By Patrick Dustin of Hopkinton, Massachusetts
Class of 2021
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The values at St. Bonaventure University appeal to me because I agree with treating everyone with respect, kindness and equality, no matter your color, gender, age, religion, etc. The color of your skin was given to you from God, the worth of your spirit is based on the decisions that you make throughout your life and the experiences that you have had along your journey. I have always admired the teachings of St. Francis of Assisi; that every living thing in this world has worth. As he showed, dying lepers should be given respect and treated with dignity. There is no such thing as a “Nobody.”

After reading the book “Nobody: Casualties of America’s War on the Vulnerable, from Ferguson to Flint and Beyond” by Marc Lamont Hill and learning the values defined in SBU’s value statement, I feel that everyone would benefit from following the values outlined in the statement. This may sound idealistic and simple, but if everyone followed the values of *Discovery, Community and Individual Worth*, the world would be a dramatically better place.
The book covers many social topics, but I am going to focus on the riots in Ferguson. I try to understand the frustration on both sides. There are always two sides to every story. I believe despair, violence and racism caused the unrest. The African American community feels their lives do not matter to the police. They believe the police suppressed and categorized them as thieves or degenerates. Their hopelessness turned to outrage when Michael Brown was killed by a white police officer, Darren Wilson. On the other hand, the police felt they had to keep control by using brutal force either for fear of getting killed or the community getting out of control. The police saw violence and disrespect for their authority on a constant basis. I think, in many ways, they had become desensitized to the community’s feelings. Marc Lamont Hill feels that even though Michael Brown was far from being a good citizen (stealing cigarettes, jaywalking and fighting with the officer and even reaching for Darren Wilson’s gun), the killing of Michael Brown showed the complete disregard for human life. Ultimately, he feels that dehumanization of black men over the years caused Michael Brown’s death. There was no value of community. I feel that instead of diversity being a strength, it is what alienated each group in Ferguson. They turned against each other. Each side did not take accountability for their actions. If they saw each person as an individual, perhaps things would have been different in Ferguson.

As a brown-skinned, male Hispanic student, I am especially happy to be part of the SBU community, where caring, respect and mutual accountability is a core to the mission of the university. I was adopted as a baby from Guatemala by my loving white parents. I was lucky to grow up in a community where the value of the individual’s spiritual and intellectual growth was of utmost importance. The population of my town is predominantly white, but they were extremely accepting of me and my multicultural family. I do not think living in Ferguson would be the same for me.
In second grade, my mom came into my classroom and taught us a lesson on diversity that still sticks with me and my peers today. She separated a big bag of M&Ms into piles based on their color. Everyone described what made each color special: For example, yellow was the color of the sun, red was the color of a Valentine heart, etc. We all celebrated the unique things that made each color valuable and special. She then mixed all the candies together. We all agreed it was even better when they were all mixed together like a rainbow. Then we each took an M&M and bit it in half. We all loved eating the candy and then noticed we were exactly the same inside no matter what color of the shell on the outside! All the students commented that they were special and equal no matter the color of their skin. I wish all people would have this understanding. Like SBU’s value statement, I believe that God created each one of us to have individual worth and to have the right to experience things equally in our society. I am happy that Marc Lamont Hill does see hope for the future. Change is needed and I am hoping to be part of that change!

(Patrick is an elementary education/special education major from Hopkinton, Massachusetts)