

**[witness right hand raised]**

let's listen  
let's stop talking first  
let's hear their stories  
let's learn our real history  
*let's witness*  
let's add some light and shade  
let's acknowledge that wherever we're at  
we're still a work-in-progress  
so let's move over  
let's stop casting shadows  
let's support leaders who get it  
let's identify the "joke" and call it out for what it is  
let's raise the temperature  
let's expand our circles  
let's show up  
let's do the work  
let's stop crossing the street  
let's walk towards the discomfort  
let's go deeper  
and farther  
because we need to do better  
and we need to do more

**[witness head down, breathe]**

I was asked to tell my story  
I can't do so without acknowledging a few things first  
I'm a White, heterosexual, gender-conforming, able-bodied, middle-class, woman  
those first five things give me a whole host of privileges  
in this moment  
as a part of this movement  
for Rayshard Brooks  
George Floyd  
Breonna Taylor  
Ahmaud Arbery  
and too many others before them  
it's important that I address my whiteness

**[witness head down, breathe]**

***Witness***, Monica Lynn Manoski  
*originally written and performed for "Violence Transformed," in Boston, MA in 2019*  
*performed for "iartcolony" in Rockport, MA in 2020*

**[witness rolls up sleeves]**

what does it mean to wear this skin  
that some must see as violent?  
I didn't choose it  
and I'm not always sure I want it  
it was given to me unearned  
the color of my skin came from parents  
but before I was born  
the color of their skin granted them access into a community  
where mostly, everyone looked like them  
when I came into the world  
I grew up seeing people who looked like me on tv  
and most of the people in positions of power  
my teachers, the principles, doctors, and business owners  
looked like they could be relatives  
I always felt accounted for in course curriculum  
I never attended an under-resourced school  
I never had to learn that people who were meant to help me  
might actually cause me harm  
so I don't have to be afraid of walking and getting shot  
I've never been followed in a store  
tailed in a car  
or treated like a suspect  
it's always been assumed that I'm good

**[witness head down, breathe]**

now don't get me wrong  
I try to be good  
and my parents?  
they're two of the hardest-working people I know  
I grew up in a family that didn't believe in naps or downtime  
you were expected to be productive  
and to earn everything you have  
but while we "pulled ourselves up by our bootstraps"  
there's been a steady wind at our back  
helping us inch forward even when things feel hard

**[witness head down, breathe]**

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*originally written and performed for "Violence Transformed," in Boston, MA in 2019*  
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the color of my skin means normal  
the color of my skin means I'm welcome  
the color of my skin means I've got options  
the color of my skin means I can be late to meetings  
wear whatever I want  
and ignore what doesn't affect me  
the color of my skin means *I benefit from racism*  
in the United States of America our systems and institutions work in subtle  
and overt ways to advance people who look like me  
the White narrative of U.S. history is what I learned in school  
it glossed over the atrocities of white supremacy  
first, the genocide of this country's Indigenous people  
my teachers called it "manifest destiny"  
and taught the myth of the first Thanksgiving  
later, the enslavement and slaughter of millions of Black people  
textbooks still call this "immigration"  
still later, the injustice of sharecropping  
the terrorism of lynching  
the codified criminalization of Black life for White gain  
today, this violence continues in the streets by way of police brutality  
it lingers in hospitals  
where people of color are known to receive substandard care  
racial discrimination in mortgage lending in the 1930s  
shaped the demographic and wealth patterns of american communities today  
racism is why northern, liberal-leaning cities like Chicago, New York, and Boston  
are still largely segregated by race  
racial disparity pervades the criminal justice system  
Black folks are more likely than White folks to be arrested  
once arrested they're more likely to be convicted  
once convicted they're more likely to experience lengthy prison sentences  
if accused of a crime  
I can assume I'd get a fair and impartial trial  
the same would not hold true  
if I was Black  
the assumption in America is that White people are good  
that's why White people who kill people are deemed mentally ill  
while people of color who do the same are terrorists  
**[witness head down, breathe]**

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now slavery was before our time  
so I've heard people who look like me say things like  
"that was so long ago "  
"slavery didn't affect this generation"  
"so why is it still an issue?"  
"why is everything about race?"  
and "why is everyone so sensitive?"  
has there been restitution?  
who got the forty acres and two mules promised?  
and who really believes affirmative action can make amends  
for the millions of Black lives lost?  
you can't make up for humanity sold  
and time does not solve the problem  
**[witness head down, breathe]**

racism today is still so real  
our white racist culture allowed Trump to take power  
white nationalism has always been a part of this country  
while white hoods and swastikas are easy to point out  
today's racism is often more nuanced  
if you're White *you can choose to not see it*  
it's reflex  
it's unconscious bias  
it's automatic associations and assumptions  
it's the good/bad binary  
it's the lack of representation  
it's actions without consequences  
it's who you trust and it's who you fear  
it's the when moving to the suburbs isn't just for more space  
it's where we put our pollution  
it's self-interest and double standards  
it's code words and veiled language  
when "better schools" mean whiter schools  
it's the school-to-prison pipeline  
it's the white savior complex  
it's "my best friend is black"

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“I don’t see color”  
and “Black people are racist too”  
it’s “I’m sorry I didn’t see you”  
**[witness head down, breathe]**

to all the people who share my skin color advantage  
**[witness right hand raised]**  
our oath is to the public  
and this is not the end  
violence transformed is violence acknowledged  
*now what are we going to do about it?*  
**[witness slowly scans the room, exists]**

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