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I CAN'T BREATHE: BUT THE HOLY SPIRIT CAN, AS I ADVOCATE FOR AFRICAN AMERICAN BOYS AND MEN

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ABSTRACT

Six and a half years ago, I wrote about my feelings, deeply entrenched in the continued assault on African American boys and men. I wept then for the loss, and thoughts about my son and grandson bombarded my soul. Those thoughts were only shared on Facebook. I share them now, as I again, reflect on the continued and intensified assault on African American boys and men. African American boys and men are 2.5 times more likely than European American boys and men to die during an encounter with the police (Kahn, 2019). I reflect now on how these issues continue to impact my scholarship from a spiritual perspective.

Keywords: African American boys and men, Black Lives Matter, education, faith

Six and a half years ago, I wrote about my feelings, deeply entrenched in the continued assault on African American boys and men. I wept then for the loss, and thoughts about my son and grandson bombarded my soul. Those thoughts were only shared on Facebook. I share them now, as I again, reflect on the continued and intensified assault on African American boys and men. African American boys and men are 2.5 times more likely than European American boys and men to die during an encounter with the police (Kahn, 2019). I reflect now on how these issues continue to impact my scholarship from a spiritual perspective.

Most recently, the murder of George Floyd (May, 25, 2020), allowed the nation and the world to witness my greatest fear for my son and my grandson. I too realized, "I can't breathe." As I observed that police officer's knee and the weight of his body those 8 minutes and 46 seconds, in the midst of my faith, I gasped and cried. In those moments, I prayerfully held on to my belief in George Floyd's, my son's and my grandson's unwavering worth in the sight of my Lord and Savior. Yet, I was again confronted with the reality that so many others did not hold that belief. As I teach in the academic daily, I continue to consider my impact on the developing scholars I serve, and my precious son and grandson. This rumination is offered as an effort to make sense through my continued personal and professional development. The murder of George Floyd was a tipping point. His life, taken so brutally, "matters." My advocacy of my son and grandson, and other African American boys and men, who mean the world to me, "matters."

How do I breathe, teach and love in the way my faith teaches me? I know that only through the Holy Spirit am I sustained to challenge, demand and advocate for educators to partner with African American mothers, grandmothers, and aunts, who continue to assert, certify, and testify that "Black Lives Matter." I share my journey with you to be a part of asserting a paradigm for real change in our communities, but most importantly, in our PreK-20 school settings.

EVENTS OVER THE PAST 10 YEARS

On February 26, 2012, George Zimmerman shot and killed Trayvon Martin, a 17-year-old African American teenager, who was passionately loved by his mother and his father (Fulton & Martin, 2017). Zimmerman was a neighborhood watch coordinator. He lived in a gated community, in Sanford, Florida. He said he acted in self-defense. My African American community was appalled and hurt, yet again. The pain was wrenching for Trayvon's family and for every mother of an African American son, with whom I spoke. 17 months later, on July 13, 2013, Zimmerman was found not guilty of second-degree murder and acquitted of manslaughter. (Thomas & Blackmon, 2015). I was then compelled to share my thoughts with other African American mothers and grandmothers. I posted them on Facebook.

JULY 14, 2014 – THE POST

All praises to our Father, The Son, and the Holy Spirit. I am so sad this morning. We have yet another example of how our society does not value the lives of our children, especially our sons. Our justice system remains broken. I understand that the "system" supposedly worked because an individual was tried in a court of law and the expectation was that we "accept" the verdict as just, and move on. The verdict was not just. A young man (and he is by no means alone) is no longer with us and he should not have lost his life under the circumstances given to him. So, what do we do?

We move to or remain with the Higher Power that must guide, educate and keep us. We wrap our hearts, our minds, and our love around our children and teach them how to be a part of building who and what they must become and "be" in a race conscious society that continues to insist that we live in a post-racial society.

We must, as African American mothers and grandmothers, reach out yet again to let our babies know how much we love and cherish them because they are our blessings from the Lord. We must reach out and teach them, even if they are 31 (my son) or eight (my grandson), how passionately and actively they are loved. We must be proactive, because this African American mother and grandmother, will truly be at a loss in how to "act" if one of them is killed because of a person or a system that disregards the sanctity of their lives. We must teach them that we live in a race conscious society that persists in insisting that they do not matter. They do matter.

We must teach our sons and grandsons to study to show themselves approved in a "world" that encourages them to focus on the "today," the simple, the emptiness of immediacy issues, and the belief that they do not matter. We must teach them to build themselves with the power of the One most High, and who they are in every context of this earthly existence. I love you Quincy. I love you Cayden. That love comes with power, mercy and grace. I thank the Lord for keeping you, for protecting you, because, but for the grace of God, I could have lost you. Yesterday I got another glimpse of what that might "feel" like.

Because of that feeling, I pray strength for every African American mother who has lost their baby to the senseless act of another human being's disregard for an African American child's heavenly voice, his dynamic laughter, and his "swag" as he learned how to be a "brother." I pray resolve as that mother peers at his slightly slanted grin as she told him yet again to get his "rusty, dusty, rear end in that bath tub." I pray fortitude as she touches his feet stretched out so she can kiss his wonderfully stinky toes. I pray the glory cloud of protection as his last kiss might be placed strategically on her forehead, as he walks out the door to again meet a world hostile to his very existence.

I pray our strength and our conscientious action my dear sisters, as we love and learn from the suffering of our sisters who have lost an African American boy-child. We must hold on to the fact that we are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation (of mothering women) belonging to God, who may declare praises to Him, who calls us out of darkness into His wonderful light (I Peter 2:9).

FOUR YEARS AGO – DECEMBER 1, 2016

The Black Lives Matter movement officially began as a Twitter hashtag soon after the acquittal of George Zimmerman in 2013. Three women, Patrice Cullors, Alicia Garza, and Opal Tometi, had a history of advocating for social justice in the areas of incarceration, immigration, and domestic labor (Rickford, 2016). The movement grew throughout 2013 and 2014. It gave "voice to a popular and righteous rage, establishing a new touchstone of grassroots resistance..." (p. 36). By 2016, the movement was recognized globally (Lebron, 2017). While much of the nation and the world perceive these important women as a negative force, people in the African American community heard and resonated with their voices and joined this movement to effect change.

I again reflected on what I needed to do to further activate my emerging voice. As an African American mother and grandmother of a son and a grandson, the perceived threat on their very lives was and is important to me, on a daily basis. When I think of my son and my grandson, I am not concerned about statistics or perceptions of their worth. I love them with a passion. That passion is fueled by the power of my religious, professional, and personal beliefs.

I want them to live vibrant, productive and God-fearing lives. I want them to be safe in that pursuit. I do not want them to be disrespected and most important, I do not want them injured or killed because someone does not love and value them in the same ways that I do. Further, I do not want anyone to look for reasons or explore why my son or grandson could have acted "better, or more responsibly," if and when they are confronted and possibly murdered in interactions with someone from a neighborhood watch or the police.

MY SON'S ENCOUNTERS WITH THE POLICE

As I think about George Floyd and Trayvon Martin, I remember vividly the six times my son was stopped and/or detained by police as a high school student in an urban area of Texas. Each time he was questioned, it was because he was African American. They wondered why he was driving "that car." When his friends tried to defend him, the police demanded that those friends (all European American young men), be quiet. On one beautiful Saturday morning, the police were interested in why my son was sitting in a car, in a parking lot, with his radio volume turned on high.

My son, along with his European American friends, had come to the parking lot of a high school, during a break from their University Interscholastic League (UIL) speech event. UIL has operated in the State of Texas since 1910. While students like my son, were not

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included in this organization's early development, because of segregation. In an "integrated" Texas Independent School District, he joined a tradition of educational excellence in the development of leadership skills. This organization now provides all high school students in the State of Texas, the opportunity to represent their respective schools in the areas of debate, forensics and sports. Ironically, this organization is managed under the auspices of the University of Texas' Office of the Vice President of Diversity and Community Engagement (UIL, 2021).

My son and his friends were playing their "rap" music in synch, in their respective cars. Six of them had convinced their parents to allow them to drive to this high school sponsored event because it was close to our school community. They were happy to exercise what they considered a mode of independence, driving a car, and not riding the school bus. None of them "owned," a car and they were quite proud they had convinced their parents to allow them to drive to the school sponsored event. Playing their music was an innocent activity, in their wonderfully young minds, because they were not bothering anyone.

They were enjoying themselves on a Saturday morning as they awaited the continuation of their participation in an extra-curricular event that would surely earn them "brownie" points as they contemplated college. However, none of them understood the magnitude of my concern because my son was the only one accused of doing something wrong. He was the only African American in the parking lot on that Saturday morning. He was the only one whose identity was "verified" by police, while being questioned about the ownership of the vehicle he was driving.

In a later incident, my son was stopped by police for entering a construction area in a residential neighborhood. He was driving down a one-way street. He had clearly broken the "law." His rationale, along with that of his European American friend, who my son was dropping off, during a college break, was "that is what 'everyone' does Mom," on the weekends." His friend had instructed him to drive down the one-way street. He said the entire neighborhood drove in this manner on weekends, because construction workers were not present. Another European American friend again tried to defend my son and he was told to be quiet.

My son was questioned about whether he was transporting anything illegal. The police called the canine unit; they wondered if my son had anything to tell them as they awaited the arrival of the unit. When additional police arrived, they informed my son that the dog was spending a significant amount of time sniffing the steering wheel of the vehicle. When my son responded that it might be due to the burger with onions, he had recently consumed, he was accused of being a "smart aleck." These memories might be perceived as outliers and anecdotal, but they were and are "real" to me. I was enraged. He was told he would have a court date and it would mean him having to leave his university to appear in court. I called to complain about the disrespectful treatment of my son. I called to find out the court date. He received a ticket, but the ticket was never submitted by the officer. These memories from my son's teenage years, are often like recurring nightmares.

When Trayvon Martin was murdered, I wondered when the onslaught would begin for my then, eight-year-old grandson. That same wonder has continued with each murder of a young African American boy or an African American man. The wonder violently accosted me during the summer of 2020, when George Floyd was murdered by a policeman. My now 16-year-old grandson is in the forefront of my mind and my soul. "I can't breathe..."

Application To My Teaching

During the Fall of 2016, my graduate students were studying to become instructional school leaders. In a Culturally Responsive Community Engagement class, they planned a conversation with law enforcement and a community forum to support more effective communication between the home, school, and the community. Further, the student chapter of the National Association Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), at my university, also participated in the forum. I am their faculty sponsor.

The NAACP is the oldest and largest grassroots civil rights organization in the United States. Their goal in education is to ensure "access to great teaching, equitable resources, and a challenging curriculum" for all students (NAACP, 2020). As undergraduate students, they were and are committed to promoting awareness and understanding of campus concerns for racially and culturally just interactions.

The 2016 forum was engaging and important to both my graduate, and undergraduate students. The police chiefs and/or representatives from three departments attended. A minister from the immediate community (a former police officer) facilitated the discussion. The undergraduate students in attendance challenged everyone who attended the forum, as they shared their experiences with the campus police and the predominantly European American student population at our university. My graduate students also included their middle school and high students. Those young people decorated the table clothes used during the forum with their questions for the police. For example, they wrote, "Why are people who look like me shot so much? What are you going to do to help and not hurt us?" All community members in attendance engaged in intimate and important conversations.

Each of these student groups (graduate and undergraduate) continue to remind me of why I teach. I continue to teach the graduate course on Culturally Responsive Community Engagement. The graduate students remind me that we can change the world, one leader at a time. They are predominantly European and Latinx American students. Recently, I was blessed to have five African American developing leaders in a co-hort of 50 graduate students. They each were committed to acting on the need for dynamic culturally responsive instructional leadership in PreK-12 schools. The undergraduates remind me of how brilliant and wonderful an opportunity it is to serve African American youth. They are invigorating and passionate about their pursuit of an education. Both groups were and are charismatic, inventive, astute, and worthy of a socio-political educational system that honors and respects them. The forum continues

to be conducted or envisioned each semester the course is offered. However, during the summer of 2020, I again was confronted with reflecting and acting on the fortification of my teaching.

SEVEN MONTHS AGO – JUNE 2, 2020

On May 25, 2020, I wept even more profoundly as I thought about George Floyd, my son, my grandson, and two of my nephews. I can't breathe, but I now understand, the Holy Spirit is breathing for me. What would I do differently as a result of the turmoil experienced by our nation and the world in midst of a pandemic and the pressing visibility of the Black Lives Matter Movement?

On Saturday, May 30, 2020, I drove down Texas Avenue in College Station, Texas, and I was so proud, even in the midst of my sadness and my tears. I was proud because as I blew the horn in my car, some Texas A&M University (TAMU) students waved, carrying signs. We shared a fist up! Those fists meant, "Black Power Revisited," to me. The students carried signs that said, "Black Lives Matter," "George Floyd, and "Justice Now." As I wept some more, I saw that most of those students were European American. TAMU, where I proudly teach, is a Predominantly White Institution of Higher Learning (PWI), in the United States of America. During the Fall of 2020, we educated over 71,109 students across all programs at the university. 3.34% of undergraduate and graduate students are African American.

While the university educates over 56,205 undergraduate students, only 3.02% of the student body is African American (Texas A&M University, 2020). Be very clear, I am not delusional, nor am I pretending that a "pie in the sky" notion about what is happening systemically at my institution of employment exists. We have serious issues and our African American undergraduate students live, study, and work within those sometimes, painful issues on a daily basis.

My graduate students are a part of an online program, so they were not on campus as undergraduates grappled with how to address the growing panic in our nation. However, on May 25, 2020, while I witnessed hope as I traveled home on that Saturday afternoon, I was assaulted with an imperative asking what I was going to do to make things better for my son, my grandson, African American young men throughout the country, and undergraduate students at TAMU. I continue to have the privilege of being the faculty sponsor of the student chapter of the NAACP. Those undergraduates continue to teach me to respect their passion and persistence as they pursue their education at a PEAIHL. What would I do with the lessons learned from my students, while I struggled with what the ongoing pain resulting from the assault on the lives of African American boys and men?

APPLICATION TO MY TEACHING NOW

I was and am proud to say I am a member of the TAMU faculty, as I observed our students peacefully protesting on that Saturday afternoon. Many might not understand, and I can only hope and pray that what I share will provide everyone with a context that is real and important to me as a mother, a grandmother, an aunt, a researcher, and a teacher, living in a race-conscious society. I had watched the news coverage of angry and hurt communities, all over America and the world. Yet, I witnessed a beacon of hope at that particular moment. Those European American students demonstrated that beacon of hope.

I continued home as I thought about our nation and world being in the midst of a pandemic that had taken over 100,000 lives in May of 2020. Did those students, demonstrating on that Saturday afternoon understand the magnitude of what was happening on our campus and in our country. Were we teaching them about institutional and systemic racism and the importance of eradicating the persistent infestation of their hope? What would I do to demonstrate to African American undergraduate students at TAMU and those in PreK-12 environments that the Aggie community understood that they "Matter?"

Nine months later (February, 2021), over 500,000 American citizens had died from Co-VID 19. Many of our schools in the United States were either providing instruction in virtual teaching environments or working to transition back to face-to-face environments. I have continued to teach graduate students in an online environment. I am teaching yet another section of the same community and family engagement course. I am charged with advocating and challenging my students to continue to pursue a culturally responsive ideology that champions not only the worth of the predominant Latinx American PreK-12 student enrollment in our state, but also the proud and clear assertion that, "Black Lives Matter," as they support teachers who serve African American young boys and men.

I have struggled with what I want to say and teach my students about culturally responsive community engagement as they think about and serve African American boys and men. Over the years I have been accused of focusing "too much," on issues related to African American children. I have never been motivated to eradicate my advocacy; however, I have continued to work on how best to share my advocacy for the purpose of motivating culturally responsive leadership action by my developing school leaders. The following is what I share with my students, unapologetically, and passionately, because African American children are worthy of the best that educators offer through culturally responsive leadership and instructional delivery, in a race-conscious society.

What I Want My Students To Know And Understand

George Floyd reportedly said he could not breathe at least 12 times to unresponsive police officers. At least one mayor in our nation reportedly tweeted, "If you can say you can't breathe, you're breathing. Most likely that man died of an overdose or heart attack"

(Kessien, 2020). His response was unfounded and unnecessary in the present climate of insensitivity, overt systemic racism, disrespect, and racially motivated murder.

As a mother and grandmother, "I can't breathe!" But yet, I have to breathe. I need the nitrogen and the oxygen in the air that sustains each of us. When I think of George Floyd and see images of my son and my grandson in my head, I hesitate in my breathing. I inhale quickly and remind myself to exhale. I feel nauseated. "I can't breathe."

MY DYNAMIC AND BRILLIANT SON

Will a police officer see my 39-year-old son on the streets of Los Angeles and decide that he is a thug or a drug dealer? Will they care that he has two undergraduate degrees and a Master's degree? Will they care that I still refer to him as my baby boy? Will they care about his sage wisdom, at the age of four? We had moved to Washington, DC. He observed me as I somehow lost my way, (every day for two weeks), as we traveled daily from school, back to our new home. Will they care that my son constantly told me, "Mommy, you turned the wrong way!" Will they care that I told him, "you are four and do not know what you are talking about?"

Will they care that my baby boy was right, and I finally had to yield to his wisdom and sense of direction, in the midst of the circles re-created in our Nation's Capital, by Benjamin Banneker, an African American surveyor and inventor, who duplicated the plans left by Pierre Charles L'Enfant in 1791? Will they care that my son teased me about not listening to him, but I listened to all the stories about the controversies around Banneker's importance in considering the design of our Nation's Capital?

Will they care that my son makes the best bread pudding on the planet and persists in talking about his mother's "Kool-Aid for the family," because he insists that it is too sweet for human consumption? Will they care that I love him with all my heart? "I can't breathe!"

MY DYNAMIC AND EVEN MORE BRILLIANT GRANDSON

Will a police officer see my 16 year-old grandson on a Texas street and decide that he too is a thug, a young thug? Will they care that he plays the tuba and is in the marching band? Will they care that he is teaching himself to play the Bass guitar and is in the Symphonic and Jazz Band? Will they care that he currently has a 92.75 average as a Sophomore in high school? Will they care that he is enrolled in Pre AP-Algebra II, Chemistry, US History, Advanced Journalism, English II, Symphonic Band, and the Jazz Band? Will they care that he loves to have conversations with his "Grangi" (that is me), about micro-aggressions in America?

Will they care that he makes the best macaroni and cheese on the planet? Will they care that he laughs at his Grangi, when she reminds him of how much she used to love to smell his stinky toes when he was an infant and toddler? Will they care that he accepts the fact that he will always be my grandbaby boy, but insists that the rest of the world does not need to be reminded of that fact by me? Will they care that my grandson has and will always be my standard of excellence in championing the brilliance of African American boys to teachers who do not understand the importance of his worth in our educational settings? Will they care that I love him with all my heart? "I can't breathe!"

MY DYNAMIC NEPHEWS

As an aunt, researcher and teacher, "I can't breathe!" But yet, I have to breathe. I need the nitrogen and the oxygen in the air that sustains each of us. When I think of George Floyd with the images of my son and my grandson in my head, I think of other African American men. I also see my nephews, one, a police officer in Chicago, and the other, a police officer in Houston. I inhale quickly and remind myself to breathe.

Will a bystander decide that my nephews are like those police officers who disrespect the lives of African American boys and men? Will they care that one nephew is a proud graduate of Prairie View A&M University, in Prairie View, Texas? Will they care that he majored in criminal justice? Will they care that he served as a police officer in the State of Texas for 8 years (College Station, Hearne, and Belton) and then decided to move back to the state of Illinois, to become a police officer in a large, urban city? Will they care that he was willing to start over so he could serve and protect in Chicago, Illinois, especially because of the ongoing assault on African American boys and young men, while thinking of the importance of being with his young son? Will they care that his life is placed at risk every day he goes to work? Will they care that I love him with all my heart? "I can't breathe."

Will a bystander care that another nephew is a proud graduate of Texas A&M University? Will they care that this Aggie served in the Corp of Cadets for four years, graduated with a teaching degree, and decided to become a police officer? Will they care that as he discussed the pandemic and the neighborhoods where he serves in Houston, Texas, that he is concerned that so many of "our" people do not always seem to take the importance of social distancing seriously? Will they care that he is vigilant in stressing the importance of what he is committed to doing as a police officer, even though he acknowledges that racism is "alive and well in the United States? Will they care that we use to have "knock 'em out, drag 'em out," discussions about the importance of voting, as he waited for his clothes to dry and then return to his studies, as a university student? Will they care that he decided to vote for the first time in November of 2020, even though he still had little "faith," in our nation? Will they care that his life is placed at risk every day he goes to work? Will they care that I love him with all my heart? "I can't breathe!"

DYNAMIC AFRICAN AMERICAN YOUNG MEN

I share my reflections also as a sister. I am a sister, not only to my siblings, but also to the strong, yet vulnerable Black men God has brought into my life as friend, confidant, mentor—brother. I have three biological brothers; I have watched them mature and constantly negotiate the waters of schools and society. Each of them demonstrates creative brilliance that has often been ignored. One of my brothers was in and out of prison during his youth and young adult life, because his brilliance led him down a path of poor decisions and dire consequences. God has allowed all of my brothers to pour critical wisdom into my development.

You see, as I have reflected on this emotional journey of love, and concern for my son and grandson, I began to reconcile with greater clarity that I have never stopped worrying about other Black men throughout our nation. I worry about those who are mature, and those growing into maturity. I am concerned about how they experience America's construct of African American male identity. I ask, how do mature African American men feel and respond to being un/underemployed? How do African American men survive or thrive on a daily basis, as they navigate their life, knowing that many never see them as trustworthy or honorable?

How do African American men feel when they are labeled as athlete, entertainer, gang banger, dope dealer, rapist, brute, violent, uneducable, fatherless, jobless, wasteful, insensitive... You see, African American men make up approximately 6% of the total U.S. population, yet according to the U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics, African American males account for 34% of the total male population of those incarcerated (Zeng, 2018). Further, 42% of youth under the age of 18, who are detained in juvenile facilities, are African American (Sawyer, 2019). This alone is both telling and alarming. We must consider, the social determinants of holistic health and dignity, if we want to fully understand the daily vulnerability of "living while African American, and male in the United States."

My Faith Based Conclusions

Will anyone care that I love my son, grandson, nephews, and all of my brothers, passionately and purposefully? I can't breathe, yet, I have to breathe. I need the nitrogen and the oxygen in the air that sustains each of us. I know that the Holy Spirit is breathing for me, because I know I cannot do it on my own. God has blessed me with a desire to facilitate change in my advocacy for their very existence, growth, maturity, and education.

On Sunday, May 31, 2020, my minister said that one might be angry, but we are not to allow our anger to control us. She said, "Be mad about it, but do right about it!" My Pastor quoted the Apostle Paul from the Book of Ephesians, and the late Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

"In your anger do not sin": Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold. "Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you."
(New International Version Bible, 1984/2020, Ephesians 4:26-27 and 31-32)

REV. DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING JR.

Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that. Hate multiplies hate, violence multiplies violence, and toughness multiplies toughness in a descending spiral of destruction (King, 1957).

History will have to record that the greatest tragedy of this period of social transition was not the strident clamor of the bad people, but the appalling silence of the good people (King, 1959).

My dynamic Pastor, the mother of three African American young men said, "we have a responsibility to do something." As a result, I decided not to let the sun go down on my hurt or my anger. I am going to do something about it. I am not going to be pessimistic and assume that nothing can be done to change the current tide of violence, pain, and death. I am going to teach with God-given strength. I am going to teach that the lives of African American boys and men, matter. I am going to teach, unapologetically, that the lives of African American children matter.

I am also going to teach that "culturally responsive leadership matters" (The Leadership Academy, 2021). I am going to teach that school leaders have to teach and support "all" teachers in effectively respecting and serving African American boys, girls, young men, and young women. I am going to teach that it does take an entire village to educate a child; but we must reconstruct the village.

I am going to be a part of the reconstruction, especially in the upcoming changes in our school system because of the pandemic and current financial and emotional crises in our communities. Further, I am going to teach that I cannot do this alone, but I will allow no one to discourage me or insist that nothing can be done as long as some people hold steadfastly to notions of privilege that often devalue the lives of African American people and our children.

In the depth of my faith, I ask the educational community to join me, along with the students with whom I have the privilege of teaching and serving, in your respective roles and places. I ask each of us to not just talk about the violence that is attacking cities all over our nation, while we contemplate what we are going to do about African American children who will return to school in 2021 and beyond. At Texas A&M, we proudly uphold and love the brand, "Fearless on Every Front." How will we operationalize that mantra for African

American boys and men? Let us “agitate” for our children to learn from and with us, because we have established a standard of excellence that supports them in rising to the occasion of meaningful engagement as productive members of our society, as a result of what we as educators do. As educators, we must be strategic standards of excellence and action, as we stand before African American learners.

“I can’t breathe!” But yet, I have to breathe. I need the nitrogen and the oxygen in the air that sustains each of us. As I advocate for African American boys and men, the Holy Spirit guides my every action in my role as mother, grandmother, aunt, sister, researcher, and teacher. He breathes for me and through me. To God All the Glory, as the educational community operationalizes action steps to construct meaningful change. It is imperative that we facilitate dynamic and improved academic outcomes for African American learners in PreK-20 educational environments with dignity and respect because, “Black Lives Matter!”

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