

Avery Coffey

## “DP helped me open the door for others”

**An IB graduate who turned his trials into triumph plans to address educational inequality in his local community**

Avery Coffey is testament to the fact that tough circumstances needn't be a barrier to success.

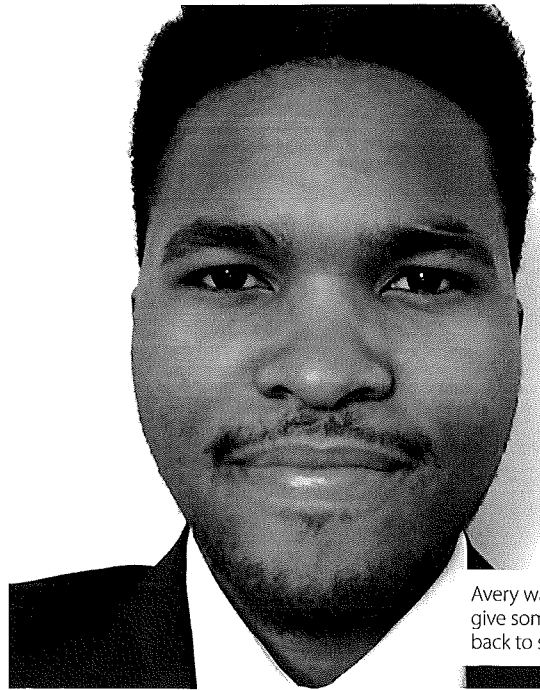
Challenging stereotypes about race and economic privilege, Avery is using his experience to inspire the next generation.

Three years ago, IB graduate Avery was accepted by five Ivy League Colleges – Harvard, Princeton, Yale, Brown and the University of Pennsylvania.

It was a difficult decision, but Avery decided that Harvard was the right choice for him.

“It is humbling to be among top minds from around the world,” he says. “It pushes you to be great. It’s nice to have the Harvard brand and I am fortunate to have the abundance of resources that the university provides.”

Avery grew up in Washington DC and witnessed housing segregation, wealth disparities and gentrification. He says he chose to study economics and African-American studies to better understand himself and the sociopolitical issues in his community, both across the



Avery wants to give something back to society

*“You can go anywhere you want to, and pursue any career that you want to. You shouldn’t let anybody hinder you from trying to reach your goals”*

country and around the globe.

During his time at Harvard, Avery has learned that comparison can be a thief of joy. He says: “I couldn’t compare myself to everyone else because everyone has a different background. When I internalized that, I began to really enjoy Harvard.”

### **IB laid the foundations**

Before Harvard, Avery attended Benjamin Banneker Academic High School in Washington DC, where he studied the IB Diploma Programme (DP).

He says it was the academic rigour that initially attracted him to the programme.

History was Avery’s favourite subject, which he says is thanks to teacher Joseph Presley, who made his classes engaging. “It’s important to understand the past in order to understand the present and thrive in the future. Sometimes, Mr Presley would

have Socratic seminars, which encouraged the entire class to care about the information and have an open discussion rather than just being lectured to.”

He also credits his biology teacher Mandi Jacobson, who “brought joy” to the subject.

He adds: “Looking back at my DP experience, it taught me the importance of studying. When I got to Harvard, I couldn’t just rely on my intelligence.”

Avery’s fondest high school memory is when his admissions and scholarships were celebrated at a school ceremony. “It felt nice to be recognized for the work that most of my peers were not aware of,” he says.

“I like to keep a low profile and I have worked very hard to be where I am, so having the support from my peers and the faculty pushed me to continue on my journey to success.”

### **Dreams to be a CEO**

Growing up, Avery loved cooking, and wanted to become a chef, but that became a hobby when he realized he was more interested in business. “I wanted to become a CEO of a Fortune 500 company and/or an entrepreneur.”

Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg particularly inspires Avery. “I consider him to be extremely successful, and despite his successes, he still has the ambition to be even greater, pursuing social missions to make the world even more interconnected,” he says.

However, Avery now sees his life going in a different direction than he planned.

### **Paying it forward**

After graduating from Harvard, he hopes to pursue a business role in consulting, finance or technology, and attend business school.

But he also plans to start a non-profit in south-east DC to help more young people of colour excel academically and professionally, and address the education inequality in his local community.

“You can go anywhere you want to, and pursue any career that you want to,” says Avery. “You shouldn’t let anybody hinder you from trying to reach your goals.”

In 10 years’ time, Avery is sure he’ll be working on an education policy that will change the lives of many. **IB**

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