

### Personal Statement

I've always been aware of the dangers and disadvantages that came with being African American. I had spent my entire Junior year building an art portfolio centered around the issue of systemic racism and police brutality. Despite already feeling deeply disturbed by this issue, seeing the video of George Floyd intensified my anger and impacted me in a way that I never thought was possible. I didn't have the courage to cry, shout, or even post about my feelings on social media. I felt helpless.

The day of the first protest in Seattle, I completed a charcoal art piece. It was a depiction of the protest happening at that very moment that I so badly wanted to be a part of but couldn't because of how dangerous it became. My intent of the art piece was to capture the magnitude of the protest and express how it empowered me. In the evening, I shared a photo of that art piece online and was shocked at the amount of positive feedback and support I received. I realized then, that so many within my own circle cared about this issue and wanted to see change as much as I did. My pain and frustrations were met with solidarity.

I was unable to participate in the Seattle protests, but in that moment, I identified a need within my community. I knew that if I planned and organized an event in my community it would allow for people like me to voice this issue and express the change that was needed here. Change was needed everywhere. But I recognized it needed to start with each of us individually and within our own communities.

Taking action, I messaged my closest friends, asking if they could spread the word about my planned protest. I wanted to reach enough people to have an impactful event. As word spread and people learned that I was leading and organizing the protest, questions started pouring in. How was I going to ensure a safe and peaceful protest? No matter the uncertainty of the attendees I knew in my heart, that if I did everything in my power to lead with peace and unity instead of anger and hatred we would all be safe. Nearly three-hundred people from within and outside the community showed up that day.

I recall looking around during the protest, seeing people of all races and ethnicities coming together. Some used their voices to educate the surrounding community, while others simply demanded justice. I remember speaking to the crowd on a megaphone, expressing my raw emotion. They tell you to stay in between the lines, not to deviate from the path that's been laid out for you. I can do much more than that. We can all do much more than that. It's a waste of power not to. It starts with standing up, creating something where there is nothing and working to improve the world little by little.

### Artist statement

Growing up I was always a creative boy, just like most other kids were. I used to get my friends together and we'd film "Oscar worthy" movies, at least they were according to my mother. But as I transitioned into high school my expression of creativity grew more and more specific. Art became my passion. With a little push from my freshman Drawing and Design class, the spark of interest within me burst into flames of determination and desire. I worked hard every day in class, and in my sketchbook at home to improve my skill level as much as I could. That's what I believed art was at the time.

That belief stood true until Junior year came around, along with one of my most impactful realizations. I had just watched a documentary/movie based on the Central Park Five. It was about five boys, younger than me, being wrongfully convicted of rape and murder. Arrested and imprisoned because their descriptions matched what they assumed the suspect to look like, Black. Learning about this injustice angered me to the core, and I was filled with internal pain that was difficult to bear. Searching for a way to release that stress I settled with putting the pen to the paper. I drew a saddened, young black boy, in a prisoner's jumper, with cuffs around his wrists. Sitting to the left of him, was a grown man, in cuffs as well, encroaching the little space given to the boy. To the right was another weathered and broken down man years into the system. That is what art is to me now. The way in which my brain allows me to express and address the problems that challenge me as a person. A way that I will forever use. I put the same emotional effort into every single piece I have created, including these 6 pieces of my portfolio.