

I sit with the SAT in front of me and I must consider my own race for the first time. Do I check yes or no when it asks if I am hispanic? Why has this ethnicity been separated from the other races? What exactly does it mean by mixed? Because I had never had to think critically about any of this before this moment, I marked this section the same way I answered every question on the SAT -- with my best guess.

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Growing up in Clarendon Hills, My experience with the police was limited to the officer at Hinsdale Central who was known to have shot himself in the foot. Not exactly a threatening presence to me, a teenaged white girl.

It wasn't until I moved to Chicago that I was really forced to contend with the police as an institution, or racism as something systemic. I never understood what people meant when they called Hinsdale a bubble until I left that bubble. Suddenly, I was surrounded by a much more diverse student population with far more progressive values than I had ever been exposed to.

At Central, I was considered very liberal for thinking that protests against the police were reasonable and based on real atrocities. However, in my freshman year at DePaul, many would have considered me conservative for not knowing how expansive the history of police violence is in our nation.

In my time at DePaul, I educated myself about social justice issues of all sorts. I enrolled in classes such as Art & Propaganda in Modern Japan or Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer Writers of Color, to name a few. In these classes, I was exposed to perspectives on race and politics that I never even knew existed. Surrounded by people who had strong opinions about politics because politics directly affected their lives, I was forced to consider the political as something personal. I realized that because I am white and grew up in a predominantly white community, I had the privilege to think about these social justice issues in the abstract, or not at all. Many of my friends and peers now were politically minded and I was listening and learning about the disadvantaged reality that so many minorities know all too well.

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In order to be compliant with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), many of the job applications that I find myself filling out have the same questions I saw on the SAT. What is your race? Are you Hispanic? I fill out the bubble next to White and I check, Yes, I am Hispanic. The much harder question to answer is what to do after figuring that out. Is there a way to use my white privilege to further the social justice issues close to my heart and my friends' of color lived experiences? How do I speak to my family history with Cuba without speaking over black and brown folk that are far more directly affected by the island's politics? What must be done to eradicate systemic inequalities that exist in my own nation's politics?

I regret that I do not have the answer to any of these questions, but I have to still take these first steps in what I imagine will be a lifelong struggle.