



COMMENTARY

Senior Editor SeMaj Musco and the *Focus* staff reckon with personal and institutional approaches to racial equity.

AMERICA TO ME

Since I was around five years old I remember every year around my birthday and Christmas I would get the Toys R Us and Target toy books, and I would always beg my parents for a Nerf gun.

My friends have them, why can't I get one?

I remember asking this question multiple times over the years. I never understood why she was so adamant in her denial to allow me to buy one.

In 2014 I found out why.

On Nov. 22, 2014, Tamir Rice was killed by a police officer less than 2 seconds upon the officer's arrival. His crime? Playing with a friend's airsoft gun. Rice was 12.

I was 12. The moment I heard about the shooting and saw the video I was mortified. I easily could have been in the same situation. Trayvon Martin had already happened two years prior, so I had been wary of police and the legal system's not protecting people who look like me. This case was especially difficult for me because this kid was a middle schooler, just like me.

For the past eight years, this is the fear I have had to live with. Over the course of my short 17 years on this planet, I have seen Trayvon Martin killed by a man cosplaying as a police officer and getting away with it.

I have seen Tamir Rice killed by a police officer within 2 seconds of the officer arriving at the scene.

I have seen Eric Garner choked to death while telling the officers he can't breathe.

I have seen Michael Brown shot and killed by police who then left his dead body in the street for four hours.

I have seen Laquan McDonald have 16 shots sent through his body in 13 seconds and then have the Chicago Police Department attempting to lie about and cover-up his murder.

I have seen Alton Sterling shot five times at close range while being pinned down.

I have seen Philando Castile killed while in the car with his girlfriend and daughter in the car.

I have seen Sandra Bland die while in police custody.

I have seen Walter Scott killed after the officer pulled him over for a broken tail light.

In my own city, I have seen Botham Jean killed in his own home while eating ice cream.

I have seen Ahmaud Aubrey killed while jogging and it taking the police over a month to arrest the men.

I have seen Breonna Taylor killed in a botched drug raid at the wrong location of a man who was already in custody. Four months later, her killers still haven't been arrested.

I have seen George Floyd killed in Minneapolis while gasping, "I can't breathe" and crying for his deceased mother, while an officer nonchalantly kept a knee on his neck with bystanders yelling that he can't breathe.

This isn't even considering the instances of police brutality I have seen that didn't end fatally.

For the majority of people reading this, these are events and fears that you will never have to live with that I and people who look like me live with daily.

You will never worry about driving and being stopped simply because you "fit the

description."

You will never send your son out to play and worry if he will make it home safely.

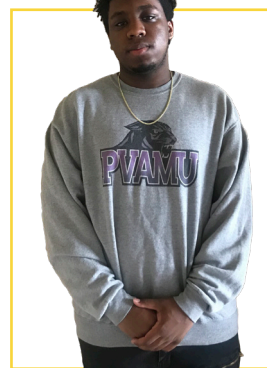
You will never drive and worry about losing your life over something as simple as a broken taillight.

You will never tell the people around you to call your family before the police if you need help.

You will never worry about someone saying you look suspicious while waiting for your parents after an away game.

You will never feel terror driving through a city full of the rebel flags of people who wanted to enslave you while insisting you were sub-human.

You will never have to think that if an officer were to see your son with a toy gun, he might consider him a threat. And you will never have to see a fellow 12-year-old murdered by someone who took an oath to protect and serve and realize that regardless of what you do, because your skin is darker, you will always be seen as a threat.



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OPINION SeMaj Musco