

JASMYN SHUMATE SCHOLARSHIP FINALIST



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is a junior at Shaker Heights High School. She loves sports—especially volleyball and softball and also writes poetry and composes music. Jasmyn likes to educate herself on the issues facing the African-American community and would one day like to be an ESPN sports analyst and commentator.

I anxiously walk into my first honors class. I enter the classroom and quickly notice, as an African American female, I am a minority. As I take my seat, I am greeted by stares and sarcastic giggles. The teacher takes attendance; my white classmates raise their hands when called. In return, he greets them with a smile. “Jasmyn Shumate,” he says. Hesitantly raising my hand, I see him shake his head and grimace.

The teacher assigns our first project. I wanted to make a good impression so I spent countless hours working on this project. Anxiously, I await my grade. My teacher passes back the projects, congratulating those who did well. I received a 94% but no praise from my teacher. The class congregated to discuss their scores. “Jasmyn, What did you get?” a fellow student asked. When I told him, he turned to his friend and said, “Jasmyn got a 94%. How could you let the black girl outdo you?”

After overhearing his comment, I sat with fists clenched, and eyes filled with anger. However, I calmed my nerves quickly. I worked hard for my grade, yet it was unacceptable according to fellow students. Some research statistics show that African Americans are less successful academically than Caucasians which inspires me to do better. These statistics enrich my thirst for knowledge, motivating me to amend them. Barack Obama paraphrased Ghandi, saying, “We are the change that we seek.” I promote change by facing challenges forthright.

The lack of diversity within my school in advanced classes is discouraging. Minorities dominate College Prep classes and are minimal to non-existent in Honors and Advanced Placement classes. I asked minority schoolmates why they preferred not to take higher level classes. Their responses revealed that they do not want to be in an environment where they are the center of attention or face an enormous workload. But, I do not accept these excuses. I believe social issues will not change if we sit back and do nothing. Therefore, I challenge myself by enrolling in Honors and AP classes to change not only academic statistics, but also the mentality of those who believe in them. My friends think my schedule is crazy, which includes two Honors and two AP classes. However, I encourage them to follow my lead and become the change as well. I strive for success in all that I do, as I learn to overcome life’s adversities.

Since that incident, I have made it my mission to bring about change and each year, I progress. I relay these alarming statistics to my peers and encourage them to be a part of the change. They enroll in challenging courses to enhance their knowledge, using it as power to eliminate statistics. Each year, I take my seat and look around and notice more students who look like me. Integration not segregation allows people as a community to share unique ideas to strengthen the community. I enter the classroom now with my head held high.

