

My interest in criminal law began with 50 bullets. My normal trip to the store on the morning of November 25th, 2006 turned into a historic nightmare for many residents of South Side Jamaica, Queens, New York. I was there; I was present in the murder of Sean Bell by New York City's Police Department. Despite my being only eight years old at the time, I remember everything. I remember a peaceful morning with my family members turned to chaos as we erratically ran down the block in an attempt to escape stray bullets. I remember seeing my grandmother's block broadcasted on local news. Although it took me almost ten years to understand the significance of the murder, it played a crucial moment in the reasons why I desire to pursue a career in the legal field.

Prior to high school, I had no factual knowledge on the case of Sean Bell other than the fact that he died. In fact, I wrote it off as an unfortunate childhood memory where I happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. However, due to my taking AP History and Social Studies classes, I was able to explore topics such as police brutality, mass incarceration, and racially biased practices in government, which may have not been discussed otherwise in non-accelerated classes.

The knowledge gained in my classes served as a catalyst to my budding desire to learn more about law, whether I was reading on the historical significance of voter suppression with grandfather clauses or volunteering for electioneering with my AP American Government teacher for City Council Office. After learning that it was the NYPD who were responsible for the shooting-death of 23-year-old Sean Bell, it further accelerated my interest in law and advocacy. I couldn't imagine the idea that the people who were called to serve and protect my

community killed an unarmed man, and potentially put my life in danger. It is even more unfathomable presently because I am now around the same age as Mr. Bell when he died.

My decision to pursue a legal degree did not come about until my junior year of college, but I fully understand how my psychological background coincides with my legal passion. This legal desire is backed by persistence. Shortly after deciding to pursue a law degree, I made it a daily task for 3 months to email 10 local law firms my resume and transcript in efforts to land an internship. Although I received countless rejections, I was able to work both at Weissman Law and The Employment Law Solution: Mcfadden-Davis prior to completing my undergraduate degree.

In short, I strongly desire to be the change I want to see in the criminal justice system because I empathize with all those who have been unfairly treated by it. I've personally witnessed the psychological traumas of an inequitable system in my own community, so I want to be the one to heal it. Enrolling into Howard University has been a dream of mine since I was 16-years-old. I have not let my dream die. My values of advocating and legally educating minorities, especially African Americans, would thrive in the Criminal Justice Clinic.

Becoming an attorney would mean a lot to me because I owe it to myself and childhood community members to act as a cultural reset. Approximately 6% of practicing attorneys identify as African American; fewer still identify as both woman and African American. If I were to be selected for the scholarship, I would not only be a face of representation for those that are severely underrepresented in the legal field due to the alleviated costs of attending law school, but I would facilitate change as well. My long term goal as an attorney is to implement "Know Your Rights" programs in high schools nationwide to teach adolescents not only about their

basic constitutional rights, but how to enforce them as well. As a current Community Education Vista for First Defense Legal Aid, a non-profit organization in Chicago, I host workshops on knowing your rights, enforcing your rights, discussing alternatives to jailing and incarceration, and the importance of jury duty to overpoliced communities. I would like to expand on these workshops to a broader audience regionally. It is my belief that many people succumb to the injustices of the legal system due to their lack of knowledge of it. On the other hand, I also believe that many employed in the criminal justice sector lack the empathy to understand the potential harm they may cause when they overstep their legal boundaries or unfairly practice. If I were to properly teach teenagers and young adults at an early age how to legally enforce their rights and understand the workings of the legal system, it could potentially be the first step towards healing several generations of psychological traumas.