

I Am Constantly Concerned

By Ricardo A. Woods



For those of you who do not know me personally, allow me to introduce myself. My name is Ricardo Woods. I was born and raised in Natchez, Mississippi. I am a product of the Natchez Public Schools, which integrated for the first time in 1989. I am a graduate of the University of Southern Mississippi. I received my law degree from the Cumberland School of Law. I am the son of a United States Navy veteran and a grocery store clerk. I am a brother to two siblings. I am a husband to a wonderful woman some would call a saint for marrying me. I am a father to two very smart, intense, and fearless daughters. I love volunteering in the community. I am a mentor to younger attorneys and law students. I am a partner at Burr & Forman LLP. I serve on our firm's executive committee. I currently serve as the city attorney for Mobile, Alabama. I represent and defend law enforcement officers. I am an American, I am a Black Man, and I am concerned.

The reason I am concerned is largely based on my own life experiences and those of my colleagues who share my ethnicity. I am concerned because in my life I have been pulled over by law enforcement officers more than fifty times. I am concerned because I am consistently questioned on whether or not I am a lawyer in more than one jurisdiction. I am concerned because I know Black doctors who have been profiled in the same manner. I know Black public officials who have dedicated their lives to public service who have been pulled over numerous times. I am concerned because I know Black bankers who are profiled in the same manner. I am concerned because I have been denied access to enter the well to address a judge in federal court by an armed federal marshal with his hand on his firearm.

I am concerned that there are people who disagree with the statement "Black Lives Matter." I am concerned that I have once again had to watch a video of an unarmed Black Man being senselessly murdered for allegedly committing

a nonviolent offense. I am concerned that I live in a society where some people automatically feel threatened by my presence simply because I am Black. I realize that some of these very people who are threatened by my skin color are employed to serve and protect me and may not value Black Lives. I am concerned that certain people in our society feel that I have to justify my presence in a particular location and threaten to call the police if I fail to provide the justification they require. I am concerned because I do not run in my own neighborhood at night. I am concerned because I have been the victim of racial profiling. I am concerned that I have been mistreated by police officers. I am concerned that it will not stop with my generation.

I am concerned that I have to teach my daughters certain life lessons: how to act when you encounter police officers; how to respond when you are wrongfully accused; how you may be judged based on your ethnicity; how to make other people feel comfortable around you; how not to appear threatening or intimidating at school or in the workplace; how to ignore or deal with racially insensitive conversations. I am concerned that I am not the only person who has had to give these lessons. I am concerned that some people misconstrued and mischaracterized Colin Kaepernick's nonviolent protest as being anti-American. (Remember, there is no rule or regulation against kneeling in the NFL.) I am concerned that some people are more disturbed by videos of buildings being vandalized than by a video showing an unarmed Black Man losing his life at the hands of former police officers.

I am concerned that so many people who I call friends have been silent on these issues for way too long.

Ricardo A. Woods is chair of the DRI Diversity and Inclusion Committee.