

Dear Dad,

I have thought about writing to you for some time now but have struggled to find the words. This month has been particularly difficult for me. It is odd. As a Black man, I should feel empowered by an entire month dedicated to the achievements of men and women who look like you and me.

But perhaps that is just not enough for me anymore.

I am tired of the retail sales, the advertisement campaigns, the social media posts, and the Martin Luther King quotes. I am tired of the temporariness of it all. For twenty-eight days, I see these momentary celebrations and try to appreciate them. But ultimately, they only serve as a reminder that this country's people are fickle. When the calendar reads "March 1st," the celebrations will disappear as they always do, and what will we have gained? When black bodies fall, lifeless and bloodied, and the streets are on fire with the rage of the unheard, where will the love that surrounds us now be? Perhaps I am being too cynical, but I prefer cynicism to the pain of disappointment.

I am not saying that we have not made progress. Surely my experience with my own color has been more tolerable than yours, and even much more tolerable than Papa's. But I would be lying if I said I am not frustrated by the constant work it takes to push that progress forward, at how little the stone budge no matter how hard we push. You are brown, I am brown, and those not born with that burden still must run a mile to come even within a lightyear of understanding what that means.

I remember when I was just eleven years old and you took me to buy my first pair of football gloves, the ones that formed a cohesive design when you put your hands together, gloves the wide receivers on television wore and thus I needed to be a proper wide receiver. You

decided to take me to Dick's Sporting Goods that day, a joyful outing for a father and his son. But the white clerk who stalked you after we had just arrived sought to rob you of such a pleasure. He lurked just behind the shoe rack, I remember, hoping to remain unseen. I did not notice him at first, not until you confronted him. I remember the way you pointed your bronze finger in his face, his pale look of shock turning a blush red of discomfort. We paid and left quickly, my hands carrying my new gloves, yours balled in fists.

I wish we had talked about that day when I was older, but perhaps it would have been too painful. I regret that I was so young then, too young to understand the weight of what had happened. I was confused why you had shown that man so much anger and embarrassed by my dad's behavior. But I knew nothing then of your color, of my color, and what that meant. You were never a Black man to me, just my dad, and I hated that my dad could be so angry sometimes.

But, when I look in the mirror now, I see your face. When I speak, I hear your voice, and I fear I am beginning to feel that same anger in me, because I now know what it is like to be a Black man in a White world. When I enter Dick's, or any retail store, I fear that that very same man with a new face will stalk me as he stalked you. I study hard to become an attorney so that I may change the world. I learn the legal system so that I might be able to protect others from its brokenness. But, as I walk home from class and feel the vicious cold on my neck, I decline to raise my hood, because to raise my hood in the black of night is to invite prejudice that may prove fatal. I know the power of the law to fight injustice, but no matter my ambitions it seems I will always be held down by a country that refuses to grow.

Despite all of this, I promise to press on because I know that is what you would have me do. That is what Papa would have me do and his Papa and his. To not do so would be to fail

those men, men who have carried the name “Millner” through struggle far greater than my own and achieved an unassailable and monumental dignity still, men who passed on an enduring spirit of love that now lives within me.

Your son,

Elliott