Dear white friends: Thanks for checking in, but no, I'm not OK
Marshall Carr Jr.  6/23/2020

I'm not OK. I haven't been OK for a long time. In the wake of the George Floyd protests, many of my dearest white friends have asked if I'm doing OK. With some of you, I've said yes, I'm OK. Honestly, I feel I have no choice but to tell you this. It's not a lie, but it's also not the truth.

I'm not alone. According to new data from the Census Bureau, anxiety and depression among African Americans soared after Floyd's death became public. No other racial or ethnic group recorded such a spike.

Over a decade ago, the critical race theorist William Smith coined the term “Racial Battle Fatigue” (RBF). He defines it as the "cumulative result of a natural race-related stress response to distressing mental and emotional conditions. These conditions emerged from constantly facing racially dismissive, demeaning, insensitive and/or hostile racial environments and individuals."

I've been here before. I feel unseen, misunderstood, angry and tired as hell. RBF is real. I'm tired of trying to convince white folks in my life that this is not new. That it happens every day. I'm sick of the continued microaggressions and the looks my colleagues and "friends" give me when I say it's been worse since Trump. You have no idea.
I live in the small, rural, coastal town of Fort Bragg, California. Yes, the town happens to bear the name of a Confederate general. In the last few years, I've seen more Confederate flags in town and on campus at the high school where I've taught English for over a decade. Now, teaching digital media, I've heard the N-word said more in the last three years in the classroom, on social media and directed at me or at the few Black students I've had the pleasure to teach than ever before.

So, to answer your question, no, I'm not doing OK.

Don't get me wrong, I'm happy to see so many folks standing up, protesting and posting on social media for change. And change is happening. But, I'm continually disheartened when I have to block a member of my extended family or a former student when they insist on posting their ignorant white privilege all over social media.

You don't get it? Fine.

You feel attacked? Fine.

You feel guilty? Good.

You think all lives matter?

You have no idea …

... how many times I've been called the N-word. From third to fifth grade, it was literally every single day.

... how many times I've been pulled over by the police. In the first two years I had my driver's license, I was pulled over at least six times. I was one of two Black kids in my high school class — but no one else can remember getting pulled over.

... how many times I've been followed through a store. Growing up, I worked for my money. On the weekends I'd go to a local shop to buy candy or to play arcade games. It didn't matter how much money I spent, or how often I frequented the shop, certain owners/workers would follow me to make sure I wasn't going to steal something. I had brought white friends. The store owners followed only me.

... how many times I've “fit the profile” of someone the cops were looking for. Once when I was 19, I went to see a movie with my (white) girlfriend at a cineplex outside of Los Angeles. Before the movie started, we stopped off at the bathroom. When I came out, there were two cops waiting for me. They asked for my ID. At first, I resisted. I was angry. I was innocent. When I asked why, they insisted I fit the profile of someone they were looking for and they needed to see my ID to be sure.

After they realized their mistake, thankfully, they let me go. But I didn't let it go. I haven't let it go. I will never let it go. We didn't see the movie that day.

Twenty years later, there is a mental health crisis among Black people in America. Because of course there is. How could there not be?

I'm still angry as hell when I see yet another Black man killed by the cops. Another trans person of color. Another minority further marginalized, killed or ignored.
Centuries of oppression and inequality protested against has put us here yet again in 2020. During a pandemic, people are marching. Enough is enough. I'm tired of feeling this way, but I know I likely will my entire life.

This sense of inevitability is what is keeping me angry. It's why I'm frustrated and depressed every time I look at the news. When I see yet another Black death and more voices going unheard. This is why Black mental health is still so fragile.

I plan to keep teaching. I will never stop learning and never stop helping those around me. I will never stop supporting my students of color and will continue to hold space for the LGBQT+ community on campus. I will raise my kids to have compassion toward all people everywhere.

The only thing I ask of you is that you continue to protest. Continue to challenge yourself and your friends when you realize you have privilege. Use that privilege to make our community and this world a better place.

Thanks again for asking how I'm doing, but right now, I am not OK, and I'm not sure I ever will be.