

My Perspective and Voice is Unlike Any Other

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I have grown up in a post-September 11 world. I have grown up being hyper surveilled. I have grown up in the biggest recession since the Great Depression. I have grown up in a world where I am alerted to every tragedy that takes place across the globe, and I have grown up in a world where suicide rates are higher than they have ever been. I have lived through a global pandemic. Social media is everywhere, and everyone is trying to create an image of themselves that does not reflect their true identity.

I have seen social movements come and go. I have seen people achieve justice in unprecedented ways like in the case of the United States Gymnastics Team members who so bravely came forward with accusations of sexual assault against Larry Nassar. However, I also saw justice fail as Ian Manuel served 26 years in prison, 18 of which in solitary confinement, for a crime he did not commit. I have seen it all.

No one making the political decisions right now has seen what I have seen. According to the Library of Congress, the average age of the U.S. Senators in 2021 was over 64 years old. None of them grew up in the world that I grew up in. None of them even live in the same world as I do. My generation has grown up in unprecedented times on multiple fronts and for multiple reasons, yet politicians and older generations refuse to acknowledge or accept our input on issues that only we have experienced. Young perspectives and young solutions are constantly ignored, and society is reaping

the consequences. Young people have been advocating for an increase in teaching Black history in schools, mental health professionals to be a part of mental health crisis calls with the police, and a new culture around sexual assault that empowers women and victims instead of villainizing and doubting them. Somehow, though, society still is uneducated on an accurate history of the United States, suicide rates are at an all-time high, and society shames victims and defends powerful men against accusations.

My generation has witnessed the unfolding of these issues like no other age group of people have. Our perspective is unlike any other. My perspective is unlike any other. I have seen riots, protests, and hate—hate that is perpetuated by our political leaders. Hate that takes away from individuality. The hate we are facing in today's world was created by the political leaders who have been in power for decades. The ingraining and solidifying of the two-party system in the United States has ruined my generation and I blame politicians, on both sides, whose ideas should have been left behind a century ago and who have used hate to push personal agendas.

I am not going to claim that our country is the most polarized it has ever been; we once saw so much hate the only escape was a civil war, but I will claim this era of polarization is the most dehumanizing. People cannot have their own opinions; they cannot have their individuality. I struggle with the polarization of politics

in the United States. A person cannot have opinions or views that span the political spectrum. They have to be left or right, Democrat or Republican, blue or red. If a person aligns with the Republican Party on one issue they are labeled as a Republican, but they could have opinions and beliefs that span the political spectrum. None of this individuality of thought is accounted for; every person must be placed in one of two boxes. Switching is not allowed, and being allowed in the middle is becoming more and more rare.

People cannot be free thinking, independent-minded individuals with their own values, priorities, and passions. By not voting people out of power for decades, in a country that was founded on the principles of ensuring one person never holds too much power or for too long, we have abandoned the very ideals our country was founded on. Politicians in power have moved from an open-minded, willing to cross the aisle for the betterment of society, to a vote directly down party lines system—without the consent or knowledge of the governed. Members of Congress are elected to represent the ideals of their constituents yet vote only by their political party.

Young people need to speak up; no one in power has seen the issues from our perspective or as fully as we have. When a politician has thought about something the same way since they took their first oath of office in the 1970s, it is hard to change their mind, and there is an issue there that needs to be addressed. My generation has new ideas. My generation has the power to dismantle the two-party system and address the issues that need to be addressed instead of letting old feuds or outdated ways of thinking stop us from improving the nation our futures lie in.

