

Savannah McCool
12th grade
Greenbrier High School, Greenbrier, Arkansas

Ever since I was young, I have had a pronounced sense of justice. My dad once joked that I have “a little bit of fascist” in me despite my love for democracy; I sometimes expect too much from society, and that leads to an “eye for an eye” mindset. However, I feel that this insistence for fairness and equality is what drives me, what makes me who I am, and what pushes me in all of my endeavors to try and leave the world a better place than I found it.

When I was little, I was a bit of a tattletale, much to the chagrin of my teachers. I believed that every wrong must be corrected, and I trusted authority figures to execute the proper punishments for every transgression committed by my peers. I did, however, also believe in fair discussions, and I insisted upon them in my own disputes. This, while annoying to my classmates, actually led to me becoming somewhat of a playground mediator— I can remember a few times in elementary school when classmates came to me instead of a teacher to resolve their arguments! It should come as no surprise, then, that I fell in love with politics during a civics unit in the third grade.

I was in the third grade during the 2012 election, which was my first real introduction to the political process. My parents, especially my mother, were deeply involved in local politics; I remember my mother giving me shirts from the campaigns she volunteered on. During the 2012 election, I asked them many questions, mainly concerning what they believed and why, but also concerning why they thought one way, while the majority of my peers’ parents believed differently. Through these discussions, I learned about our government and the many layers to the political process, and I was entranced by the idea of a system that guarantees justice for everyone.

Imagine my disappointment when I learned, years later, that that system is deeply flawed. From cases like OJ Simpson to the Central Park 5, the justice system in America fails both accusers and the accused every day. This, in my opinion, is entirely unacceptable in a country that claims “liberty and justice for all.” I have known since I was eight that I want to be a lawyer, but it wasn’t until this year that I decided I want to work as a public defender, focusing on reform in the criminal justice system. Considering my lifelong desire for justice, I think it was only inevitable that I would pursue a career that allowed me to fight for those without a voice. I know that, regardless of whatever future decisions I make, this passion will lead me every day to improve the lives of those around me, and to fight for those who need it most.