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The Pursuit of Advil and Blow Pops

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The Pursuit of Advil and Blow Pops

Abstract

“Excuse me sir, where’s the Advil?” I ask politely as I walk, for the first time, into the Quik Mart across the street from the Colonial Hall apartments.

“Over there.” A middle-aged Indian man declares, apparently suspicious of my request to alleviate my cramps.

I smile back anyway, hoping that his face is permanently in a suspicious glance that makes me uncomfortable to go anywhere but the aisle in front of him. [*excerpt*]

Keywords

Surge, Surge Gettysburg, Gettysburg College, Center for Public Service, racial profiling

Disciplines

African American Studies | Race and Ethnicity | Social Psychology and Interaction

Comments

Surge is a student blog at [Gettysburg College](#) where systemic issues of justice matter. Posts are originally published at surgegettysburg.wordpress.com Through stories and reflection, these blog entries relate personal experiences to larger issues of equity, demonstrating that –isms are structural problems, not actions defined by individual prejudice. We intend to popularize justice, helping each other to recognize our biases and unlearn the untruths.

SURGE

[VERB] : to move suddenly or powerfully forward or upward

THE PURSUIT OF ADVIL AND BLOW POPS

November 24, 2014

"Excuse me sir, where's the Advil?" I ask politely as I walk, for the first time, into the Quik Mart across the street from the Colonial Hall apartments.



"Over there." A middle-aged Indian man declares, apparently suspicious of my request to alleviate my cramps.

I smile back anyway, hoping that his face is permanently in a suspicious glance that makes me uncomfortable to go anywhere but the aisle in front of him.

I didn't hear him the first time so I asked again.

"Where?" I raised my voice to make myself sound more friendly, gave him the nicest smile possible, and waited attentively for an answer.

"There." He points, this time raising his voice. As I wander around the aisles, half distracted and half looking for advil, his eyes follow me.

Another Gettysburg student, this one a white male, walks in a few seconds later. The store owner's eyes remain on me. I change aisles, continually checking out of the side of my eye to see if he's still watching me. He is. After picking up a bag of Blow Pops and worrying more about the store owner's glances than my own personal pain, I ask him a third time.

"Sorry, can you-"

"There! In front of you."

This time, his voice lacks friendliness and has a looming overtone of anger and discomfort. I grab the advil, pay for my purchases and leave.

“Thanks,” I say.

I feel uncomfortable. I was watched and treated as if I were a criminal.

First, I think about what I am wearing. I’m both disappointed and relieved that I’m wearing bootcut jeans, sneakers and a hoodie (with the hood down I might add, since apparently that can put “suspicious looking” African-Americans in harm’s way). I think about my actions, my tone, my manners. I can’t think of anything I did to deserve the harsh and dirty looks.

I was racially profiled.

As I realized this, my palms became sweaty and stomach dropped. I had just come back from volunteering. I was obviously carrying a wallet and I even smiled at him. It occurred to me that no matter how many “good” things I did in my spare time, how openly I present myself, or how much I am loved by friends and family, I am still being seen as the color of my skin.

Being black *is* the suspicious behavior.

It is a chilling thought. One that I have intentionally blocked out of my mind by comfortably fitting into small-school environments and spending time with people that knew me the most. Even in my first few months at Gettysburg, I maintained this routine and didn’t have to think about the injustices I would inevitably experience as an African-American woman.

As I stood in the store, I was quickly reminded of the harsh reality of a racially-plagued America. Even people of color have come to internalize the logic of black guilt.

To the man at Quik Mart, I’ll buy my Blow Pops and Advil somewhere else.

To everyone else, we can no longer live in a world in which we, as black people, need to explain the mere presence of our existence, in a world where we are assumed to be at fault.

While equity is a nice goal, we aren’t there yet. Fighting for it isn’t an option, it’s a necessity. I am more than a perceived threat to a convenience store.

I am a paying customer with a headache and sugar craving.

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