

June 6, 2020 The Players Tribune

Today's reflection is a personal letter from a woman professional basketball player. Please read, reflect, pray and ask yourself, what can you do to make things better for people of color in Canada?

Dear America,

Our whole lives you've wanted black people to 'love' you, to pledge their allegiance to you.

You want us to *love* you when serving in uniform, but when we are out of uniform, you throw us aside as if we never served and protected you.

You want us to *love* you when we protect your fancy cities, but you designed them to keep us out.

You want us to *love* you on the grand stage of the Olympics, but you give us no peace or justice at home.

You don't want us to expose your treatment of us to the rest of the world. You want us to stay silent and keep this a family secret.

Well, now everything has been exposed in broad daylight for the whole world to see.

Your oppression, your systemic racism, your lack of justice continue to suffocate black America, and "We Can't Breathe!" Black people have had *enough* of you destroying our very existence.

We are happy to shed your broken system and step into the light on behalf of our ancestors, our grandparents, for ourselves and most importantly for our children!

***Black people have had enough of you destroying our very existence.***

We are going to scream it loudly and proudly: BLACK LIVES MATTER!

As for my fellow Americans who see and recognize this oppression and understand our fight, don't sit silently at your tables just because the whip is not on *your* back. An injustice to *one* race is an injustice to all races. We are ALL Americans.

Think about something for a second. Since the pandemic, every person in the world knows the importance of being able to breathe. Now you see our brother, George Floyd, murdered, struggling for air with a knee on his neck until his last breath, and it compels me to say this: *That's* the way it feels to be Black in America.

We can't breathe like everyone else because of the inequality, racism and obstacles that America has purposefully placed to impede the ascent of its black citizens. You have smothered us with your hate and apathy to the point where we are protesting in the streets during a global *pandemic*. We would rather die on our feet, fighting for justice, than lie down waiting for you to freely give it.

We just can't do it anymore! We are tired! Enough is enough!

Just ask any black person about the uncomfortable conversations we have to have with our kids. My son and daughter saw the video of George Floyd's murder on the news and had basic human questions like, "Why is that man on him? Why is this happening? What are we going to do?" All I could say was, "This is what you call racism. This is what you call murder. That is what you call injustice."

My husband said to my son, "This is why I teach you that we must be better in every way. We have to be more educated. We have to have stronger values. You have to not only follow the law, but you have to know the law. You have to know your rights."

We started having these conversations with my son when he was seven. He's 10 now. The fact that we have to introduce our children to this reality at such an early age is bad enough, and unfortunately this

wasn't the first time. Ever since 45 (as I call him) has been in office, we've had to have these difficult conversations regularly.

That's really what breaks my heart the most: the children. I would love to see how the rest of America explains what's happening around our country.

How do you explain the prejudices and inhumane way black people have been treated for over 400 years to your children?

It's our country, too! I love being an American, and I love being a black American. I've traveled the world, and I choose to live here.

I have received many calls and texts from some of my white friends saying, "Is it really that bad? I had no idea." Yes, it is that bad!

Even though we no longer have laws saying that blacks have to drink at one water fountain and whites at the other, or blacks have to enter a restaurant from the back, or sit in the back of the bus, we still have to abide by an *unspoken* set of rules because of the color of our skin. The police can arrive in our communities and be the judge, the jury and the executioner on the spot.

I never dreamt that history would repeat itself like this, definitely not in my lifetime.

I'm from Compton, California. The inner city. I'm old enough to remember the brutal beating of Rodney King by the LAPD. That was a horrible, horrible time. It was my sophomore year at USC and I barely made it home before the riots began. Seeing that kind of brutality with my own eyes was disgusting, yet we continue to see officers beat down innocent protestors today. How can that be?

Back then, we heard cries from rap groups like NWA, and others. But, police brutality wasn't something many Americans could comprehend. Now however, with the advent of body cams, social media, and cellphones, it's starting to become crystal clear to the naysayers of decades past.

I have a black husband, son, brothers, uncles, cousins and nephews. I stay in prayer in hopes that the men I love don't come in contact with the police. Quite frankly, as the death of Breonna Taylor shows, black women are killed by law enforcement, too.

My husband graduated from the U.S. Air Force Academy and fought in two wars for our country. His father served in the Marines. My grandfather served in the Army, and my aunt in the Air Force. My bonus daughter is currently serving in the Air Force after graduating from the Air Force Academy. But when not dressed in their respective uniforms, America sees each one of them as merely another black face. When will the confines of your mind allow you to accept us for who we are?

Why should we have to explain to our son, *You can't do everything you see your white friends doing?* There is a difference, if you have not recognized it. When white kids have a rambunctious college party, it's just kids being kids. However, when black kids do the same, it's a crime. Society's response is different, solely due to the color of their skin.

You could have a group of white boys on the street, about 17 years old, and they would be seen as a bunch of kids just hanging out. Replace those same white boys with a group of black boys, and they would no longer be seen as kids hanging out. They would be referred to as "thugs." The narrative changes instantly and the next questions and thoughts are, *What are they up to? They look suspicious!* Which is

pretty much what George Zimmerman said before he shot and killed young Trayvon Martin. He shot and killed him because he looked like he was “up to no good” as he walked home innocently wearing a hoodie on a winter evening holding a bag of Skittles and a can of iced tea.

It’s unfortunate, but that’s exactly the sort of thing that happens all the time. That’s the “talk” that we have to have with our kids. And you know what? We are tired of having this talk and trying to make you feel comfortable with the color of our skin.

Over the past week, I’ve had a lot of my white friends — who I love — say things like, “You know what? That’s why I don’t even watch the news. I just turn it off.” Well, that’s a privilege to be able to turn it off. Just because you *choose* to be in the dark about what’s going on doesn’t mean that it doesn’t exist.

I’ve also had white friends say, “I’m so sorry this is happening to you.” I appreciate what’s in your heart, but it’s not just happening to me. As long as you think it’s *only* happening to me, that’s the problem. It’s happening to all of us. It’s injustice, and your silence is confirmation.

We 100% appreciate the people who don’t look like us who join us peacefully, seriously and compassionately in our fight. We need you, we welcome you, we thank you. We need people who want to be a part of the solution.

Our solutions have to start not just with our voices, not just with social media and hashtags, but also with our actions. Explain to your children the injustice and teach them to stand up for what is right and just, regardless of race. Be careful how you stereotype others, because you are either passing on love, or passing on hate to the next generation.

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Another solution is voting for the next president. Vote for the lawmakers in Congress this year — and again in two years when it’s time to vote again. Don’t just vote once every four years.

There is still so much to do, and I support those who are trying to move the needle by investing in businesses and using their financial success to help. I encourage people to continue to invest in each other. Continue to seek out information and share with each other and use our voices to be the change we want to see. It starts with taking better care of each other.

I take my role in this very seriously, as well. I’ve always tried to be a role model by how I represent myself, especially to women and girls, and to my own children.

My husband and I read many books about black America’s struggle. We’ve had the opportunity to educate ourselves, and I encourage everyone else to do so. There’s so much information out there, from books about the rage of an oppressed group forced to live under a privileged class, to messages about the black man in America from writers and activists like Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., James Baldwin, Malcolm X, and others.

We have to know our own history. We should know what our leaders thought and what they experienced, to really understand where we’re going and what we are fighting for. I don’t have all the answers, but together we can all work to find solutions for our sons and daughters.

If we want a better future, we need to do more than just talk it into existence.

We need action.      And we need everybody.      With love,      Lisa Leslie

## **Over 1,100 new online Anabaptist worship materials**

With the launch of our new website, [www.commonword.ca](http://www.commonword.ca), we have added over 1,100 free online Anabaptist worship resources ([www.commonword.ca/go/tiw](http://www.commonword.ca/go/tiw)) through our partnership with Together in Worship ([www.togetherinworship.net](http://www.togetherinworship.net)), a bi-national Mennonite curation team committed to providing Anabaptist worship materials for free online.

### Anti-Racism Resources

In this time of overt racial tensions (in the US ... and in Canada ... and confessionally, in ourselves), we humbly offer these resources – biographies, group studies, worship services, biblical retellings – to inspire us toward true reconciliation and love of neighbour.

- [Trouble I've Seen: Changing the Way the Church Views Racism](#) by Drew G.I. Hart
- [White Fragility: Why it's so Hard for White People to Talk about Racism](#) by Robin J. DiAngelo
- [Dear Church: A Love Letter from a Black Preacher to the Whitest Denomination in the U.S.](#) by Lenny Duncan
- [Plantation Jesus: Race, Faith, and a New Way Forward](#) by Skot Welch and Rick Wilson
- [Perception: A Photo Series](#) by K.C. Adams and Cathy Mattes
- [The Cross and the Lynching Tree](#) by James H. Cone
- [Racism and Intolerance](#) by Louise Spilsbury
- [Becoming an Ally: Breaking the Cycle of Oppression in People](#) by Anne Bishop

Also see related "[Decolonization](#)" resources:

- [Decolonizing Evangelicalism](#) by Randy S. Woodley and Bo C. Sanders
- [Why Indigenous Sovereignty Should Matter to Christians](#) by Chris Budden
- [The Church and Indigenous Peoples in the Americas: In Between Reconciliation and Decolonization](#) Edited by Michel Andraos
- [Canada at a Crossroads: Boundaries, Bridges, and Laissez-Faire Racism in Indigenous-Settler Relations](#)