

By Dawn and Rick Collins

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Dawn and Rick Collins: Our son died because of racism in this country. Stop questioning Black American's patriotism



Rick and Dawn Collins are the parents of Army Second Lieutenant Richard Collins III, who was murdered at a bus stop at the University of Maryland on May 20, 2017. (Photo: Bruce Smallwood)

Michael Savage is one of the most popular conservative radio hosts in the country, and on May 29th he had a blunt message for his millions of listeners. The protesters filling the streets of America's cities after George Floyd's murder weren't simply wrong to decry police violence and call for far-reaching reforms; instead, he argued that they were fundamentally un-American.

"Are you telling me we don't have a civil war going on in this country?" he asked. "Are you telling me the left isn't a foreign nation to most Americans?"

Savage's message wasn't subtle. He wasn't questioning the beliefs of the protesters. He was questioning their patriotism.

He couldn't be more wrong. Patriotism doesn't mean blind allegiance to a broken system. It means loving one's country enough to want to fight to make it better. It means a willingness to protect your fellow Americans even at the cost of your own life. And it means a readiness to do all of that despite knowing that a disturbingly large chunk of the country will hate you no matter what you say, do, or believe.

By any measure, Black Americans are among the most patriotic of all Americans. To argue otherwise is to ignore the history of families like ours — and to turn a blind eye to the sacrifices we've made along the way.

Our parents served in the New York Police Department and the Korean War. Our son joined Bowie State University's ROTC program because he wanted to serve his country; seeing him newly-commissioned as a lieutenant in the Army was one of the happiest days of our lives. We were proud that he was willing to put his life on the line for democracy, and looked forward to witnessing his accomplishments.

Sadly, those days will never come because our son, just 23-years-old, was murdered by a white man on the University of Maryland campus just days before his college graduation. And that wasn't the first time racism had stolen a member of our family. Some 65 years ago, shortly after his return from Korea, our son's grandfather was murdered by another white man motivated by blind hatred for a stranger whose sole crime was having a different skin color. Our son's grandfather survived a foreign war, but he couldn't survive the scourge of American racism.

Black Americans have served the country even as institutional racism has punished us for serving. A 2016 study released by the Equal Justice Initiative found that between 1877 and 1950, "no one was more at risk of experiencing violence and targeted racial terror than Black veterans." After World War II, gaps in wealth and education between white and Black Americans increased because we were denied pivotal G.I. Bill benefits whites enjoyed.

The tradition of black patriotism in America continues to this day, despite repeated acts of state-sanctioned violence against us. It isn't that Black people don't love America; we just want America to love us back. We are protesting so that message can finally be heard and heeded.

Those who would cast us as rebels without a worthy cause are not only seeking to perpetuate a racist system, they are opposing the democratic values upon which America was founded. Benjamin Franklin himself said "it is the first responsibility of every citizen to question authority." Was he unpatriotic too?

White people ought to ignore ridiculous claims that Black people are unpatriotic, acknowledge the unfair deck we are dealt in this country, and open themselves up to reconciliation measures that can begin to right historical wrongs.

We're going to do our part to help the country heal its deep societal wounds by creating a foundation in our son's honor that will stand as a reminder of the bright light that was prematurely extinguished because of racism — and of the ongoing sacrifices of Black Americans. Neither can or should ever be forgotten.



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