More than A Moment: What Happens After the Headlines Fade

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On June 2, 2023, Ajike "AJ" Owens was shot and killed by her neighbor, Susan Lorincz, in front of her children. She was a mother of four. Unarmed. Protecting her kids.

You likely heard about it. The story made national headlines. There was public outrage. A trial. A sentence. Then—silence.

That silence haunts me. Because I've heard it before.

As a Black woman and someone who has spent over 20 years in philanthropy and the arts, I've seen the cycle: A Black like is taken, briefly covered, and quickly forgotten.

In this country, Black death is no longer breaking news—it's a pattern. A few days of outrage. A fleeting trend. And then the story disappears, as if our lives are only meaningful when they generate clicks or controversy.

But the families left behind do not forget.

Ajike's mother, Pamela Dias, is now raising her daughter's children while carrying her grief. In the weeks after AJ's death, she and I founded the *Standing in the Gap Fund*—a national mutual aid initiative that provides direct financial relief, healing resources, and support to families and communities impacted by racial violence.

We started the Fund because we know what happens *after* the cameras leave: the funeral bills are still coming. Rent is still due. Legal fees mount. Therapy becomes a luxury. And too often, there's no support system.

This June marks two years since Ajike was killed. We're using this anniversary not to revisit trauma-but to reclaim truth.

This moment is not just a remembrance – it's a call to action
Standing in the Gap Fund is focused on three urgent priorities:

1. **Pay Attention Again -** Read. Watch. Share. Reignite the conversation
2. **Support the Work -** We are asking 100 new monthly donors to help us sustain this work.

3. **Refuse the Erasure -** Stand with us in ensuring these stories don't disappear

A sustaining donation doesn't just support the future of the Fund – it can mean a family doesn't lose their home after tragedy or have to sacrifice basic needs. No one should have to choose between survival and healing.

Because the problem isn't just violence – it's the forgetting.

In the past year, we've seen the George Floyd mural in Houston demolished, the Black Lives Matter street mural in Washington D.C. removed, and the Smithsonian's National Museum of African American History and culture face budget cuts. In Salt Lake City, murals of people killed by police were taken down. Across the country, books by Black authors are disappearing from schools. Monuments, murals, and public art honoring our history - are being erased.

These are not isolated acts. They're a part of a national pattern of erasure. A retreat from reckoning.

While media occasionally covers these rollbacks, few stories are shaped by Black voices. Fewer still come from those living the consequences firsthand.

This work is personal for me – not just because I knew Ajike, but because I believe art is one of our most powerful tools to preserve memory and resist erasure. Before leading the Fund, I curated exhibitions, collaborated with artists, and helped foundations invest in cultural justice. That's why our work goes beyond financial support – we also fund murals, poetry, film and rituals that honor Black life.

When the world forgets, we remember in color.

Later this year, AJ's story will reach broader audiences through *The Perfect Neighbor, a* documentary I served as an executive producer on. Built around exclusive police bodycam footage and investigative interviews, the film premiered at Sundance and will debut on Netflix this fall. It doesn't just recount AJ's death – it interrogates the years of systemic failure that made it possible.

For many, this will be the first time they hear AJ's full story. For us, it's a continuation of what we've done since day one: refusing to let her legacy be reduced to a moment.

This isn't just about AJ. It's about families who never make the news. The systems that normalize racial violence. What it means to live—and grieve—as Black people in a country that too often denies our humanity.

Because erasure isn’t just about what gets taken down – it's about what our children may never even know to miss. As a mother, I think about what’s being stolen from the next generation: the stories, art, and rituals that root us. That’s why we must protect our artists, griots, and truth-tellers – who hold the keys to our memory and meaning.

We can’t undo what happened to Ajike. But we can carry her story. We can invest in the people who remain. And we can build something better – together.

That’s what it means to stand in the gap.