

Walking While Black Lyrics

This morning after my usual high protein breakfast of black beans, salmon, salad and a bite of eggs, I set out on my 15 minute brisk walk. (I started this routine after hearing Tim Ferris author of The 4 Hour Body.)

I don't like to be cold--except when I'm heat flashing--so I added a mid-thigh black suede coat to my ensemble.

I start walking. I see a white family of three or four kids and two adults playing while waiting for the school bus.

Immediately, I feel weird. I feel like a threat. I am Black, dark brown complected. I have dread locks. I am wearing a black coat that could conceal something bad.

This is not my neighborhood, not my state and not my home. I am an outsider. I am in a middle class neighborhood in Hamden, Ct.

No one in the family speaks and I keep my eyes forward so as not to offend or be offended. I feel fear.

It is 8:25am. I worry that someone will call the police about a suspicious Black woman walking.

As I walk, I wish I had chosen my lime green sweater. It's cute and it seems to increase my innocence.

Black is dangerous. It hides things. I'm dangerous. I could be hiding something.

These are the automatic thoughts that I notice myself thinking only after I pass another collection of white adults and children waiting for the school bus. As I pass this group, a woman smiles and says "Good morning." I respond "Good morning" and smile back. A little. I keep walking.

Going down a steep hill, I realize I've internalized all of these messages about Black people, about myself as a threat. I pick up speed. There's nothing wrong with me, I insist, still worried about my black mid-thigh suede coat that a white friend had given to me. You're going to be okay, I tell myself. I search for a hair band to tie up my dreads. No luck.

As I turn around to ascend the hill, I open the coat. There, nobody will think I'm hiding a weapon. I'm wearing a pink fitted sweater and olive cardigan underneath my jacket. I am innocently female. (I know, #SayHerName, but I'm just doing what I can.)

As I huff and puff my way to the top of the hill, I feel a little relieved that all the families are gone. I don't feel like a threat.

I practice what I will say to the police: I'm visiting my friend _____ and her address is... I'm proud that I remember her address.

I worry about my son, about black boys and men who walk outside their neighborhoods. Threatening. Suspicious. (Trayvon Martin sits in the back of my consciousness.) I worry that they don't have female innocence to draw on. A cute lime green sweater or a fitted pink top to cue the outside world that they are not a threat. (Of course that did not save Sandra Bland.)

I am facing traffic. Cars come at me. There's no sidewalk here. People who walk are unexpected. Will the dark coat could hide me from a careless, momentarily distracted driver?

I arrive home.

I go to the guest bedroom.

I meditate.

I write.

This is what it's like to "Walk while Black."