

## **A Letter to the White Police Officer**

Dear white police officer  
at my local gas station,  
I apologize.  
Momma and Daddy always told me  
to shake police officers' hands  
and thank them for their service,  
and I used to, wanted  
to be just like you  
in my Dollar Tree dress-up kit  
as a kid – black  
baton, cuffs, a gun,  
and a badge. I played  
in the basement with my brother,  
demanded he put his hands up,  
but I couldn't quite  
shake your hand today.

Dear white police officer  
clockin' cars on I-35 South,  
I apologize, but something  
changed. I was in seventh grade  
and Daddy gave me the talk  
his daddy gave him,  
explaining that when the time came  
I'd need to drive extra safe,  
find a place in the open  
to keep my wallet,  
always say yes sir, yes ma'am,  
keep my hands still on the wheel,  
and never resist—even if  
I did nothing wrong  
because it's not worth getting killed  
and I have the right to a phone call  
in jail, and Daddy promised  
he'd always find me.

Dear white police officer  
at the academy down the street,  
don't worry; Daddy didn't teach me  
to fear you, the news did.  
My granddaddy grew up  
during the Civil Rights,  
but I grew up during the Ferguson,

Baltimore, and Charlotte riots,  
and I watched the tv screens  
filled with scenes of burning buildings,  
cars, and screaming masses  
choking on tear gas.  
I learned the term “police brutality”  
and about the divide  
between black and “blue” lives  
and that mine didn’t matter,  
even if I was “a good kid  
who planned to go to college.”

Dear white police officer  
eyeing me at the grocery store,  
Michael Brown  
is the first name I carried with me,  
my generation’s Emmett Till  
with a twist, teaching me  
that the moment I commit  
a crime, I lose my rights  
so I should never give officers  
ammunition  
to shoot me with.

Dear white police officer  
whom I was afraid to ask for help from  
while I was being followed at the mall,  
Philando Castile  
was the first human I saw  
seconds from death.  
His white tee was soaked red  
in blood drawn by the bullets  
of your acquitted  
fellow officer.  
I was 17.

Dear white police officer  
who ticketed Daddy’s car in our driveway  
for blocking the sidewalk  
but forgot to ticket our neighbors,  
my brother brought home a pellet gun,  
and Momma, Daddy, and I got mad.  
We didn’t mean to hurt his feelings,  
but he isn’t like the “other neighborhood kids.”

Dear white police officer  
who drove me to the hospital,  
I am sorry if I looked at you fearfully  
in my delirium  
when I demanded  
my brown-skinned friend  
be allowed to ride with us.  
I know you were just doing your job,  
but I didn't feel safe  
and didn't trust  
my shaking hands.

*Addendum:*

Dear [former] white police officer,  
Elijah McClain  
Ahmaud Arbery  
Breonna Taylor  
George Floyd

et al.

Dear white police officer,  
I wrote this poem almost  
two years ago.  
I could have written this poem  
two hundred years ago.  
In twenty years,  
will my daughters live  
to write the same poem?  
Will my sons die the same death?