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2020 is commonly known as the year of two pandemics: COVID-19 and racism. Joan Didion once wrote: “Life changes in the instant—the ordinary instant.” While I do agree that our descent into a deadly public health crisis was rather rapid, I disagree with the sentiment that our nation’s uproar of social injustice was as equally unforeseen. In certain ways, the two plagues are comparable. Graphs of rising cases paralleled the country’s upwards battle against bigotry. Small victories such as a decline in cases were met with disheartening spikes and hope for social change, and racial justice was met with horrifying spectacles of hatred.

However, what I found to be just as harrowing was people’s general sense of revelation in reaction to these events. When my school district shut down, I was shocked by the sudden reality and danger of the disease that seemed so distant and removed. While the displays of racism were undoubtedly magnified during these months, they were not debuting in the same way COVID was. As well as a virus whose death toll was multiplying each day, I was frustrated by the genuine surprise of people who had been oblivious to things such as police brutality and systemic racism. One of the things that I remember most vividly was the stark change in social media content. Normally, my social media is filled with vacation pictures, selfies, and birthdays, but after George Floyd’s murder, it was pervaded by infographics, black screens, and protest videos. Although some of these things were deemed ineffective and performative, there was still a greater sense of regard and urgency during this time. In retrospect, I do not wish to return to the climate of that year, but I do wish that people still held the same caliber of concern.

The sad matter is that, while serious, tangible progress has been made with the vaccine, few advancements have been made in amending America’s institutional racism. The heinous events of 2020 were also exacerbated by the imminent fear of the election and the fear that our country would spend another four years under such an abhorrent president. The anxiety surrounding the election also created much division amongst people, to which I fell victim. Unfortunately, my family and I cut ties with several people who were unable to see past their sheltered worldview. Looking back on those decisions, I do not feel regret, but I hope that I compromise and that growth can be reached in the future. One of my biggest role models, Dr. Pauli Murray, perfectly employed this practice. She famously said: “When my brothers try to draw a circle to exclude me, I shall draw bigger circles to include them.” As a civil rights activist, a person of color, and a woman, Dr. Murray was at the intersection of discrimination. However, her entire ideology centered around her willingness to help others learn and grow.

Dr. Murray was a lawyer turned activist whose studies focused on how laws strategically exclude people based on race. While she is not still alive today, she has influenced the work of many current reformers, one of my favorites being Bryan Stevenson. During quarantine, everybody

was suffering, but some more than others. I recognized that I was in a position of major privilege and was lucky to have access to the things that many people did not. I wanted to unify and help people but did not know how. At this time, when I wasn't watching the news, I was sewing. I decided to make handmade masks to sell and donate all proceeds to an organization that I admire: Bryan Stevenson's Equal Justice Initiative.

This organization works to provide legal representation for the poor and incarcerated and seeks to reduce prison populations, an issue I am very passionate about. In doing this, I wanted to provide people with necessary materials such as masks and give people the opportunity to learn about the cause I was advocating for. I sold the masks via Instagram and posted information about the masks and the goals of the Equal Justice Initiative to spread awareness. This project proved to be quite difficult and time-consuming as I received more and more customers, but it was time well spent. My contribution was small, but witnessing overwhelming support for such an important cause was a much-needed reminder that people can also be good. Today, seeing people wearing my mask makes me happy but also serves as a reminder of the year 2020, a year that will be remembered by many.