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PERSPECTIVE

Making Sense Of Terror: A Study Abroad Student's Thoughts On The Paris Attacks

By [Alexa Goins](#) | December 8, 2015

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It's the last week of my semester in Paris. I go for dinner in Le Marais to say goodbye to a friend. We sit on a deserted sidewalk and talk about life while we eat falafels. She invites me to a house party with some people from church. So we walk to a metro and get off at Republique. I stay for about half an hour before leaving the party around 10 p.m., alone. I want to make sure I have enough time to get back to the dorm before the metros shut down around midnight.

I start to walk back the same way that we came, but an ambulance blocks the sidewalk. I walk past it and see French military and policemen blocking the next several streets. I wait a few minutes before approaching one of the officers to ask him if there's another route to the metro.

I've never been to this area of Paris before tonight. He kindly gives me directions in broken English and I turn around to follow them. After about 15 minutes of walking, I find Republique again. I swipe my card and wait for the next train to come. But it doesn't. A voice rings out over the speaker system that says the metro is closed to the public. I try not to get frustrated and follow the crowd of people back onto the streets.

More police cars, sirens, guns, and crowds surround me. I try not to think about it and cross the street. Another officer tells me that this street is blocked off. I ask him where the next open metro station is. He ignores me, but I keep asking. "Guns...fire safety," he

mutters to me in English. I keep walking and tell myself that maybe it's just a single shooting and they're being extra vigilant.

The next metro is closed. And the next. And the next. I try not to cry. I tell myself to keep walking. I don't stop for 45 minutes when I find Chatelet. It's open. I wait for the next train. It's coming in two minutes. An announcement says that they'll be closing this metro station too. My train pulls up at the same time. I get on. Half an hour later, I'm at my dorm, getting texts and calls all about one thing.

There were terrorist attacks in Paris. Several attacks were near Republique. I was there. 130 people. Dead.

It's still hard to process what happened in Paris nearly a month ago. And I'm not certain of much right now, but I know this: those innocent people didn't deserve death. **These people aren't just numbers either.** They were college students, fiancés, mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers, journalists, graphic designers, artists, drivers, FedEx employees, and government officials. They were French, American, Mexican, Chilean, Italian, and African. But when it comes down to it, it shouldn't matter if we're American, or French, or black, or white, or Arab. What matters is that we're all human beings, each one of us just as vulnerable as the next. It could've been me that night. It could've been you. People keep telling me that Paris is "unsafe" right now and how happy they are that I'm home. But for the three months that I was there, Paris was *home*. And it's not about Paris being safe or unsafe. Paris isn't any more "unsafe" than Small Town, USA. This could've happened anywhere. It just happened in San Bernardino. We're all just as unsafe as the next person when terrorism is involved. It's hard to put into words how to feel or know what to do or how to get over something like this. But, we need to stop hurting each other because, at the end of the day, we're all just humans. **Nothing more and nothing less.**

