90

Name: Amari Edmonds
School: DC Prep
Grade: 8th

Have you ever lost a friend? How about a parent? Well for kids like me its our lives everyday. Gun violence has taken over my city and turned it upside down. All my life I've been taught to hold the ones I love close to me because they can be here today and gone tomorrow. I've grown up with children and saw them one day and found out they were dead the next. Gun violence is snatching my friends and family from me left to right. When I was on my spring break vacation I found out my dad had been shot 5 times in the chest and left to bleed out and die in his own car. I didn't even find out from my mom or his parents I found out through social media. Seeing his face all over instagram and seeing his name with the phrase "RIP" made me want to end it all. All I could do was drop down to my knees and cry. Just imagining his last breaths and what was going through his mind when he died. Hearing my mom scream at night because of it made me not sleep for days after I found out. This was the first time I had lost someone this close to me due to gun violence but it most certainly wasn't the last. Just the other day I found out my childhood friend had been shot in his throat and left to bleed out in an alley. I've been crying myself to sleep every night since then, knowing that he was only 13 and hadn't even seen the world yet. I cry because I know there was nothing I could even do to save him. I cry because just like me he had a dream that he will never get to see thrive.

The authorities have done nothing to help. This problem has been going on for years. If you ask me why it's happening I wouldn't even be able to give you a clear answer. Everyday a person is dying because of something new, but the simplest way I can put it is *jealousy.* I always say to my friends and people around me that "you'll leave DC in a bodybag before you leave on a flight". This city is full of people who kill out of spite or jealousy. People are being killed over clothes, shoes, and money all because they may have had these things while another person doesn't and because of this they are killed. Some die over gang or hood beef because they put the set they claim and their street cred above their entire life. Just the thought that you can get killed just for being associated with a group of people sends shutters down my spine. The worst one of them all is just being in the right place at the wrong time. Many of the people that die in DC aren't even the intended target. They are often hit by stray bullets or sometimes are with people who aren't good to be around and because of it they suffer. As of 2019 there were over 160 homicides in DC caused by neighborhood violence or personal beef. Already in 2020 with March just now beginning there have been over 30 homicides in DC. Citizens in DC claim that the system is failing us when really we are failing each other. We kill without even thinking twice about what we are actually doing. The homicide rate in DC is so high because as citizens in DC we don't value our lives enough.

Many people that aren't truly from DC will say that we need to "put the weapons down" or "ban guns" but that isn't enough. We as a community have to start from the roots. We need to take these kids out of the street life while they're still young. We need more programs that teach young kids there is more to life than guns and drugs. We must teach the next generation that it's ok to show emotion and it's ok to not want to be outside standing on the block. By creating these programs we are teaching our future youth that street life is not the place to be. The main reason the violence rate in DC is so high is because our youth is being taught at a very young age that violence is the answer. But it's not. Teaching our young black brothers and sisters the phrase "kill or be killed" will only wipe us out as a whole. We must thrive together, succeed together or see will all fall as one. When I see a black child, black father, or black mother in the headlines it makes me think about how much we are embarrassing ourselves. We have to change and very soon. We need to create the programs and teach our young black kids before it's too late.