bees.

WHY is it that too many black men know how to serve a sentence before they can actually write one?

WHY are there so many black deadbeat fathers that I can't tell mine under the bright sun?

My family should have been my brother's protection,
but now, he's out here looking for the right gun.
Blacks in America have long since lost their individuality and their culture,
forgotten the world's reliance on Africa's vast resources,
forgotten Martin and Malcolm's wise words
and Mansa Musa's power and wealth--the grand power that Africa once held.

Now, we overcompensate for our past,
wear expensive jewelry and Jordan's,
when really, what's more important is educating ourselves and the ones around us.

Read a book!
Nobody is forcing you to listen to the corrupted mainstream rap
that endorses guns, gangs, money, and misogyny.
Be more scholarly!
Do your research on Booker T. Washington.
Though it took the white man 244 years to forge our rights and emancipation,
the next 154 has shown just how easily he can take them.
My father was wrongfully incarcerated,
and me going to see him was the closest thing that I have EVER had to having a vacation.

We are preparing our future generation for a war
that we do not know how to fight ourselves.
All we pray is that our youth stays safe,
that we avoid any unnecessary confrontation with the police,
that we stay in good faith and maintain good health.

Put the guns on the shelf--we no longer need them!

From now on, we will fight our battles with our knowledge,
and hope that one day, we'll successfully make it through college--in hopes of freedom--
not freedom from shackles and slave ships,
but freedom from impure thought
and the mental whip that prevents us from giving it our all.

So with that said, all black children of America's many playgrounds,
please don't run and hide when the police show up.
Be a kid! Be proud of your skin--
play even harder
And keep asking **WHY**

Nasmere Johnson
School of the Arts
Grade 11