

Thoughts on World Cancer Day and Black History Month 2023

While I'm thankful for my friends in cancerland, the majority are white. I'm tired of being the only Black person in the room or on Zoom.

February 23, 2023 By [Megan-Claire Chase](#)

You think
your pain
and your heartbreak
are unprecedented
in the history of the world
but then you read.

—James Baldwin

February 4 was World Cancer Day. I get emotional when I think about my cancer story and how doctors have consistently dismissed my pain and concerns. The thoughts running through my head about cancer and Black History month always make me want to scream in frustration.

We need providers, researchers, employers, friends, and family to

SEE us

HEAR us

BELIEVE us

RESPECT us

Going through cancer takes a HUGE toll on every aspect of our lives. Having to constantly push through barriers, deal with microaggressions from doctors, financial toxicity, career changes, infertility, and so much more is only part of MY story. I know I'm not alone in this.

Becoming an advocate was born out of my experiences and the urgent need to spotlight the issues of access to care and support. Whether you want to hear it or not, RACE, age, and how you

sexually identify play an ugly role in trying to be heard and believed. I feel for the Black community, communities of color, the young adult community, and the LGBTQIA community.

Something else I want to spotlight is how I've become intolerant of cancer spaces where I am the ONLY Black person in attendance. I used to go to a weekly virtual happy hour that was born during the pandemic in the AYA community. It was something I looked forward to each week. There would be new people of color who joined once but then never came back.

After the murders of Ahmad Arbery, Breonna Taylor, George Floyd, and the insurrection, I found it more challenging to be in spaces where I am the only Black person. I couldn't continue going to virtual happy hours or journaling sessions and chitchatting about Disney characters, food, kids, etc. I felt like this country was on fire, and I had no community to honestly talk about the stress of being Black and how my nervous system was constantly in flight or fight mode, which exacerbated my pain from toxic cancer treatments.

I now understand why there are certain Black-only breast cancer groups. I have yet to find a general cancer Black-only group that's a mix of men, women, and those whose pronouns are they/them. When I would bring this up in the other groups where I am the only Black person, inevitably, a white person felt the need to recommend "another strong Black person" to me. I shake my head because 1) I don't need white people to suggest Black people to reach out to, and 2) The Black cancer space is extremely small, and we already know each other or of each other.

I'm tired of having to center whiteness.

I'm tired of not feeling safe to express myself fully.

I'm tired of being the only Black person in the room or on Zoom.

I'm tired of white people sending private messages saying I'm an inspiration but won't state it publicly.

I always notice the Black people some white organizations ask to take part in specific panels, programs, or be guest speakers are the ones who don't fully talk about how racism and microaggressions have shaped their cancer experiences. They often give diluted versions of their experiences. I've also noticed that I am rarely asked to participate in certain cancer activities when race is on the agenda because I refuse to make the white community comfortable anymore.

The more I learn about Black culture, the more I have begun to stop trying to filter the Black out of myself. I used to pride myself on being the ONLY one in the room. Now, it enrages me. As a Black woman, I don't have the luxury of talking about trivial things when I see murders of Black people on TV or shot in grocery stores or killed for simply existing.

While I am thankful for the many genuine friends I have in cancerland, I am acutely aware that the majority are white. Being Black has shaped my access to care, access to pain management, and access to community support. It's like what James Baldwin said in the quote I posted, the more I

read, the more I understand.

Until next time,

Warrior Megsie

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