I’ve always considered myself a tolerant individual. I believe in respecting the rights and opinions of all people, even when starkly different than mine. However, to say that the 2016 election did not turn out the way I expected would be an understatement.

To me, I’ve always seen that the Republican and Democratic parties are more two sides of the same coin than anything else. Both parties have a vision for America that is largely the same, what separates them is the manner in which each party thinks this vision is to be obtained. What I witnessed in the 2016 presidential election was not differences in Republican and Democrat ideals that I’ve seen, understood, and studied, it was a much larger more fundamental difference. Donald Trump ran a campaign that was based on exclusion, fear, and divisiveness, and I was hopeful that the America that I love— that I am proud to be a citizen of— would stand up and say that is not the America we are. In part, this country did stand up against Trump’s version of America, given the almost 2 million popular vote difference in favor of Secretary Clinton, but due to the political system we have, Donald Trump is going to be the next President. That is
a fact that I will not be arguing against. Rather, I speak now to those who voted for Donald Trump and to those wondering where we go now.

Let me be clear, I am definitely a privileged individual. I attend an Ivy League University in a time where even getting a post-secondary degree is not afforded to all; I come from a family that has been able to sacrifice so that I’ve always had clothes to wear, food to eat, and a place to sleep; I am cisgender and heterosexual. But I am still a black woman in America, and now still have to wonder whether or not this administration will work to uphold my rights and the rights of many of my friends and family who have marginalized identities. When I woke up on November 9th, an uncertainty I’ve never felt before settled in-- an uncertainty that will stay until (at least) 2020.

To those who voted for Donald Trump, no, I don’t believe that every one of you is a racist, xenophobic, islamophobic, transphobic, sexist, homophobic, or ableist individual. I do, however, believe that, for whatever the reason, these qualities were not a dealbreaker for you in choosing who to elect to hold our nation’s highest office. I do believe that now you have an obligation to stand in solidarity with those who are fearful for their lives and the lives of those they love. I hope that you understand that to do nothing would mean that when those adjectives are used to describe you, you cannot deny them. The fact of the matter is that when the history books look back, there will not be an asterisk next to the legacy left behind by this era of American politics. Even if your reasons for voting for Donald Trump had nothing to do with personal racism, xenophobia, islamophobia, transphobia, sexism, homophobia, or ableism, a choice not to actively stand in solidarity with marginalized folks during the next four years and beyond will ensure that you are associated with white supremacists in the end.
As for the future, I have never hoped so fervently to be proven wrong, but with every ensuing appointment to Trump’s cabinet this administration is proving to be exactly what I feared it would. While there are many things that are uncertain, there are many things I know to be as fact. I know that my education, my advocacy, and my activism is more important now than ever before. I know that for all who have wondered who they would have been during historical times of tension, now is when we will find out. I know that there is no such thing as neutrality now, even though everyone’s activism might look different. I know that I will continue to hold the President-elect, all his appointed officials, and all other elected officials to the highest of standards. I will continue to fight to keep the rights we have earned and to protect the rights of others. I will continue to make sure that America stays an inclusive place because immigration is the basis on which our country was founded upon and diversity is what has brought America this far. Finally, I know that if America is to be great, its greatness only lies ahead of us and not in our past. For America to be great we must continue to care not only for all of our fellow Americans, but also for those internationally who are deprived of the fundamental human rights to freedom of expression of all genders and sexualities, access to education and healthcare, and other necessities essential to life. This is the vision of America that I know we have started to progress towards and even though November 8th and 9th were surreal and dreary days for me and many other Americans, this is the vision we continue to march towards.

Sincerely yours,
Victoria Gillison

With support from GSWS Seniors:
Abbie Starker
Amelia Goodman
Nirupa Galagedera
Zach Willis