

“I’ve Stayed Silent for Way Too Long” by Lauren Holiday

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It starts with something small, and you ignore it.

I remember when Jrue and I first started dating, right after college, and one of the women on my club team made a passing comment about him.

“Jrue is the *whitest* black guy I know.”

I don’t think she knew that she was being racist. It was like it was her way of “complimenting” Jrue on how “polite” she found him, or how “articulate,” or how “intelligent.” Either way, her comment made me pretty upset. Jrue, though, being the understanding guy that he is, calmly shrugged it off when I told him. He always finds a way to shrug people like that off.

“They just don’t know any better,” he says.

Jrue has always been amazing at rising above — and I’ve taken to following his lead in that sense. We’ve both tried hard to live our lives as socially conscious people. And as a white woman and a black man married and parenting a biracial child, our eyes couldn’t be more wide open when it comes to this country’s history of racism and racial politics. But we’re also extremely private — and have never been ones to air our personal business out in public.

And I think that’s carried over into how I’ve dealt with the racism that Jrue faces — on a pretty regular basis — both on his own and as a result of our being together. As upset as I might get, my instinct in those moments has generally been to not get confrontational with people. Not because I necessarily felt that was the “right” or “wrong” way of dealing with racism..... but because it’s what felt natural, being with Jrue. Our M.O. has mostly been to try to rise above the hate and move on. To just keep on living our lives.

So when we’d walk into a “nice” store — a furniture store, a clothing store — and a salesperson would greet me in the friendliest way, but never even acknowledge Jrue (until they realized we were together, and then they’d become awkwardly polite to him)?? Inside, I’d be *furios*. But I’d never confront anyone, or make a scene. We’d just take a deep breath and go on with our day.

And when we went to buy a new car and the dealer asked Jrue, straight up, “Are you sure you can afford this?” — *furios* doesn’t even begin to describe what we were feeling. Jrue wanted to pay for the car in cash, right then and there, to prove a point. I had a different idea: to walk out and not give them a penny of our business. Man..... we were both SO angry when that happened. And we definitely “dealt with it,” in our own personal way. But still — looking back?? We didn’t exactly speak up about it.

And I think that just sort of became the norm for us. Jrue and I have always cared deeply about racial injustice — and fought hard against it. But when we encountered racism on a personal level? Instead of confronting it, we tended to reckon with it privately.

Instead of exposing it, I’d mostly keep it to myself.

And then something happened that I couldn't keep to myself.

I was in the car with my sister-in-law — Jrue's sister — Lauren. (Lauren Holiday and Lauren Holiday, I know, it's a lot of Lauren Holiday. We make it work.) Lauren and I are pretty close, and do a lot together. And we'd just now finished our morning workout — and were driving to grab some post-gym Starbucks.

But then suddenly, right as we were pulling out onto the road, we saw this police car swerving into our lane behind us. I didn't think anything of it really. I wasn't speeding or in any rush. As far as I knew, everything was fine. So I kept driving. That is until a few minutes later, when the police car — still trailing behind us — turned on its lights and siren.

Since we were on a busier street, I pulled into an empty parking lot, and the police car pulled in right behind us. Over a loudspeaker, the officer instructed me to get out of the car. I got out. He asked for my license and registration. I didn't have my license on me — neither of us did. Instinctively, my sister-in-law FaceTimed Jrue and told him our situation. (At the time, I was struck by how quickly Lauren sprang into action — how she recognized the full seriousness of what was happening long before I did. Looking back, now, I see my relative lack of urgency for what it was: white privilege.) Fortunately, Jrue was at home, only like five minutes away, and so he said he'd be right there with our licenses.

We explained to the officer that my husband was coming.

A few minutes later, Jrue (with his dad) pulled into the parking lot. He immediately stepped out of his car, and calmly approached us with our licenses in hand.

I'll never forget what happened next.

They handcuffed him.

No, seriously: Even though the officer knew in advance that Jrue was my husband, and that he was coming to the scene, and why. Even though no one had explained to us *why we had even been pulled over in the first place*. And even though Jrue could not have been more careful, or more deferential, in how he made his approach. All the cop saw was this large black man getting out of a car.

That was it — apparently that was enough.

He came at Jrue and slapped handcuffs on him.

Jrue of course, being Jrue, stayed calm and composed as this was happening. I was livid, and the opposite of calm — demanding answers, insisting that my husband hadn't done anything wrong, trying to figure out how this whole thing had snowballed so quickly. But neither of our reactions in that moment are what I remember most. The image that most stays with me is the look I saw on Lauren's — Jrue's sister's — face. I think it was seeing her react that made me actually register the *danger* Jrue was in.

Lauren wasn't staying calm like her brother, or getting angry like me.

She was just..... terrified.

Her face was completely paralyzed with dread. It was the face of something that, as a white person, I'd never experienced before: the feeling — no, the *knowledge* — that any interaction you have with the police could potentially be fatal. That any breath you take in the presence of a cop could potentially be your last.

We got lucky.

In terms of what happened next, that's really the only way to put it: We got lucky.

None of us are sure of exactly what happened — but after about 15 minutes of Jrue locked in handcuffs, a second officer arrived at the parking lot, surveyed the scene, and started talking to the first officer. We couldn't make out what they were saying. Maybe the officer was being informed of Jrue's status as an NBA player. Maybe they saw there was nothing to charge Jrue with, and were figuring out what to tell us. Or..... who knows. All we do know is that after that conversation, the officer removed Jrue's handcuffs, and let him go.

As for me? They gave me a ticket.....

For my tint being too dark.

Let me repeat that: I drove without a license — *while Jrue did absolutely nothing wrong.*

And yet Jrue was the one who ended up in handcuffs.

Like I said, though, we got lucky. And now I'm finally realizing how much we've *been* lucky. Not just about the fact that our encounter with the police that morning could have gone so much worse — but about the fact that *all* of Jrue's encounters with racism over the course of our relationship could have gone so much worse.

I'm also realizing how privileged I've been, as a white person, to have encountered racism like I have and to have been able to compartmentalize it. To have been able to get angry about it on a personal level, but then move on with my day. To have been able to move on, period.

And that's why I've decided to come forward and write this.

I'm also realizing how privileged I've been, as a white person, to have encountered racism like I have and to have been able to compartmentalize it.

I'm writing this because I know it's not enough for me just to be self-aware. It's not enough for me just to acknowledge my white privilege within the context of racism. I have to actively be leveraging it *against* racism.

I'm writing this about my family's experience with the police, not because it compares in any way to the appalling murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor and so many others, or to the heartbreak their families

have had to endure. I'm writing this because the point is: *Any racism at all, on any level, is worth confronting, and worth exposing, and worth speaking up about.*

And when we wonder how things got to this point, where it took a *cold-blooded murder caught on video* for us to finally begin a national conversation — I think a big part of the answer is that, as a country, we've kept our experiences with racism "private" for way too long. We've rationalized racism away as "someone just not knowing any better" for way too long. We've been taking the easy way out for way too long. We've been staying silent for way too long.

I've stayed silent for way too long.

And I'm sorry.

Jrue and I are pregnant again — we're expecting our second child sometime later this year.
It's a boy.

And I've been thinking a lot lately, as I guess a mom does, about the world our kids are going to grow up in. I've been thinking a lot about the meaning of certain things. About what it means to raise a daughter growing up to be a black woman in America — and soon a son who will grow up to be a black man in America.

I've been thinking a lot lately about what I owe.

What I owe to my kids as a mother — and what I owe as an ally to the adults they'll become.

And I'll be honest: I don't have all of the answers right now. I probably don't even have all of the questions. But I do know one thing for sure.

I owe.

Every white person in America owes.

We owe a debt that's far from being paid, and the promise of a country that's not yet where it needs to be.

We owe our voices — and, more than that, we owe our actions.

We've owed for a while..... and we'll owe for as long as it takes to make it right.

So let's get to work.

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<https://www.theplayerstribune.com/en-us/articles/lauren-jrue-holiday-nba-racial-injustice>