

THE PRICE TO PAY

Written by Raabia Qureshi



A few months ago, my cousin and I visited our local Sonic on a late Saturday night in hopes of ordering a small strawberry cherry limeade and a medium order of mozzarella sticks. As we pulled into the parking lot, six to seven cars—mostly trucks—crowded the lot alongside large groups of teenage boys. As we slowly drove around, many saw the hijabs on our heads and began to point and laugh at us, and applaud us in a mocking way. I even ducked my head to avoid watching them allude to their “political” flags adoring their trucks. As if we weren’t terrified enough, their cars followed us out of the parking lot as we left empty-handed.

Although we arrived home safely that night, the insurmountable fear and panic I felt that day will forever be etched in my brain. For weeks, the sight of trucks either behind me in a drive through or parked next to me in a parking lot made me wary. I’m fully aware every white person in a truck isn’t hateful like the people we encountered that night. But experiences like these are the culprit behind the discomfort and fear in many cases.

In the past year, the numerous events—from the Black Lives Matter movement to the raid on the Capitol building—have not only served as defining moments for those who face discrimination, but also widened the gap between Americans as a whole and heightened the fear inside me. All I can think about is racism, hatred and who’s left and who’s right. My mind goes into overdrive as I wonder whether the person in front of me in the school

lunch line believes I don’t belong in this country, respects me like everyone else or simply doesn’t give a damn.

But even before this year, my past four years of high school subtly reflect the hostility I’ve always felt in public spaces around strangers. I’ve tried to go unnoticed by maintaining the same group of friends or saving my worries and concerns only for those who “understand” and feel the same as me. I convinced myself mingling outside of my comfort zone wasn’t worth the trouble in the case of something uncomfortable or happening to me in a discriminatory way. Compromising my confidence in my identity to make others feel comfortable has become second nature to me.

Joining The Express has allowed me to express some of my thoughts on paper. It allows me to call out the discrepancies in the Northwest community and voice how they affect me personally. However, not everyone has that opportunity. Constantly discouraged through comments such as “snowflake” or “overly sensitive,” the gaslighting many people of color feel shoves them in a corner and forces them to push their issues under a rug. Only until a white, liberal activist finally brings attention to the issue a few months later does the topic actually gain a fraction of the attention it deserves. I appreciate the effort

non-POC put into shedding light to our problems, but we need to hold the mic ourselves for once, too.

Even now, the feeling as though I’m complaining about my thoughts and feelings associated with my identity keeps nagging at me. Constantly, I allow white fragility—the discomfort a white person feels when confronted by information of racial inequality or discrimination—to ensue at my own expense. In a culture where the media only sheds light on a Black or Asian person when it involves crime and death or the conversations in

most classrooms still tiptoe around social justice as if racism and hate crimes are political subjects, students of color often feel unimportant. However, it’s also safe to say that culture is gradually changing. Through Instagram, Twitter, and protests, people are louder than ever before. Not only is it inspiring, it makes me comfortable speaking of my experiences.

I accepted the Sonic incident as a price to pay for living in America—as if I’m not American too. While it is unfair to generalize an entire race based on the actions of a few people, it’s the repetitive pattern, the daily silence, and the systemic faults white people are complacent with which validate my feelings of fear. No matter where I go, the hijab I wear on my head or the color of my skin will always make me a second class citizen in my own country.

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