

Preface

Kimberly Jade Norwood

In the months following the eruption in Ferguson, my youngest, then a sophomore in a predominately white public high school, found herself at the center of debates at school dealing with the fallout from the death of Michael Brown. The debates included: the framing of the issues by the media in black versus white, the policing of black and poor communities by law enforcement officers, poverty, looting, rioting and the color and face of crime as portrayed in the media, the identity of the black male narrative, and the relevance of black life, whether and how it matters. She was blindsided by the racial division, turmoil, hate, and anger displayed throughout the media and even in her environment. She did not know what to do, how to respond, what to feel. As part of an effort to begin a process of understanding and thus healing, she wrote a poem, subsequently published in our local newspaper. It is reproduced below.

This book expands upon the innocence raised in that poem in pro-voactive ways. The information conveyed in this work is designed to push readers to ask of themselves the very questions raised therein with a commitment to seeing the challenges our nation faces as revealed in the aftermath of Michael Brown's death and to committing to work towards the eradication of the barriers of injustice reflected herein. This book is full of hard questions we all must ask of ourselves and of others, soul searching we all must do, and brutal honesty we all must face. Race is still an issue and while uncomfortable to discuss, can no longer be ignored. We have to figure out what to do and what to say. The future of our society depends on it.

What Do You Say?

Veronica Jade Norwood

What do you say when you have so much shame for your country and so many emotions race through your mind that the words you search for are never found?

What do you say when your heart aches so much that you don't even know if you can make it through the night?

What do you say when you're trying to get people to listen to you and then realize they hear your words but they just don't care?

What do you say to your community to get them to see that instead of helping justice prevail they're destroying our homes and dreams instead?

What do you say to them to make them see the hypocritical actions of fighting for justice by destroying businesses to get that message through?

What do you say to a nation that allows hate crimes to still be an issue, while they say they will make changes but never do?

What do you say to your children when you have to explain to them whether a person was shot because of the color of his skin?

What do you say to someone who is not conscious enough, to make them see that racism does in fact still exist?

What do you say to someone who has been a victim of this hatred when the comforting words of "It will get better" surely feels like it never will?

What do you say to those who treat this stuff as a joke, or don't even acknowledge that this is an issue?

What do you say to someone who doesn't understand integrity or refuses to accept equality?

What do you say about those issues to the people in power, when they are the ones causing them?

What do you say when you don't even know how to feel safe in your own city, in your own country?

What do you say when you're ashamed of yourself, for not doing everything you possibly can to make this country a safer place for all man- and woman-kind?

What do you say to bring change?

What do you say?¹

1. Veronica Norwood, *What Do You Say?*, St. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH, Dec. 10, 2014, http://www.stltoday.com/news/opinion/what-do-you-say/article_1b502ccf-22f2-5a1f-871b-20763c2a5956.html.