

Gena Ann Parker

Millington Central High School (Shelby County)

The Importance of Civic Duty

Since I can remember, I always went to vote with my parents. They would come home from work, pick me up and we would drive 1.6 miles down the road to our polling location. I don't remember much about the voting experience specifically, but I do remember the people that would check us in and give us our sticker at the end. When an opportunity arose to be a poll worker, I took it.

On election day, I arrived at my precinct with nerves, anticipation and excitement. I was nervous for the crowds that we were expecting, anticipating a long day, and excited for a new experience. Once we walked through the doors, it was non-stop. From opening the voting booths to setting up the registrars, I was overwhelmed quickly.

Then came signing payroll and swearing in. When I was younger I never thought about how the people that checked us in had to raise their right hand and confirm their integrity. I also didn't realize how tedious the process of opening the voting machines was. We had to write down every step of the process. And then we had to sign even more papers. I learned things before we even opened the door.

When we opened the polls, there was already a line forming outside. My colleagues and I all thought, "This means our day is going to be busier than ever." However, after about an hour of constant people, the precinct quieted down. I asked why we didn't have as many people as I thought we would and my officer reminded me that many people early voted. She also informed me that my county broke records for early voting. My first thought was, "Wow that's great," but after some thought, I realized that many voted in this election because this election made them realize how important our civic duty is.

2020 has been the toughest year of my 17 years of life. I drove home from school for what was supposed to be a week-long spring break and wasn't able to return to school until August. While I was at home, I immersed myself into politics. I was always interested in current events and our countries history, but never more than the past 6 months. After months and months of debates, Facebook arguments and lots of stress, I began to realize that this election could be split until the end and that people needed to exercise their right to vote now more than ever. Our polling location had many first-time voters. I choose to believe that this was due to how tense the election was this year. Many young people are voting for the first time because they, like me, realized over the past year how much change they can be in the world.

The last hour of the day seemed to be the longest. All of the registrars watched the clock with great anticipation for a herd to come in 10 minutes before we closed the polls. However, there was no significant line at 7 PM. After closing down the electronic poll books, I looked at the total number of people that voted that day. The number was much lower than I thought it would be. This is because of the amount of people that chose to early vote. This proved to me even more that this election meant more to the public than any other.

At one time, about 70 years ago, I, an Asian woman would not have been able to vote. Just 100 years ago, women gained the right to vote. As I grow older and more educated, I recognize that my opportunity to vote is a privilege, and my responsibility. Once the day comes that I am of age to perform my civic duty of voting, I fully intend to.