

The crispness of the cold, thin air.

*“Hands up! Don't shoot!”*

Posters and picket signs plastered with a people's lifelong demands for justice.

*“This is what democracy looks like!”*

The fluorescent greyness of the sky.

*“Stop the violence! Break the silence!”*

Everywhere different faces and experiences and beliefs, but they walk together hand in hand carrying a shared commitment.

*“No justice! No peace!”*

Marvin Gaye plays over the speakers in the street.

*“Black! Lives! Matter!”*

These vague memories are all I can recollect when I look back on that day in Washington. It's not much, but what I remember most is the fact that I almost didn't go.

...but before I get to that I want to tell you a little about myself and my experience at St. Andrew's

When I first came to St. Andrew's as a freshman, I was incredibly eager to engage in deep and sophisticated discussions concerning race and the realities of racism. Before high school, I went to a predominantly white school on the Upper West Side of New York City which was surprisingly hesitant about encouraging those types of honest discussions in the classroom. It was the type of place where people believed they were accepting and educated but had not yet taken the first step towards true acceptance. They had not yet pushed themselves towards conversation, action, recognition, or vulnerability. St. Andrew's felt like the place where I could finally engage in these discussions in a community as open minded and eager as I thought I was.

As an incoming freshman, I was eager to engage in discussions concerning race and political issues. However, I soon felt that there was this implicit message that they were only for people who had gone to conferences, or who were involved in diversity groups, or those who had been identified by faculty as having the potential for understanding the complexity of those issues. I felt isolated from the topics I was passionate about.

Flash back to the march...In the winter of my sophomore year at St. Andrew's, a group of students wanted to attend a march in Washington, D.C. protesting police brutality. The trip was open to anyone who wanted to attend. As soon as I heard about the opportunity, I already had my mind made up. There was no decision to make. I was going.

I've always been someone who knows what they aspire to do but struggles to put her

aspirations and hopes into action. I saw this march as my chance to do this - an opportunity to share my voice and my stance. I could finally become a part of the interests I had felt so isolated from. I was going to be present and active in the movement rather than logically discussing the issues in a controlled classroom environment.

It actually turns out that I had another commitment that Saturday that would have prevented my attendance at the march. Regardless, I still decided to go. I was not going to let other people's say or interest keep from being a part of something I was truly passionate about. That decision marked a critical moment for me. That day at the march I found the will to do what was important to me without having worrying about others' permission.

After the march, I found the confidence to get involved in the diversity education programs here. I stopped waiting around for a formal invitation to at the table, and instead I pulled up a chair. I found the confidence to apply to SDLC. Even though, I've never been selected to attend the national conference I've still stayed persistence. I've volunteered to help organize each chapel and weekend since my sophomore year.

While I still struggle with self doubt and overcoming uncertainty in many aspects of my life, my decision to attend the march helped me to realize that I don't need other people's validation of my interests to feel confident in pursuing them.

Now, I look to all of you - as underformers, rising and fellow seniors. At this school I feel that we take leadership positions far too seriously and we too often make it seem that our leaders are the students with the assigned titles or the reputations. Well, I think by falling into that we take to many other people for granted. Everyone here has the potential to make an impact - no matter how small or large. It may feel hard to find a way in or be recognized but what I'm trying to say is that your passion and interest is enough. What do you want to pursue? What is it that you want to contribute to this school?