

"Too high a price on making sure our children are disciplined"

By [Steve Thorngate](#)

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In all the commentary around [Adrian Peterson and his son](#), one of the more interesting threads has been about the particular history of African American parenting and corporal punishment. [Charles Barkley](#) weighed in of course; so did [Michael Eric Dyson](#). Jamelle Bouie pushes back against Dyson in [this thoughtful post](#).

But the most provocative thing I've seen is by [Brittney Cooper](#). She goes past the "black parents spank" point to an important difference among Americans: it's not just that black parents are more disciplinarian and white parents more permissive due to correlations with class, religion, regional identity, etc. It's also at least partly because white and black kids are raised with a different understanding of their relationship to the world:

Parenting black children in a culture of white supremacy forces us to place too high a price on making sure our children are disciplined and well-behaved.... If black folks are honest, many of us will admit to both internally and vocally balking at the very "free" ways that we have heard white children address their parents in public. Many a black person has seen a white child yelling at his or her parents, while the parents calmly respond, gently scold, ignore, attempt to soothe, or failing all else, look embarrassed.

I can never recount one time, ever seeing a black child yell at his or her mother in public. Never. It is almost unfathomable.

I confess I've never thought about this specific point. But I have no doubt that Cooper is absolutely right. My daily routine has long included taking public transit to and from apartments in a series of Chicago neighborhoods that are not only racially diverse but also full of families. By now, a third of the little kids in town must have mouthed off to their parents in my earshot. But there's little to no overlap with the third of Chicagoans who are black. I can't remember the last time I saw a young black child giving his or her parents a hard time in public.

Cooper doesn't defend Peterson or even corporal punishment generally; her point is that black and white parents err in different directions because of the difference white supremacy makes. Among other things, her essay reminds me not to put too much stock in [my own, limited experience](#).