

# More Than a Hashtag



by Peyton Wilson

It's July 7th, 2016. I'm lying on my bed at 2am scrolling through Twitter. I find myself watching Diamond Reynold's video of her fiancé getting shot in front of his four year old daughter.

I immediately think of my dad. What if my parents were pulled over on their way home from one of their Friday lunch dates and my dad is shot not even a foot from my mom?

I run to my dad's bedside, collapse on the floor, and grab his hand. The tears won't stop. My whole world is spinning, and I keep thinking of my life without him.

I beg him not to go to work the next day. I beg him not to step foot outside of our house. I don't want to lose him like Alton Sterling and Philando Castile's family lost them.

Black Lives Matter is just a radical movement made by a bunch of angry black people, right? They're making something out of nothing, right? It's not that serious, right? Wrong. How dare we demand rights!

Think of getting a call saying your dad was shot because the way he reached for his license appeared threatening. Think of saying goodbye to your brother as he

leaves for the store only to find out the way he wore his hoodie made an officer feel unsafe so he was shot in the back and killed.

There shouldn't be a death warrant on my skin color. I shouldn't have to wonder if the next time I see my family will be at Christmas dinner or at a funeral. My best friend, my neighbor, my youth pastor, my classmate, I never know when the last time I see them is going to be. The systematic racism in our country has taken that sense of security away from me.

"The day that I don't feel like I'm being watched as I walk down the street or in a store is the day that I will say this country has changed," Vesey Banuel (9) said.

Black Lives Matter is more than a hashtag. Black Lives Matter does not mean white lives don't. Black Lives Matter does not mean Police Lives don't. Black Lives Matter means a group of people in our country are tired of seeing black Americans being murdered and beaten by those who are sworn to protect us. Tired of hearing about another father, brother, and husband being unjustly killed.

"There are a lot of ignorant people who don't want to admit that there are problems with the way the criminal justice system handles situations where people of color's lives have been disregarded," Bishop Gustafson (12) said.

Yes, it is true that all lives matter. One life cannot be valued over another. But right now, in our coun-

try, we need to focus our attention on the black lives.

Imagine what a difference it would make if All Lives Matter was a movement used to push equity in the way that American citizens are treated in the justice system and in everyday life-- not as a way to silence black Americans' plea for equal treatment and justice.

From personal experience, I have found that my voice as a black person is not always heard. Sure, my white counterparts or superiors will listen to me and act like my demands will be met, but they won't really do anything about it. At what point will we stop being silenced?

I marched with the NAACP in Atlanta on July 8th. Every color, every age, every background you can think of was there. There was no gunfire, no riots, no hatred. Only a large group of people who were tired of watching black Americans be murdered and mistreated and were ready to do something.

"There continues to be support from a rainbow of peoples who are fighters for justice and equality for all," Benjamin Williams, President of Cobb County SCLC, said.

Regardless of my background, my ancestry, the way my hair looks, how I talk, or what my skin color is, I'm still American. And I still have a right to be treated the same way by our justice system and police as every other Ameri-

can. Having a black President doesn't pardon every single act of racism and injustice against my people. We have accomplished so much, but at the same time, we have so much work to do.

The similarities between protests and ideals during the Civil Rights Movement in the 60's 50 years ago and the Black Lives Matter Movement now are too uncanny.

Yes, in these last 50 years, we've earned basic human rights. I can attend a good school, use the same bathroom, eat at the same restaurants, shop in the same stores, as any other white person. But there still remains an unacceptable lack of respect and basic human decency for the lives of people in the black community.

The blatant mistreatment and neglect of black Americans has gone on for too long, and we all have the power to do something about it.

Tweeting #BlackLivesMatter doesn't solve the problem, it just brings awareness. Don't be afraid to take the first step to inflict positive change in and for the black community.

My Black Life Matters. And until that is recognized by this country, I will keep marching, I will keep protesting, and I will keep fighting until more than my hair styles, clothes, music, food, and dancing is valued in this country.

