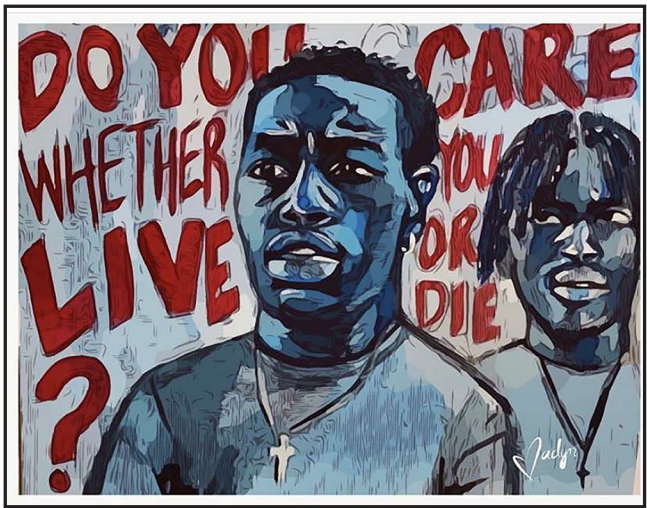


LEWIS, CONTINUED

“Being around both white and black people, like do you care as a black person or do you care as a white person whether I live or die,” Lewis said. “Somebody could take that and it could mean something completely different to them. I think artists have a beautiful way of giving other people a sense of relief and encouragement.” Lewis uses her voice on social media to full effect as an advocate. She constantly posts, shares, retweets and educates across many different social media platforms. Held to a very high standard as an athlete and someone who represents A-State, Lewis does have to watch what she says on social media. Not being able to be as emotional and vulnerable as she said she wants to be on social media, she calculates her posts carefully but still gets her message across. Lewis also said A-State has not made her feel in any situation that she needed to be super calculated in any single post. “Before I started speaking up

I just thought it was someone else’s job to do it,” Lewis said. “Then as I got older I just realized, ‘Why not me?’ Being biracial, being Black and white, I especially think it’s important because I’m in the mix and I’m also an ally to the mix because I feel like I can reach other populations some people might not be able to reach.” As an athlete who knows people all over campus and throughout the state, Lewis stands as a role model for younger athletes and also bridges the gap between non-athlete and student athletes at A-State. “She is a mentor in a sense,” Toney said. “A lot of young individuals, particularly high school track athletes look up to her. She’s very involved in helping, shaping and networking with high school athletes in track. She has that platform and she’s using it for good.” A-State Black Student Association President Courtney Atkins highlighted the importance of synergy between student athletes and regular students.



ART COURTESY OF JADYN LEWIS
Lewis created this piece inspired by “Menace II Society.”

“With athletes I feel like they’re in their separate world,” Atkins said. “It aggravates me sometimes because, why are y’all treated differently? It’s not their fault. I feel like they work for the athletic department. But, I feel like us being able to make that connection, this is the first step of us joining hands and coming together.” Living in the South, Lewis constantly converses with others trying to educate them on

racism. Lewis explained to others why they cannot use racial slurs and also tried to destroy hateful conceptions people were taught in the South. “Their family has more credibility with them than I do,” Lewis said. “If I’m emotional in my response toward them then they might not listen to me. But if I’m graceful in my response toward them they might listen. They might not, but I can say I tried my best.”

After the athletic department’s march Aug. 31, other parts of the student body felt left out. Lewis used her connections and saw the need for another march, especially since many students could not participate in marches with peers over the summer due to the coronavirus. “I feel like I’m pretty diverse in the groups I partake in,” Lewis said. “I heard a lot from regular students that weren’t athletes that they were upset because they didn’t know about it. The NAACP, the BSA, that’s what they joined the groups for, to do and advocate. They weren’t made aware until it was over and that just really upset them.” Toney joined Lewis one day after class and the two came up with the idea for another march. Lewis confided in Toney the need for another march had been weighing on her mind and her heart. They enlisted the help of Atkins along with student organizations all over campus including the A-State NAACP, National Pan-

Hellenic Council and others. “We knew we had to get Courtney because Courtney knows how to pull strings,” Lewis said. “With her being the BSA president and Dominique (Phillips) being NAACP president, and me having great relationships with them, I knew who to reach out to to get the job done.” Atkins described Lewis as just simply different. The combination of student athletes and regular students produced a large turnout at the unity march Sept. 17. Lewis, Atkins, Toney and Phillips along with faculty and staff spoke important words encouraging the movement forward. “Black lives matter,” Lewis said. “Black lives do matter. Black dreams matter. Black kids matter. Black lives matter. I’m behind the statement. I’m not too much on the political stance on that. I don’t think there should be any politics with human rights.”

VOTE A-State, on campus organizations out in full force before voter registration deadline

CHASE GAGE
NEWS WRITER

Every citizen in the United States can voice their opinion at the polls. Yet, every election cycle, some Americans choose not to exercise this privilege. **VOTER TURNOUT** In the 2016 presidential election, only around 60% of eligible voters went to the polls. For younger voters — defined here as any voter between 18 and 29 years old — that number plummets to just over 48%. The abysmal number represents a generation that will reap the consequences of elections they choose not to participate in. Ryan Baldwin, president of the newly founded VOTE A-State organization at Arkansas State University, wants to increase that number, especially in Northeast Arkansas. His organization has been working virtually around the clock to help residents of the area register to vote, no matter their age or political affiliation. However, getting young voters to the polls is the top priority. Baldwin reiterated the low turnout numbers, citing fewer than 50% of young people vote compared to upwards of 70% of older people. He said young voices matter as much as those of any demographic, but young people simply don’t use them. He added if young people want to see change at the local, state or national level, the trend must change. People who vote decide the direction of the country. VOTE A-State has been actively working with organizations across campus to host registration drives. These groups include both the Young Democrats and College Republicans, as well as Volunteer A-State and the Black Student Association. They share a simple, common

goal. All of the aforementioned want students to exercise their right to have their voices heard in the 2020 election, and in future elections as well. **LOCAL VS NATIONAL** Though presidential elections get the overwhelming majority of media coverage, the outcome of the race for top executive is arguably less impactful to the individual than the outcome of local elections. For example, two of the biggest cities in Northeast Arkansas — Jonesboro and Paragould — will elect new mayors in November. Jonesboro Mayor Harold Perrin is stepping down after three terms while Paragould Mayor Mike Gaskill is calling it quits after 23 years. These positions will impact the residents of Northeast Arkansas on a daily basis for years to come. “A lot of people don’t consider how important their vote is, especially in local elections,” VOTE A-State member Lexie Hendrix said. “A lot of people think the President is the deciding factor — and it is important for the country — but the president doesn’t know what you need on a community level. He doesn’t know if your neighborhood needs more funding for schools. That can only be known on a local level. That’s where our vote matters.” As much as people focus on the presidential races — and for good reason, of course — they may fail to realize the importance of these local races and how they affect the communities in which they live. Hendrix isn’t alone in her belief in the importance of local elections. Markus Pillow, motivation chair for VOTE A-State, shares the sentiment. “Looking at how many people vote in the country, not just young people, it’s less than 50% on average. People say voting doesn’t matter when half the



Photo by: Chase Gage | News Writer
(Left) Ryan Baldwin and Markus Pillow of VOTE A-State ran one of three tables for a registration drive on campus. Arkansas voters must register by Oct. 5.

people don’t even vote,” Pillow said. “The office of president — which is what most people focus on — doesn’t have as big of an impact on their daily lives. There are so many local elections decided by five or 10 votes, and those actually directly affect (members of the community).” **BIPARTISAN ENDEAVORS** Both the Young Democrats and College Republicans have been promoting voter registration among college-aged voters in recent weeks. For both organizations, getting voters to the polls is the top priority. Partisan politics remains important, of course, but promoting the democratic process remains the ultimate goal. Noah Haynes, president of the A-State College Republicans, said his organization is focused on getting people to the polls more than anything else. Partisan politics comes second. “Obviously we want to get Republican candidates elected. We do have political goals, but the message we’ve been trying

to spread is ‘vote.’ We don’t care who you vote for, as long as you vote. That’s how our democracy succeeds,” Haynes said. “Once we show people that voting is a civic duty and teach them how to register and how to vote, that’s when we get into actual issues.” As a nationally chartered organization, the A-State College Republicans focus on getting members of their party elected across the state and country. But on a simpler level, they want to promote voter turnout, no matter the party affiliation. Macy Walker, president of the A-State Young Democrats, expressed the same when discussing the organization she leads. Party politics play a large role, but voter turnout fuels the organization. “We just want to get as many people registered to vote as we can,” Walker said. “We try to educate people on candidates, especially at the local level. I feel as if most people have their minds made up about presidential campaigns, but we

want to encourage and educate people about local elections.” The Young Democrats are partnering with the A-State chapter of the NAACP to host registration drives every Saturday up until the registration deadline, with a focus on minority neighborhoods. Though they have a roster of roughly 80 students, Walker said only around 30 are what she would call “active” members. “Voting is the least you can do. It’s the bare minimum in terms of civic duty. It sounds pretty negative, but it’s true,” Walker said. “People truly do care about issues, but it isn’t reflected in their actions. It’s like performative activism. I mean, any activism is good, but posting (on social media) doesn’t help. You have to actually take action to get things done.” **BEYOND PARTY POLITICS** Haynes maintains a positive outlook in terms of the democratic process in the country. To him, it’s what sets the United States

apart on the world stage. “This could be a controversial statement, but we live in a great country. Part of that is that the people have a voice. That’s such an amazing privilege,” Haynes said. “You’d be doing yourself a disservice by not exercising it. I would rather have someone vote (against a Republican candidate) than to not vote at all.” Dean MacDonald, vice president of VOTE A-State, said the community matters the most, not partisanship. He said how voters identify doesn’t matter, but expressing those beliefs at the polls does. He wants his organization to focus first on people and voting education. Whether those people are liberal, conservative, Democrat or Republican falls to the wayside. He noted how diverse Northeast Arkansas is, and how people from all walks of life need to be inspired to voice their opinions this November. **YOUR VOICE MATTERS** From city council positions to the office of president, every vote counts. Whether citizens believe their vote matters is up to each individual to decide. But every vote does, in fact, matter. No matter where an individual falls on the political spectrum, if change is to happen in any direction, it all starts at the polls. Arkansas voters must register by Oct. 5. This election has the potential to shape the future of Jonesboro, Paragould, the entire state of Arkansas and the United States as a whole. Voters will decide that future. It goes far beyond the presidential race and partisan politics. Local elections matter. State elections matter. National elections matter. Educating citizens on issues creates a well-informed public. If that well-informed public floods the polls, the people take their power back.