

Ferguson, Missouri...a name that everyone has come to know. I've watched people drop the name in daily conversation, in intense debate, and sometimes even in harmless jokes. But to me, Ferguson isn't just a name. It's part of the place that I call home.

I grew up just 30 minutes outside of downtown St. Louis, with Ferguson being about 10 minutes just north of the city. I've driven through the streets of Ferguson on my way to my favorite ice cream shop and I've gone to school since kindergarten with kids who live in Ferguson. But being honest, for St. Louis white suburban residents... for me... Ferguson wasn't just another neighborhood growing up. It was the neighborhood where we would make sure our doors were locked as we drove through in the car on the way to a late night ballgame downtown. It was one of the predominately African-American north city neighborhoods feared by the white suburban population. It was the cover story of St. Louis racism, but for too long it was the story we just swept under the rug.

Until August 9, 2014. It has been hard to watch my city—a city I've loved since birth—be torn apart in the past few months as St. Louis racism has been

unveiled. This complicated situation, encompassing not only the events surrounding Michael Brown's death, but also our larger social and political reality, has been distilled into two opposing "sides". On one hand, there's the feeling of gratitude for the courageous police officers who feel misunderstood, a sentiment many of my fellow St. Louisans share. On the other, there's the feeling of compassion for the individuals who experience the harshness of racial discrimination every day, and I've seen this emotion be echoed by many of us Harvard students since August.

To many who have kept up with the Ferguson situation, one of these sides may be the "right side"... but not to me. I see both. I hear both. I wholeheartedly understand both. Therefore in choosing to support a single one, I'd feel as if I'm betraying a separate, significant part of me. And that is simply not something I'll ever be able to do.

So here I am, juggling this mini identity crisis, not entirely positive where my head is at. But what I do know is where my heart will be in the end, and that's with my love for St. Louis.

I could rave about St. Lou all day, but if I had to choose one thing that exemplifies its beauty, I'd hands down go with the hot, humid St. Louis summers. The days are filled with free outdoor concerts and festivals just because we love free things, and the nights you find the sweet smell of barbeque and Bud Light in the air. The weekends? Well, our craziest Saturday plans consist of floating in an inner tube down a Missouri river while drinking and laughing with friends, followed up by watching the Cardinals game on the big screen at a local pub after church on Sunday afternoon.

But yes, there are faults in St. Louis as well, and these faults have been made very public by the situation in Ferguson. When the news of Ferguson broke out, I was overcome with sadness not only that another young individual had lost his life due to an act of violence, but also that the world was seeing the worst of St. Louis and I had absolutely no words to defend it. Being a thousand miles from home, I felt more exposed and vulnerable than ever. However, I've come to realize that St. Louis isn't a *failed* city because of its clear shortcomings; it's simply a *growing* one, struggling to change for the better. As J. Cole would say, there's beauty in the struggle, and

I'm eager to build a more just and more beautiful St. Louis.

So, where does that leave me? Well, I still may not be able to give you the straight up opinion you might want when it comes to the situation in Ferguson. I don't see myself as a part of a right or wrong, yes or no, he's guilty or she's guilty side. I'm somewhere floating in the middle, hoping to myself one day that racial barriers can be torn down, and peaceful relationships rebuilt. But until then, I do know this: St. Louis is a broken, complicated, naïve city... yet I could not be more determined to make it a place where every race, every background, and every single individual is proud to call St. Lou home.

Thank you.