



The Next Generation of Civil Rights Activists: Getting to Know Joy Ayodele

Eighteen-year-old Santa Rosa resident Joy Ayodele has been a powerful leader and staple in the community. Born and raised in Santa Rosa, Ayodele has been active as a community leader regarding racial inequity and injustice. After the murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis, she expressed her hurt and frustration by putting together a protest that she announced on social media. She explained that it wasn't organized or planned, and she wouldn't have thought hundreds of people would show up. That moment was powerful for her; seeing the turnout, the amount of youth who were present and feeling a sense of community even in that moment. After witnessing a powerful and overwhelming instance, where a young Black boy raised his fist out of his car's sunroof during a protest, Ayodele founded her organization What We Are Fighting For. It's clear that youth in the community are affected by racial injustice yet may not truly understand the extent to what is being fought for. She wants her organization to serve as a resource for people, mainly youth, in the community. She provides education around racial injustice, disseminates local information, discusses ballot measures, encourages youth to vote and organizes gatherings, whether that be protests or safe spaces for people to have these important conversations. Ayodele has also been involved with integrating Ethnic Studies courses in Santa Rosa schools, where students can have the opportunity to learn about their own history and the history of other ethnic groups.

Fighting for justice and equality is not easy. Joy Ayodele has had her own set of challenges being a youth organizer in a city that exemplifies passive-aggressive racism. Within the community, some people have deemed her as being a loud protester and an overly direct Black woman and she has worked to combat those stereotypical views. She exudes passion, excellence and intelligence, ensuring that she fact checks any information she puts out because the overall message is what needs to be received, without the focus on her hair, race or any other unimportant factors. Not only has she been met with harsh comments about her appearance and the work she's doing, she along with other protesters, have been met with many acts of violence, from people plowing through the crowd with their vehicles to another person pulling out a shotgun on the crowd.

It's indescribable how hard the work is that Ayodele is doing. However, she doesn't allow that to stop her. She has great mentors who support her, are a listening ear and provide education around important issues that are happening locally. She is an inspiration for many people and an amazing leader. There are small strides being made, but Joy Ayodele knows there is far more to be done.