



Perspective/Opinion

Unapologetically Black

By British L. Fields, MLS(ASCP)

When I first read the news that Dr. Manning was “coming” to MCW, I literally freaked out. I’ve been following Dr. Manning on #MedTwitter, so I know just how big of a person she is. She is one of the giants in Black medicine, along with Drs. Camara Jones and Quinn Capers. I hung on every word that Drs. Jones and Capers said when they came to MCW as guest speakers a few years ago.

I was an excited pre-medical student with dreams that went beyond anything my ancestors could’ve imagined for their lineage as they were sharecroppers in Mississippi. Fast forward some years to me becoming a third-year medical student, who has been slightly jaded by all that which comes with being a Black, ambitious, female medical student at a white institution trying to make change when many of my colleagues are fine with the way things are. The same person who realized we did not have our first Black professor in M1 year until we had been in school about 5-6 months. The same person who spent eight weeks on a surgery rotation at our home institution and only worked with one Black surgeon during that time, and that was during an overnight shift. So, when I tell you about my excitement for Dr. Manning “visiting” MCW, it was really what the doctor ordered to bring some inspiration and motivation back into my life. I knew that no matter how tired I was from working a 6pm-6am shift on Labor and Delivery, NOTHING was going to stop me from “meeting” with Dr. Manning.

Many moments pop into my head as I reflect on my time with Dr. Manning. I was fortunate to not only attend the school-wide Grand Rounds but also a more intimate “conversation” with her that Dr. Marty Muntz facilitated for URM student leaders and those passionate about working with marginalized populations. One of the things that stood out most for me was how unapologetically Black Dr. Manning was in both spaces. For some of you, this concept maybe foreign. As a Black woman going into a profession that has been dominated by white individuals, I must completely change who I am to fit into this mold that is medicine. “Code switching,” as we call it, is a daily, exhausting ritual. And to be in the presence of a beautiful, educated, Black female leader in healthcare, who was unapologetically Black in the way that she spoke, looked, and behaved was refreshing! She stood completely in her “whole Black self” (as she said to me on Twitter as I caught one of her facial expressions on a Zoom screenshot), and for me, it was just what this little Black girl and aspiring pediatrician from the West Side of Chicago needed to see.

Dr. Manning was the perfect reminder that I am enough, and my voice, approach, and style matters. Listening to her speak about her conversations with those hesitant on getting the COVID vaccines reminded me of conversations I've had with patients during my OBGYN rotation at St. Joseph's Hospital. How those couple extra minutes spent with a patient having "Empathetic Communication," as Dr. Manning called it, really goes a long way. Even those who are completely against it, just having a conversation with them matters. This was a reminder that me, sitting in my whole Black self, with my Black mothers or expecting mothers and talking to them real about their thoughts on the COVID vaccine could be just the spark they needed to go and research the vaccine or commit to getting vaccination, which has happened for a pregnant mom of mine and her partner.

I must also remember that I am a woman and a part of a people that has been hurt time and time again by the healthcare system. So, I can't just throw away the statement of Dr. Manning's patient who said, "I've never seen anything good offered to poor Black people that is also offered to rich white people at the same time." But I can keep trying, advocating, speaking up, and not backing down when being one of the only Black faces in a room. Thank you, Dr. Manning, for reminding me that "I come as one, but stand as 10,000," as Dr. Maya Angelou said, and that is the strength that will continue to carry me during this journey.

British Fields is third-year medical student from Chicago, IL. She attended Howard University in Washington, DC for her undergraduate studies and then completed a post-baccalaureate pre-medical program at Dominican University in River Forest, IL, where she received her second Bachelor of Medical Science. Her interests include diversity, equity and inclusion work, mentorship, medical education research, pipeline programs (GO DSHREP/ROADS/AIM), and patient advocacy. British is an aspiring pediatrician, with the goal of working with underserved patient populations to improve health outcomes.