

'We who believe in freedom cannot rest'

by M. Linda Jaramillo
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These lyrics from "Ella's Song" written by Bernice Johnson Reagon several years ago ring as true today as they did then. These words painfully remind us that the quest for freedom in this country is slipping through our fingers.

"Until the killing of Black men, Black mothers' sons is as important as the killing of White men, White mothers' sons, we who believe in freedom cannot rest until it comes."

Freedom from violence and discrimination has not come for Black mothers' sons. Until that happens, none of us can be safe in a nation that claims freedom as a basic fundamental principle in our democracy.

Twelve-year-old Tamir Rice was shot and killed by a police officer right before Thanksgiving last year in a playground right across the street from his home on the west side of Cleveland. He was fooling around with a toy gun that a friend had given him. I can only imagine the horror that Samaria Rice felt when two boys ran across the street and knocked on her door to tell her that Tamir had just been shot by the police. As she ran across the street in panic, she came upon the scene only to find that she couldn't get close enough. But she could hear the cries of her daughter who had been detained as she tried to reach her little brother.

Samaria Rice, a Black mother, has endured the pain of losing her son. In the middle of her grief, soon after Tamir's death, she courageously appealed to the world, saying that violence was not the answer under any circumstances.

Now, as grief continues to swell in her heart, Samaria Rice has been told that Tamir caused his own death. Even though a videotape shows otherwise, the City of Cleveland now defends itself in a wrongful death lawsuit filed by the Rice family, says that Tamir and his family are "directly and proximately"

responsible for what happened. The city claims that Tamir caused his own death “by the failure to exercise due care to avoid injury.” Let’s not forget that Tamir Rice was twelve years old. He was a child. I do not believe under any circumstances that Tamir expected to be shot and killed by police while playing with a non-lethal gun.

A few months ago, in a Witness for Justice titled “We Are All Affected,” I shared that tragedies like the death of Tamir Rice are just minutes away in our own backyards. Cudell Recreation Center in Cleveland, Ohio, where Tamir Rice was killed, is just five minutes away from my home. On a recent Sunday afternoon, I visited the very place where it all happened. There is a playground right outside a recreation center for kids, surrounded by a neighborhood where families come and go every day. Symbols of love and remembrances fill the space. So that we never forget, this space should now be blessed as holy ground in memory of Tamir Rice.

“... Until the killing of Black men (and boys), Black mothers’ sons is as important as the killing of White men, White mothers’ sons. We who believe in freedom cannot rest until it comes. We who believe in justice will not rest until it comes.”

With Special gratitude to Bernice Johnson Reagon for “Ella’s Song.”



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