A PRODUCT

OF THE

SYSTEM

SHAMBHALA

The Sacred Path of the Warrior: Rebel Buddha’s Journey
Caution! You are about to step into a radical mind. Upon entry you relinquish your rights to any previous ways of thinking and grant permission for the conversions of my choosing. I highly recommend your openness throughout this exploration as naysayers have been known to experience adverse side effects such as short-term vision, narrow mindedness, standoffishness, a poor sense of humor, and most often reality checks. However, if you’re anything like me you skipped straight to the poetry and rap, and so those are who this piece is truly for. If you took this route consider this a guide for the rest of your exploration through my mind and journey to becoming one with a larger collective entity. Community.
The goal of this Senior Thesis is to construct a sociopolitical narrative that provides instruction through example of how to execute ethical community organizing and engagement. The research will serve as supplement and synthesis of the theoretical basis for my Individualized Interdisciplinary Major. The process of this exploration is committed to maintaining the authenticity of voices represented throughout the text. I have pursued this endeavor in spite of the institution, declaring the importance of using one’s own language to speak against oppression. I hope to challenge society’s perspective of scholarly material, broadening it to include storytelling traditions practiced between generations of Black communities. Storytelling brings significance to our understanding of marginal experiences and develops our ability to act autonomously.

When pursuing this study of community organizing I was in a reflective state. Searching through the journal that I kept throughout my term as Senate President of Goucher Student Government, I discovered my dissonance from my voice in this journal. I questioned who I wrote that journal for because I couldn’t even recognize my voice. This fuels my passion to pursue this study through a return to my use of poetry. As a poet, I struggle to stand by my pieces, as works that provide explanation to unworded experiences and emotions. This endeavor was partially to increase my comfortability expressing myself, in addition to speaking and writing in my unrestricted voice. After reading Jay Z’s Decoded I realized the importance of rappers sharing their stories through their songs. His book, including his raps and narratives, explained his life in a way that inspired me to transform the pain I’ve experienced into my motivation. I loved reading about his experience, and learned about sociopolitical challenges
within another era of the Black experience. However, I lamented when considering how I’d never find a book like Jay Z’s on my Syllabi. I lamented because this meant academia does not acknowledge ebonics and black vernacular as true language that possesses the “professionalism” to articulate a point, to advocate for our lives, to make autonomous decisions about the ways we wish to live. For these reasons, I am not only driven, but I must produce this research in my most authentic voice; in order to develop the skill sets within communities that I wish to engage. And so I abolish grammar rules and pave new ways for black youth to discover themselves and become empowered members of their communities.

I pursued Psychology when I began my higher education because I wanted to be a guidance counselor. I wanted to go back to schools for kids like me and help counsel them into the next stages of life, while listening to the issues in their daily lives, issues that rarely make it into the conversation although they influence their education. In order to understand how to implement childhood development practice, I referred to Abraham Maslow’s well known Hierarchy of Needs theory about human needs and development. This was introduced through my Peace Studies professor Jen Bess in a class studying the structural needs of Baltimoreans. The Peace Studies department grounded my understanding of the social sphere’s relationship with political systems by explaining Baltimore Redlining. Once, I understood the impact that political systems could have in places like Baltimore; I solidified my political knowledge to transfer the activism to anywhere like my home in Brooklyn.
In my sophomore year I continued exploring Peace Studies through my Social Practice course with Ailish Hopper, which challenged us to use strategies like theories from *Adaptive Leadership* in our fieldwork on campus. This engagement led into my presidency halfway through the year. Although I had initially lost the election, my dedication and service led to my promotion from Vice President in Goucher Student Government’s time of need. I fervently attempted to integrate the theories I learned from classes into my leadership and activism. Political Anthropology helped me to solidify my understanding of political systems while taking the anthropological approach, which acknowledges different ways of life and historical origins.

In my junior year I was settling into my leadership role on campus. I enrolled in Organizing Advocacy to strengthen my knowledge of implementing activism, especially in relation to non-profit organizing and techniques like distributive leadership. As I prepared to bring in a new generation of Student Government and focus on finishing my education, I reflected while I looked through my Little Black Journal. The disconnect from my voice sent me into a dissonance that inspired a centering of my identity. I sought out Black Psychology with Dr. Nyasha Grayman which deepened my understanding of black identity development in the American context. It was partially for my professional development and service to those like myself, and incidentally for my self-exploration. All the while, I am increasing my knowledge of urban politics alongside theories about power derived from Foucault. My political studies culminated in this philosophical understanding of systems and structures. All this intensive analysis of theory, happened while I felt further distanced from home. This drove me to master the balance of theory and practice. My Intensive Course Abroad in South Africa was a great
chance to engage in communities experiencing recent political change following a period of racial traumatization. Engaging in communities there with my newfound American privilege was challenging and forced me to consider many of the ethics of organizing with marginalized people. Power is sensitive and must be handled responsibly.

That inspired me to pursue and produce this Senior Thesis, an example of my experience learning and implementing theories about community development. This began my expansion of knowledge as I learned about incarceration and recidivism rates in Baltimore. I was motivated to join the efforts of organizations like TurnAround Tuesday and the Baltimore Mediation Center to combat these issues. This highlights the essence of how I build upon the work of those before me; by directly engaging in the work of communities around me.

Synthesizing the information from my critical autoethnography, the ethnographic interviews, and fieldwork experiences I will present an assertion for ethical community organizing. Survey responses will incorporate input from various individuals about their understanding of community. This allows my work to immediately be reviewed in conversation with others. My own art will be used to emphasize recurring topics throughout the research, while adding my raw expression to deliver this message through an alternative medium that honors the authenticity of voices presented within this text.
Creating an Enlightened Society

11221 Souls
Brooklyn’s back baby
We ain’t really leave tho

Shoutout to the key notes
Brooklyn speakers, jammin straight from ya speakers
We do the most
Brooklyn speeches sweet Georgia peaches
If it’s in season just know that your boi reachin

My fam hit the East Coast, we transatlantic
Since day one we been frantic
That’s probably why mama panicked through all the antics. I can’t stand it
She shoulda known I was raised to be pragmatic
Graphs of past classes skipping mathematics
I had practice, why the fuck they give me math packets

Jay Z helped me decode the flows
Lone woes, soul Cole, walking through the snow
Took me 15 to know, to tell my bro, this the way it goes

These niggas is so reckless, they might risk it
Shakin up the Richer scale, yeh we might tip this
Yeah we trippin, but we finna flip tips to a couple million

How you feelin
This my block nigga

It’s that 11221 that’s where I’m from nigga
It’s that 11221 that’s where I’m from
If you don’t know you can’t come
Haha…

Dreams in dirt, seeds planted at birth
A true homegrown bean, just meant to be free
Sprouts burst, weed out the turf
And careful weaves of blossomings
I weave and see such awesome things
I weave and leave you offerings
Night vision put me onto finer things
Shiny things, I had to buy flyer bling
So boss, jumped hoops to firings
Call out to God, that’s how I think

That’s how I think, don’t mind repeat
That’s how I think, rewind repeat
That’s how I think, slow down repeat
Think on the beat, That’s how I think

I think a ring might make me King
I had a dream that I couldn’t achieve
I passed notes that you couldn’t receive
P.O.s to my bro, yo too illegal to read

And so I rep that 221 that’s where I’m from nigga check it
It’s that 11221, that’s where I’m from nigga
If your screws not quite unsprung, you might run
It’s that 11221, that’s where I’m from
If you don’t know you can’t come

Come around, but trust if you ackin dumb
These niggas will send you back packin son
Boi where you from?
Boi what you want?
You wanna run with dem?
You lookin dumb
I wanted some but I’d rather pursue the funds
They say my grace outpace a loaded gun
I’d really rather not drop a one and done
But I can’t help if it’s really done in one

Got back on the track
 Seems like they wanted something
Passed that back
Seem they hate to see me bumpin
Whole game hacked
Now the players started dunking
Style intact
When we pull up at the function
So damn fast
Check the way I press the button
Hold him back!
Just a couple lucky punches
So exact
The way his combos keep comin
Play that back
I think he really sayin somethin

It’s that 11221, that’s where I’m from nigga
If your screws not quite unsprung, you might run
It’s that 11221, that’s where I’m from
If you don’t know you can’t come
11221, that’s where I’m from nigga
If you go unscrew that rum, you gon run
11221, my anthems’ trap slums
It’s that 11221, that’s where I’m from
If you don’t know you can’t come

Back in the mix, this that city life
Hard knock life in the city lights
On any night
Lemme fight. You gon lemme fight.
Thug lyfe.
My path in life, it just went right
Life just goes right for some people but maybe it’s my mindset. Deuces
As A Man Thinketh by James Allen
Reflection to Thought and Character

While doing pond/nature meditation I began to look at the surface of the pond, like I usually do when I get pensive. I observed the leaves falling and tried to account for them all. As they fell to the surface of the pond, I watched the ripples reverberate. Before, I used to simply observe this phenomena when the rain falls, but I notice that the ripples continue. With or without the impact of leaves outside the pond, the surface still brims with the reflection of the sun rays and rings of vibration. I realized I could trace the epicenter, but could barely follow them to their cause. As I traced the vibrations to their source, and peered through the murky waters I saw the fish. They darted through my vision, but I trained myself to notice them! I was finally seeing the fish below the surface, bare and vulnerable, but ultimately trying to survive. As I bore this nugget of knowledge, I wondered, Must I track the fish to hunt or will I throw bread into their den and watch them flourish? What would you do...what have you done?
The Genuine Heart of Sadness

I don't understand you
You seem to get me, but I won't let you hold me
Pull away from closer things, though I want you to own me
I don't understand you
But I keep reaching out, because my heart wants yours
But I snap back for fear of your irritation
Afraid to want something for myself in fear of others' aggravation
I don't understand you
You say that I'm cold-hearted, I know everyone else
But how the fuck can I be cold if I don't love myself
I don't understand how you can't tell
When all I hear is, "Hey what's up?"
"Nothing much". Who the fuck are you?
Who really are you?
because by now everyone is a liar and I don't wanna talk into void
Funny how an empty campus makes the most noise
I don't understand you
When you said, "you can't handle a funny
But it's probably what I don't understand you
I don't understand you
No really can you speak clearly?
E-nun-ci-ate
I don't understand you
But that's probably because I'm still hitched up from last night
I try to reply but you can't understand me because I can't get my thoughts right

-R. M. J.
I don't understand you
You seem to get me, but I won't let you hold me
Pull away from closer things though I want you to own me
I don't understand you
But I keep reaching out because my heart wants yours
I snap back in fear of self gratification
Afraid to want something for myself in fear of others' aggravation
I don't understand you
You say that I'm cool because I know everyone else
But how the fuck can I be loved if I don't love myself?
I don't understand how people can't tell
When all I hear is, "Hey what's up Lydell?"
"Nothin much", Who the fuck was that. No really who are you?
Because by now every face is a blur and I don't wanna talk to the void
Funny how an empty campus makes the most noise
I don't understand you
When you sing a song because you're happy
But it's probably cuz I don't know the lyrics
I don't understand you
No really can you speak English?
E-nun-ci-ate
I don't understand you
But that's probably cuz I'm still fucked up from last night
I try to reply but you can't understand me because I can't get my thoughts right
Fear and Fearlessness

A tingling sensation. Maybe I should’ve eaten breakfast today. Or drank water. No time.

Freshmen year during Intramural Basketball season, my team and I were gearing up to play one of our most personal games of the semester. We were playing against the upperclassmen that had recruited me first semester and my team was all freshmen guys I should have played with the first semester. I had initially felt guilty for joining the upperclassmen and abandoning my friends. This semester I planned to make it right by putting my close friendships before championship goals. Now we had a grudge match, hyped up all semester to prove I had made the right decision, morally and strategically.

Focused, I’d gone through the day only consuming a Shrimp Entomatado and a Mexican soda; courtesy of my roommate’s parents. My roommate and I rushed to our game afterward, for which I had felt prepared. A few minutes in I began to notice the prickly sensation on my face, as if millions of tiny needles were poking my body.

I had to sit down. Maybe dinner was too late. Maybe a water would’ve been better. Time out.

I asked an older guy on the side, Snapback, if my face looked puffy. No. What’s going on. Our team only had one sub, and they’re playing their hearts out because of a grudge linked to me…

I’m hyperventilating. Breathe in. Breathe out.

“TMB, we need to go”. The prickling sensation took over my whole body, the hyperventilation took over and my body was seized by fear. I struggled to hold onto air as TMB helped me limp across the court and out of the gym. It took all and more of my self-control not to panic once my vision went blank I thought I might be permanently blind I was in pure survival mode and in that moment all I had were my thoughts All I could recall was that Neurobio Meets Buddhism class for my Frontiers course from the previous semester and I remembered…

Breathe in. Breathe out. Vision returned. We had made it to the front steps and were waiting for Public Safety. Following my diagnosis with pericarditis, I struggled the following year with heightened awareness of my heartbeat. My condition involved a swollen pericardium, the thin fluid sac surrounding the heart. It would go away over time but I may experience chest pains. For me those chest pains were misery. I would dread the first throb as it’d send my body into silent spirals of pain. The pain became so commonplace that I endeavored to “ride the chaos”, a term I came up with to explain coping with the excruciating fear of death coupled with physical pain. I
had developed thanatophobia early, once I learned about a boy killed by a car on my block. His
death made mine's much more imminent and my physical pain from pericarditis assured me that
my fears were rational.

My struggle became to tell myself that I would not die. Each time that I struggled through but
survived, I began to accumulate certainty and trust in my body that I would be fine despite my
anxiety. In large speeches or performances I still struggle to execute as my anxiety reminds me
of my challenges. In these moments I become hyper-aware of my heartbeat, aware enough to
hear it speeding up in my eardrums and it takes my mind’s focus just to restrain hyperventilating
again. I know I will continue to struggle with fear and anxiety, but I also know I am blessed to be
so conscious of my heartbeat. I let it stand as a reminder of my persistence and continued
existence. This influences how I tackle other challenges knowing that if I can ride the chaos I
will be fine, as long as I trust in my heart to carry me through safely.

\textit{Synchronizing Mind and Body}

8/29/17

Center the mind and the body will pulse.
A mantra that came to me while meditating, it seemed to hold deeper significance for me. To me,
this meant to silence fears and distracting energies that push and pull you to act based on logical
reasoning. Centering your mind to your conscious level, to acknowledge your existence; and
from here understand who you are and the values you hold dear. From there, the body will pulse,
and you can follow the feeling of passion pulsing from your heart and body.

Emotion, with its latin roots as “e motor”, meaning to move outward; hints at our ability (once
centered) to move out in the world by following our feelings. Fear drives us into isolation and
disconnection, while passion and love can build relationships, foster community and a sense of
belonging.

If I had not encountered my fear of death directly I would not have known how to follow that
pulse. When we experience fear, it is at the threat of our existence, and we act as if to make
ourselves eternal. We can navigate this world through loving relationships, that acknowledge
fears yet work on building understanding through communication. In this way we can build
communities, rather than acting in private interest due to fear, mistrust, and dissociation. If we
mutually invested in the world through our passion, would we not continue to prosper and
produce surplus? Isn’t the point of life living, so why not live out of passion that fosters growth?

\ldots

I don’t believe it’s an exaggeration to say meditation saved my life then and continued to grant
me the ability to “ride the chaos”. Centering my body in that moment cleared my mind of all its
fears, and the natural functions of my body continued. It’s an incredible sensation to remember how simple breathing and existing is. Yet, fears and distracting energies over complicate our most basic needs. We narrow our focus to our own needs and willingly dissociate and accept misunderstandings. We can work towards understanding to see our fuller story, as we all continue to exist.

if not in history then in this book.

**The Dawn of the Great Eastern Sun**

I used to wake up early every morning. I stopped when I saw the day as burdensome and inevitably filled with challenges. Whether they be chores or enduring people this mindset would not fail to sour my day. But how can I wake up and waste a day? Of course my days will be unbearable after a series of days with a negative mindset. But the sun rises every day and the reason I would wake up so early as a child is that I appreciated the unlimited opportunity at my fingertips.

I was always so eager to draw when I woke up.

Sometimes I’d need inspiration from the manga I would read.

Right after that I hope I can hit the park and practice shooting free throws. Maybe I have time to take that 2 hour walk, from Brooklyn to Manhattan, to meet up with my friends at the gym. On the walk there I can probably listen to at least 10 rappers. At the gym I may ball up and work on my own physical health. Afterward, my friends and I get to catch up as we eat and take the train home together. I may wind down by watching tv, reading, but the best part is I will be interrupted by my family. I’ve taken my days for granted and the greatest things I have to appreciate happen when I open my eyes to look at the sun.

**The Cocoon**

“We’re born to win, programmed to fail” -William Glover-Bey, TurnAround Tuesday

At Working Wednesday (an alumni program of TurnAround Tuesday aimed to network and build leadership) William begins to share a story about his struggles growing up. I had finished this chapter of Shambhala earlier that day and his story seemed to be speaking to me directly.

*The Mask*: Reflecting, he realized he had gotten so side tracked in life because he followed what other people did around him, rather than using his inner talents. He felt like he should have shared his heart with others. He let himself lose connection to this and followed sports and lost touch with his “amazing sensitivities”. He stated that at his greatest moment of loss he had a revelation, which was his desire to connect and be vulnerable. He identifies this mask that we all
wear, as the walls we put up around our feelings to make us feel safe. However, our hearts are full of emotion and have a strong yearning to connect, to divulge its life force to another. We wear masks to hide our face, but to truly blossom we must burst free from our cocoon. What use have we for cradles when we have wings to rise above any situation?
FEAR
These fears I confess
They restraining my chest
When I’m competin
Heartbeatin
Heartfelt velvet speeches
Because I spill it from my veins and pray you heal my pain
My friends hear me sang, and pull me through the strange mind waves
When my mind goes blank, and the thoughts fade
Through the waters children do wade
Until we hit the bank and we say thanks
Every Sunday say Grace. God bless ya

So I’m never lesser. I attest
to profess, I ask the bestest questions
Like how the fuck you got the answers, they still teachin lessons
If you were outta options, would you wait for slow digestion?
We gotta eat. Sometimes it feel like God is outta blessings
So I hit the bass clef, and spit my confessions
I’m just messin, But true my niggas know that we won’t give up, ha
Nah. No we won’t give up

Morning rise, told my bro “yo we gotta get up”
My crew steady on the beat, stay choppin it up
We stay on the block. Still takin’ the bus.
Name undecided. We ain’t givin’ no fucks

Now it’s Rebel Buddha. Had to do it to ya.
The bandit strapped with this Nerf, shoot a ruga through ya
Pre-deceased, reloaded inches on the ruler
Now we RIPieces, ‘til we go to overload
All my niggas is overflow, it’s no control
On every note, I etch these hopes and denote these woes
Imma poet, watch my pen gon’ stroke it
How I wrote this? Focus!
Broken tip, yo’ it’s smokin’...
[I took my fears, found them, and instead of crushing them, I comforted them. I put them to the side. They’re on my team so I took that energy and redirected it. The vibrations of anxiety in my body are my heart supplying me the strength to conquer challenges my fear alerts me to. And so I rise! And so may you. -Rebel Buddha]

Celebrating the Journey

11/3/17
Just Give Me a Second Chance!
The following testimony is the confession of my sins.
I just want another chance.
Thank you Mommy and Bobo,

I must’ve been two or four years old. Yet my nature labeled me a criminal. It was presumed that I may be predisposed to thievery.
“Keep your hands out. Don’t touch anything”.
Most black kids know the iron law of entering retail stores. Everyone’s already watching so you better not prove them right. They already assume we can’t afford what we touch, so the only possibility is theft.

Whenever I got hungry in the house, I started by stealing the food I believed I needed and wouldn’t be missed. I wanted to cause the least impact possible. When you got caught at first it was pinches and beatings, but essentially reminders; to err is to experience pain so remember the rules. However, the reward is not only alluring but a necessity. Consequence becomes linked to awareness and success to deception. I am a product of the system.
“Don’t touch the wax. It’s hot”.
I could’ve avoided many scars, scratches, and pain if I listened to my mother.

Once I started flowing between rules, and as my rationale became more formidable, my parents’ punishment became more gruesome. Beatings became ass-whuppins, timeouts became corner time.

Corner time reminds me of soldiers standing at attention. My brother and I would have to face the fire safety notice and peep hole for hours, standing straight. To this day I could save anyone from a fire, while standing in the flames.

Bobo believed the punishments couldn’t work for me anymore, since I didn’t care for his rules or consequences. He threatened us with capital punishment, lashings and more hours standing. The
pain I’d already endured would make my knees infallible. I can face the consequences of my actions standing.

I would steal coins from my stepfather’s water jug piggy bank or my mom’s US quarter collection. I realized the effort my parents put in to collect his coins over his life, or my mom finding most of the state quarters since she started collecting. After nearly clearing them out I began to pay them back by recollecting all the state quarters. Unfortunately, this was another small blip in my theme of misbehavior. I still err.

Cycles of theft, remorse, predicament, crisis, and yet again theft and deception

    I fall into cycles of depression          How do I bust out of this degradation

Stole rations from corner stations       Mama was losing patience

    Heart pacin’, fingers taking...moments....eyes

    Heart pacin’, eyes waiting...no statements    Forgiveness but sad faces

I learned lessons, I just need seconds...

Though minuscule in comparison to the wrong I’ve confessed, this act of correcting my disservice to others set a precedent for appreciating my basic goodness. I have the ability to do good in this world despite my personal challenges. I am blessed.

**Letting Go**

In my pursuit of freestyle and rap I began to participate in as many cyphers as possible. I was studying different rappers to get a better understanding of how they perfect their craft. One that interested me was Eminem due to his ferocity and raw creativity when emceeing. I researched his style and attempted to find interviews where he may describe his process and break it down. What I stumbled across further revealed the extraordinary power that the mind possessed.

An article written on a study, to understand how Eminem and rappers like him can be so creative, used neuroscience to understand what happens in the brain when you freestyle. It turns out that when rappers under this study were most creative, the activity in the dorsolateral prefrontal cortex declines while the medial prefrontal cortex activates along with the mental lexicon regions of the brain. The dorsolateral prefrontal cortex houses fear and inhibition, essentially control exerted by the mind to limit our instinctive behaviors. The medial prefrontal cortex manages memory and organization. What this mean is that rappers are most creative when they can conquer the fear that invades their own mind, and focus purely on drawing words from their memory and organizing these into the most lyrically pleasing lines.
This is relieving as it falls in line with the goal of this Shambhala journey, challenges me to conquer fears taking space in my mind, and paints a beautiful vision of freedom I’ve only experienced when my freestyle is truly unleashed. I began practicing removing this inhibition from my mind and even being honest about my shortcomings. I no longer rapped to sound cool (if I ever did). I began to rap to turn coal into diamonds, pain into pleasure. I realized the beauty that can be nurtured if I learn to let go.

*Fuck Your Perspective* R.M.F.
“Thanksgiving” Break
I am now on my way back home. In the midst of struggles my family faced while I studied, and my mental tribulations finishing school in a predominantly white institution. I went so far away to achieve higher learning, but this style of learning does little to ensure the elevation of your home and your people.

My Brother, The Quran: I get home to Brooklyn around midnight and the only one up is my oldest brother. He has recently been struggling with mental health alongside his physical condition. His strife has most likely been induced by our upbringing. He’s a gentle soul, not as quick to defy as myself. He internalized years of our stepfather’s parenting and misdirected anger, as well as bore the brunt of the American system. He was protected until he went to college premature. He dropped out in his third year, was shortly after diagnosed with Diabetes, and struggled to find work after these unfortunate events brought him into spirals of depression due to diminished self-worth. This self-worth was only hurt further by our stepfather’s criticism. He tore us down like I’m sure he was raised because this form of discipline was the only way that he could see us become men.

I was so happy to talk with him that night. I went home to share I was picking rap back up. I remembered growing up writing raps and poems, only for any work my brother and I wrote to be crumpled up by our stepfather. “The fuck is this. Ya think ya gonna make it this way nigga?”. An older generation’s fear of impractical dreams. I was so happy to see my brother still writing, and this assured me poetry and rap has been one of the few emotional outlets within our culture. Not only was this my outlet but my birthright.

Keke: The next morning my mother needed me to babysit my little sister. I had missed her birthday and most of her early months. I only got to see her during the winter break last year when I babysat her for a month. That experience let me bond with her, but also constantly reminds me how I am now an elder in my family and the responsibility of nurturing the next generation better than I was nurtured.

Our time spent together; changing diapers, playing drums to J Cole songs, Tummy Time workouts, singing and dancing, let me relive my youth through you. I hope to clear any obstacles in your path as you start to walk. Our home was never baby-proofed but trust me you get stronger.
Quran and I went to visit our godbrother in his apartment in Canarsie. One of the few places in Brooklyn that still feels like Brooklyn. If you’re looking for a Kombucha stay the fuck out.

He got this apartment from his mother, and we have memories growing up with our parents running things there. It’s strange to see ourselves now coming into adulthood. The three of us grew up together, of the three I was the young one. I grew up keeping up with the older boys but my nature wouldn’t let me accept inferiority. As I got older though, age mattered less. We were all more or less failures or seen as criminals.

Since he was young, my godbrother has been producing his own beats and has kept at it. This semester I started studying rap again once I began Jay-Z’s *Decoded* book. I began trying to collaborate with my godbrother the previous year to organize party events for him to get opportunities to network and perform. Over the visits back and trying to collaborate to help him travel to Baltimore, I began to pick the craft back up. When I shared my experience at the rap contest, he asked if I seriously wanted to rap. I wasn’t sure but once I made this declaration I felt affirmed. We agreed to work on his new project together and I was working my thesis further into a piece that teaches community organizing tactics, spoken for the hood by the hood. I had begun ingraining rap into my mindset. Do I rap or am I a rapper? Am I both? Does it matter?

It always difficult to have a conversation with our stepfather, but once I had gotten to college, my brother dropped out, and he had married my mother; he would treat me with more respect. This may have been due to the occasions I’ve helped the family financially and haven’t requested assistance as I strive for independence. This is the only way I could be respected as another man in the family, but it still comes with a hint of inferiority, the chance that I could still be a boy.

We grew up with my stepfather DJing all the time. Back then it was fun but also kind of annoying. As I studied Hip-Hop’s history and evolution, I began to cherish his talents more and more. I was with him and Quran in the car to go visit on father’s side of the family in New Jersey for “Thanksgiving”. I shared my research, interests, and asked him about his DJing to express my mutual interest to carry on that art form. He mentioned having extra dusty equipment somewhere, but didn’t say too much afterward. I didn’t want to press if he didn’t jump on the opportunity to help me. It’d be nice to carry that tradition into the next generation and bring my craft back into its origins, and hopefully heal the house of broken families.

Vincent Hills: Once Bobo dropped Quran and I off near our little brother’s (on our father’s side) house on the other side of Brooklyn, our Uncle Ski and Great Aunt Rachel picked us up and
drove us to New Jersey. We drove by Brooklyn Tech, Quran’s high school. The area was washed over by gentrification but it was bound to happen. The neighborhood was always too close to Prospect Park and leads to Manhattan, highly affluent areas.

Our Uncle Trell’s (our father’s older brother) house in New Jersey was a huge upgrade for the family. I imagine most people have seen a regular house. Envision that but with us in it, maybe I have diminished self-worth but I did not anticipate seeing this for my family. Again, I’m reminded of my age as I’m now one of the older boys and I set the stage for what is allowed in masculine spaces. I have plenty of younger cousins and my brother, in addition to all the men from my father and his relatives. He had a new daughter last summer and this was my first time getting to know her. It’s difficult adjusting to this new dynamic in the family and I resonate with my younger brother, “I just don’t know what to do with her”. Nonetheless, it was a good reunion with the family and I got to see my father for the first time in awhile. I no longer look forward to these experiences, just try to work through complicated emotions of feeling abandoned but not being able to express my need for him. I needed him, but I’m my own man now. Or at least I have to be, so I am.

Mom: The morning after “Thanksgiving” I ate brunch/leftovers with her. I got to explain the details of my thesis, why I may have sounded depressed on the phone calls, and how I want my work to change the lives of my close friends and family. I started…

“I’ve been struggling during the semester, not academically but emotionally. With all the work that I have done with Community Mediation Maryland and returning citizens through its re-entry program and Turnaround Tuesday, I have managed heavy emotions. Mediation has helped me communicate to others, and my conversations with Saroj have led to deeper levels of emotional understanding needed to evolve with the relationship. This emotional awareness has opened me up to other ways that I engage with the community, in particular communicating these emotions through vivid poetry. I began reading Jay-Z’s Decoded and the way he tells his story through the transformation of his pain, the grind and hustle of his upbringing, into his aspirations and uplifted status, reveals techniques for turning struggle into celebration. When confronted with writing a 60 page paper on community organizing, I considered how I might ethically write such a thing. One aspect of this for me is writing in an accessible way. I realized my journaling was littered with jargon I picked up in college, but how do I translate this for the people I would write to uplift. In my desire to be authentic with myself, I set out on this quest to decolonize my language. After explaining how this art form allowed me to reach out to old friends and new, as well as explaining its utility as an emotional outlet for Quran and myself she seemed to understand. I was worried about pursuing rap because of the perspective that many black boys pursue it as an escape from the hood. I hope this gets through.”
I’m not tryna run away from the hood. I wanna speak to it with the voice it nurtured. My mother’s nature made me good. Good boys turned to rap researchers. Long nights of google searches, eye hurtin’. Pray not to waste my momma’s purchase. I hope she heard this. She listens during long nights on the phone. Determined, I refuse to waste a parent loan. Funny, because now her son’s alone, but failure I won’t condone. Empires built around new thrones.

**Jae:** Back in the city and free to use the day how I want, I get a quick shape up at my local barbershop and meet up with my friend Jae and some other high school friends. I was meeting up later with Sasuke in Manhattan, and it would be a fun opportunity for him to meet my friends in Brooklyn since I’ve usually been to his areas in DC. Although, it was a good chance for Sasuke to meet my friends we spent a shit ton of time traversing expensive Manhattan shops on Black Friday. It’s a fucked up part of our culture (especially in New York) that we spend so much on clothes. After about 5 hours of chilling with them, we end up at Flight Club. Sasuke and I are damn near done at this point. I show him an $8000 pair of shoes to explain hypebeast culture. ‘Nuff said.

**Goucher:** Sasuke and I leave after waiting for a few minutes outside Flight Club because we didn’t have the patience to wait to possibly buy more merchandise. Some Goucher friends had messaged me earlier in the day to meet up. I called them back and they happened to be on the same street as Sasuke and I, just a different avenue. We walked down a few blocks and eventually met them. After a few hours of hanging around, cyphing and taking model pictures we started to look for clubs. I was in sweatpants and we kept getting denied. Luckily, I had bought a shirt earlier in the day so I figured, why not get nice new pants and just rock the whole new Black Friday outfit? We eventually ended up at this Carribean bar which was great for dancing. I’m not usually comfortable dancing but the music brings me back to such a happy rhythm within my body. After talking to Sasuke about our plans and the usual venting about the ain’t shit male role models we have, I stumbled into my train and gave him advice on how he can take public transportation back to his place.
My dumbass. I got on the wrong side. I ran across the street because I needed to catch the train I sent Sasuke on. The train pulls off, just as I get through the turnstile. Fuck! I sit down on the next train. Every now and then I nod off into sleep. I wake up. Goddamn I missed my stop! I’ll spare you the details of how many times I slept through my stops throughout my entire ride. I woke up to the sun shining through the window on the L train, so close to finally being home. WTF yo. It’s 8:23 am and I’m just getting back from the clubs...I stop by McDonald’s for breakfast on the way home, then knock the fuck out.

Crew Name Undecided: Although, I contacted everyone ahead of time it was seeming like I may not get to see anybody from CNU. CNU is the name Vince, Ash Catchem, and G-Crack and I agreed to for our group. There were some other guys named NP, stolen from a rap group but fuck them, this is my story. When I got out of my relationship in high school and wasn’t sure who my friends were, this group began to form essentially from the guys I saw around school that I liked but weren’t respected for their value. Popularity is the art of riding fickle trends. I saw deeper value in each of them and my compassion couldn’t help but reach out and pull them in.

Seeing the three friends I started CNU with was great as usual, but left me feeling low. I shared my recent adventures and they shared some of their struggles with me. It seems like we’re always fluctuating into states of hardship. I try so hard for my family and friends, yet it seems leaving “the struggle” may distance me from the very people I hope to elevate alongside me.

My purple lotus flower: After returning from home and getting a chance to reflect, I’m still slightly uneasy about my night with my friends. I begin to explain to her:

“Vince and his fiance/girlfriend broke up and they’ve been together since our sophomore year of high school. Their relationship was a great model for me to see a positive relationship. Vince was the one who pulled me out of the toxic culture of masculinity, or at least pulled my head out of the water so I could breath fresh air and find land. He managed to talk to me in a way that met me at my level of understanding, understood my good nature, and revealed to me how my desires and actions did not align. I would disrespect boundaries hoping to get closer to a girl, having only been taught by media or other dumb friends. I did wrong but he caught me early and I am forever grateful. Hearing about his relationship and the challenge of “getting back on the horse” expressed by the group, I worried about how he would act as a newly single man. I feared the nature of man. The culture of masculinity is dangerously pervasive and occasionally invisible. I’ve witnessed the anxieties around virginity, and any emasculation, drive men into beings that accrue status through possession of womens’ bodies, hearts, and minds. Everyday I wake up and witness the ways race systematically and culturally imposes limitations on me, I must empathize
with women's plight. Our behavior has run rampant and is unbeknownst to most. So I repeat, Sarojini C. Schutt, we will build a restorative practice together. It's not your burden alone.”

**Discovering Magic**

Peace Amongst the Stars by Rebel Buddha

Uncertainty in whether stars are born  
Or reassembled to form new bonds  
More stars gather, drawn by the pull  
And infinite swirls shining through the null  
In a void, new crystals swarm  
To make a home in the eye of storms  
Once complete and united land  
Fallen to the woes of man  
So we learn to walk, evolved through fumble  
To earn our stand in the beginning jungles  
Self-proclaimed Gods shall fall  
Flood or droughts will end us all  
So man must march to nature's call

And so we seek a new castle  
And together construct the Tower of Babel  
We had discovered forbidden apples  
So yo melanger mon tongue, we speak in babbles  
Conquerors scattered, speech was scrambled  
On knees we seek peace out, but prefer wealth ample

Despite your faith, there is one sun  
Although they’re three, they come from one  
Lack of knowledge in their travels  
Makes my judgment deny the gavel

So now we come to present, some countries in the green  
I intervene to show there was once peace  
In the Middle East,  
But God's fear of us complete, forced speech to leave  
Even lords tremble beneath  
So I dig into our words for understanding beneath  
This is why prophets preach. Hands reach out, I'm glad to meet now
5/4/17
I have suffered a cognitive dissonance since my conceptualization of race. My society has challenged me to attempt self-identification within a single category. Amongst the caricatures of Black identities, the system demands I be narrowed down. Whether I escalate in the professional, bourgeoisie, and lose my community in the shift to colonized intellectual; or identify within the survival strategies of the oppressed, embracing my traditional cultures, the objective is to diminish my character. Capitalist relations to former slavery institutions drives the white bourgeoisie to out compete Black individuals to sustain wealth and conserve their financial prosperity through capital investments. Capital seeks self-sustenance and White American history seeks traditionally displaced peoples to supply a labor force, in which it invests as minimal as possible to extract maximum profit.

To justify the consolidation of wealth, capital must exaggerate its value and/or diminish my character in the public’s historical context. They must simplify my experience to keep me divided and keep Black people divided. *If we cannot see the illusion of dissonance, we will never free ourselves without shackling another!*

I’m the hood nigga from Brooklyn, being crushed by gentrification and corporations. I’m that nigga praising J Cole for droppin philosophical truth, “I guess the neighbors think I’m sellin dope...Well mothafucka I am”

...that nigga making ends meet over a summer.

The intellectual fabricating bonds with white peers that restrain my rights and blind my eyes.

The potential scholar who must sell his story for a scholarship.

The same nigga wandering about, that they urged to be president.

That after school nigga hoopin’ til it’s dark.

Trying to make his team every year in high school. Unsuccessful until his senior year when the school finally wins a chip!

Performing with his steel pan band in middle school, in venues like the Apollo and Rockefeller Center

The same nigga to grow up to work for the institution, as the only black male RA (at first)

The same one on whom’s door they scratched: *Nigger RA Bitch*, etching their hatred into my soul.

Attending the institution invested in the privatization of my peoples’ labored land

Crushed under the armour of the militia that oppresses us

The corporation and the state, the same, which appropriate my culture and feed poison when we asked for crumbs, extracting our value.
I wear my hair au naturel to show my dedication to be unrestrained.
It spikes up in fury as I witness the injustices of my time. They have wanted me internally divided, to colonize my mind and body.
This is my declaration of refusal!
I’m all them niggas!
Rosko M. Flame

Overcoming Arrogance

Aggressive touch is much too rough
To feel sensations beneath the brush
Angry glance will slant the eyes
The mask that’s left will be despised

Hard-pressed into gentle caress
Stress complexes the message
Cleared wreckage, cleared mind
No fear. Today will be fine.

Overcoming Habitual Patterns

Every time an unarmed black man is shot
It’s years of hatred scrunched into our face
The face of indignation

GTA, seconds wasted
It’s time for resignation

FUCK THIS NATION!!
I contemplated....

deadass

Get your nose outta’ ...head ass
Chicken head ass. I stay steadfast.
I fast like Gandhi cuz all my niggas is dead fast
I flex like Luther but his dreams won’t last
I scribble in my journal, as I daydream through last class
Hopin if these pictures come to motion, the cops won’t blast
And major motion pictures let Holy niggas type cast
Hollywood is skewed, left in their old views
Blood blue cold killers, that’s old news
Red, white, and blue roll through picking off our crews
Hit another corner. Who’s that BIG, BAD, BLACK DUDE?!

He stand too cool. Fool grab tools
Stay cool, don’t move or you will lose
Don’t move, do lose, and you don’t choose
Choice confused. No proof. I need NEW RULES!

Oh my God, drop another verse on em
I pray that thee heal whatever hurt done em
Beggars dropped to knees, denim was the only outcome
So hoodlums work for Grade A or fixed income

But that wasn’t the point of the last sentence
Forgive my nature for being long-winded
Meant to deny my brethren were born demented
Heaven, earth, and man, parted in decision

Jesus, thesis, body, conclusion
Include evidence
Sentence. Regimen.
Sentence. Specimen.
Sentence stretch again.
I’m sentenced to predicates
Truncated sentence, Hindu elephants
In the room but irrelevant
I switch codes to show my intelligence

Sacred World

Feel the breeze. Watch the leaves..and fade away. The sun fades away.
As I stroll down this trail. I spill my entrails.
When I hold this pencil. I fill in details.
You feel how we feel, I pray we don’t fail
Pros and cons sealed. Repeal the hate mail

...Sending blessings to your mama tho       Just keep it low
Ain’t no need to let your father know
I’m bouta blow
Ain’t no tellin where I’m bouta go
I gotta go
No holds, so the flow is overgrown
From bush to thick and now gone
I haven’t seen Bushwick in so long
White folks have invaded our homes
And now their words have broken our bonds

Word to moms, our word is our bond
Bonds from the hood, I’m taught to talk strong
Bonds pulled taut, form to blow bombs
Damn my fuse was short for so long

Thought that I could own the wood
I stretched across the land
Searching for the good
I had a plan in hand

I used to plan but I had to understand
The fates of old greats regenerate the stands
Great whites reintegrate the black man
Wheel of fortune, let God steer cuz I can’t
Cuz I can’t but I can. Cuz I can’t but I can.

Man I don’t understand. It’s the clash of Titans.
I see the light shine on horizons.
On the precipice of brightness.
Enlightening. Just enough for me to write this.
Touch midas, it’s the slightest. Praise be the righteous.
I’m hype when I type this, hopin’ that it’s vibin’
No swipin’, hope that you like it

Hope that you like this. Cuz I’m off for the night bend
Imma have to let my mind spin. I might start a whole new trend
But I haven’t touched the mic since, round the same time that my mind split
I spit crisp, hopin’ that it stay lit. Smash foes just hopin I can save Pit

Saved game cuz changes. Same topic different pages.
Cite the greatest when it’s playin
Throwback to the stone ages, I stay agist
Cheat game essay plagiarist

Flow too cold on your wrist
Can’t fold. I took risks
Flip bricks, that’s too quick
Tips get clicks on misfits
So I stay too slick when I do this

Man I don’t understand. It’s the clash of Titans.
I see the light shine on horizons.
On the precipice of brightness.
Enlightening. Just enough for me to write this.
Touch midas, it’s the slightest. Praise be the righteous.
I’m hype when I type this, hopin’ that it’s vibin’
No swipin’, hope that you like it

So Imma do it like this
Imma float, too swift
I present this gift

Natural Hierarchy

12/9/17
Today, Sarojini and I went to a screening of the Baltimore Uprising documentary at the 29th Street Community Center. After the film, we heard from a few individuals including featured in the film including Genard “Shadow” Barr. Lha, his head was covered in dreads and twists that took pride in his heritage, and refused to be controlled or relaxed. Nyen, his torso bore an African garb that matched his wife’s, his main consultant, that demonstrated his groundedness in his domestic life and his people. Lu, on his legs he wore a casual denim and sneakers that showed he was a practical man with no desire for flash. At the end of the talkback he’s breaking down the links between policy and voting, as well as their nature revolving around advocacy. He finishes by announcing that he will run for Mayor. He assures, not that he wants to, but that he WILL. He reaffirms he has no idea what he is doing but hopes to give any candidate a “hard time” and will draw the attention of black people who would typically not vote. I instantly felt recharged. Here was a man, truly removed from politics like I once was, and truly advocating for hood niggas. At the end I had to get the chance to talk to him and offer my allegiance. I’ve never felt more compelled to serve anybody.
How to Rule

Facebook post on December 23, 2014

Everything coming up Lydell, let's keep this momentum going into 2015. 2014 been my best year to date. To all my friends and fam, you're the real MVPs. To everyone struggling right now just keep working hard and hustling, I promise it pays off. If you look around and you got nothing to help you get forward that's even more motivation to keep going. Looking back I've never worked harder in any year but this is definitely the best payout. Like a good workout, hard work feels great when you see the results. 2015 it's a little soon but I'm here and imma kick ur ass bruh

#FCHW

Part Three: Authentic Presence

The Universal Monarch

This the beat I can spit to
Find the stoop so I can sit too
Enlightened mind, see what this spliff do
I’m outchea talking to my fammy nigga, sit and listen

We from the Ville where they shoot things
Niggas hoopin, another nigga with hoop dreams
I had to rap, matter fact, you know, cuz I can’t sing
So I relax on the track, my lips is dancing
Gettin lite
We gettin light, we livin life, we live in strife
They stuff our kids in pipes, outside they wieldin knives
Our will to fight is sanctified, we lived in fright
I fill these bills in the night and get my fammy right

Vision in sight, I told my bros let there be light
They said alright, that’s how I knew it’s time to fly
They down to ride, they always goin high to tides
Dodgin side to side, if them other niggas is ride or die
We ride to survive, we never hide
We say, “FUCK FOES”
As we tucked close and go, “Night, Night”
And then we see the light
And then we wake up

Be brave, they can’t shake us
Out here beefin with neighbors
The cocaine, it couldn’t save us
So maybe pour rogaine to regain some of our favorite players
Your son is in my prayers
So lord, send us a savior
If not, I grow this herb and hope that the words don’t fade away like some these papers do
Damn...like some these papers do
And I guess I’ll see you later dude

God bless, that I’m back in attack mode
I’m back Mo
I’m in the back of the lot
And the thoughts that I jot
Can tear down whole industries
And old friends turn enemy
So I’mma tell em what it meant to me
Imma tell em what it meant to me

Turn enemies to friends and reciprocate that energy
Slur the words of my Mini Me’s to minimize it
I’m realizing
The soul I had in writing
Now it’s outside, now it’s invitin’
My mind has arrived your allowed to come inside it
You’re allowed to come inside it
The riot is incited
**Authentic Presence**

“The vision of inscrutability is to create an orderly and powerful world of gentle energy.”

Shambhala Wisdom

1. **Look for ignition:** My family’s financial hardships geared me to pursue college simply to support them. It didn’t matter what I did.

2. **Find sympathetic environment:** Goucher, at this college I’ve been able to plug into organizations like Community Mediation Maryland and TurnAround Tuesday that help me feel complete and valuable. I’ve found allies with tools that I can use.

3. **Don’t jump to conclusions:** People aren’t bad. They may not even be prejudiced. They’re driven by self-interest and survival. They know not what they do. Every person has an amazing capacity to do good. This reveals the potential of restorative justice.

4. **Find further starting points:** I may be able to progress through Social Service, Mental Health positions now that I am developing a skill set in mediation. I hope to keep reaching out to sympathizers through rap and poetry. If they cannot sympathize with logic then maybe they can feel how I feel through my words.
The week after I was looking for a rap name, Sarojini found the book Rebel Buddha, saying I reminded her of the mission statement. She read as follows:

“There’s a rebel within you. It’s the part of you that already knows how to break free of fear and unhappiness. This rebel is the voice of your own awakened mind. It’s your rebel buddha-the sharp, clear intelligence that resists the status quo. It wakes you up from the sleepy acceptance of your day-to-day reality and shows you the power of your enlightened nature. It’s the vibrant, insightful energy that compels you to seek the truth.” -Dzogchen Ponlop, Rebel Buddha

**rebel**- one who questions, resists, refuses to obey, or rises against the unjust or unreasonable control of an authority or tradition

**buddha**- the awakened mind

This instantly landed as the name I should go by. This book may be the continuation of this journey as I seek to reveal deception. As Rebel Buddha, I can build my legacy of close relationships around our common interests, and smoothen communication between individuals, as I continue to mediate conflicts. As Rebel Buddha, I rise! And so may you.

If you’ve walked this far with me you must be exhausted. But this is where our journey begins.
I finally completed the six interviews for the fieldwork initiative within my Senior Thesis, right before Spring Break, with a quarter of the year remaining. Over this year I have met and solidified relationships with several leaders in the Baltimore Community. These relationships were guided by texts like *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*, which informed the way I managed to document experiences. It can be difficult overcoming “tourism syndrome” if you are an outsider to a community. I ensure consistent engagement throughout the experience followed by guided reflection to honor learning moments. As I honor these relationships I secure my positionality, while better understanding the people within my village network. They include:

Shantay Guy

Michael Scott

Lawrence Grandpre

William Glover-Bey

Tahira Mahdi

Menes Yahudah

After completing the field interviews, I reflected upon the wealth of wisdom available in my community network. I felt much more secure in my understanding of the world having reflected on my background and my reasons for engagement, in addition to consulting the elders in my community and field of study. Prior to the interviews I was simply a student, self-assured in my understanding of theories about community and organizing. When I put my thoughts into conversation with professionals doing the work and participate in community building exercises through their various organizations, I began to develop my potential to act through practical relationships that I could nurture and actively invest in. This method of developing activists
seems to give authenticity to individuals wishing to engage communities and develops concrete relationships within established networks to begin organizing.

Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs identifies the struggle for individuals to reach stability through satisfaction of human necessities; but may also illuminate a path to an altruistic world, one in which humane interest replace profit as the “bottom line”. We must work to address the deficiencies for individuals in our communities, in order to empower others along their path of growth. We often have conflicting needs and interests. I would say it is the role of community organizers to assist in the mediation of these relationships to empower the autonomy of a
community and its members. In this way we can build loving, mutually invested partnerships that establish consensus and fuel vision-thinking.

**Shantay Guy**

My summer interning with Baltimore Community Mediation Center accelerated my professional development by improving my communication skills and exposing me to the functions and structures of non-profits. The mediation center located in Baltimore, a partner site under Community Mediation Maryland, is run by Executive Director Shantay Guy. An established leader serving on several boards, and active in youth development, policing and gun violence via Baltimore CeaseFire, and improving community relations through dialogue; she has embraced the challenges in her city by raising the community’s “village consciousness”, empowering Baltimore’s collective healing. Having experience developing her own catering business and as program manager of 17 programs, her current position as Executive Director of BCMC makes her a powerhouse in understanding business operations as well as mending and mediating relationships that influence the lived experience of Baltimoreans.

**Experience**
- At 17 years old she was chosen for paging duties, by Delegate Curt Anderson, which opened her eyes on policy and legislation and how “far-away decision-making” could have a local impact
- From Sandtown, West Baltimore

**Identity**
- Her name is her brand: “Shantay is Baltimore. Baltimore is Shantay”. Her identity is less derived from her but rather from her engagement in the community. Therefore she identifies herself as Baltimore and community as “just one of many”.
- She doesn’t look for issues of intersectionality, they arise when addressing people
- Strong will to remember where she came from so class isn’t an issue for her
An expectation that all Black people be about progression. She has a low tolerance for Black people accepting the status quo or white fragility

Opposes the sexualization of men, as well as women that sexualize themselves

**Relationships**

Identifies as “Ambivert”, describing herself as naturally introverted. She loves to connect with people but acknowledges her need to recharge

She has tested as ISTJ Personality Type “The Logician” from the Meyer-Briggs Personality Test which she believes influences her role in organizations

Makes use of strategic relationships to serve as conduit for others to access through her

Actively pursuing others and checking in on them

**Community**

“[Community is Family...Regardless of the neighborhood you rep, we’re one village, one tribe. We co-parent and police our own neighborhoods]”. We are Baltimore.

A place where people can hold each other accountable

**Organizing Engagement**

I should use the term community engagement rather than organizing because of its implication in coming in to “fix” a community. An implication that denies community members autonomy and assumes their inability to solve their own issues.

- 1. Access to resources (or people with resources)
- 2. Enablement (provide them with necessary tools and skills/education)
- 3. Empowerment (encouragement and leadership development)
- 4. Actualization
  - When people feel engaged they’re inspired to realize their full potential

Trauma and pain pushes people to the margins of our community. We must use our pain as a catalyst to evolve. Harriet Tubman went through extreme trauma as a slave, which she riled into her passion to liberate more enslaved Africans. This pain gave her purpose.

Due to her role as a parent, she does work relating to children who may not have supportive households

**Skills/Unique Traits**

She meditates regularly. Every 2 Sundays she gets a licensed massage. She takes every chance to celebrate with her family by going on a road trip at least once a month.

Sets firm boundaries to prevent work from intruding upon her family time

She ensures that together they can compensate when one partner is not 100%
Arranging a meeting time with Michael Scott, the Chief Equity Officer at Equity Matters, was difficult but persistence in communication allowed me to catch up with him over my winter break in Baltimore, Maryland. He had time during his son’s chess tournament to meet up with me and I seized the opportunity to further my understanding of community organizing through his wisdom. My professor Rory Turner knew him from West African drum lessons, which they both attended at Greenmount West Community Association. I was introduced to his TedxBaltimore talk, which revealed to me his understanding of how systems of oppression work in discreet and insidious ways on our lived realities.

We had agreed to meet at a Roland Park Bakery and Deli located in Hampden, Maryland. I would pick up some bagels for him on my way toward Baltimore Polytechnic Institute, where the chess tournament was taking place, since he would be watching his son throughout his matches. I happened to arrive during a break in the tournament so Michael drives out in a comfortable minivan to pick me up. In the shop he runs into a coworker of his from Equity Matters, another well-suited black man, and the two break into conversation about plans with local colleges to secure a location for black establishments. He vents his frustrations with systems and people, hesitant to act in favor of justice due to restrictions in employment or lack of monetary incentives. On our drive back we also discuss issues within the schools and diagnosing of children with attention disorders and the dismissal by school teachers that enforce strict structure upon students who need their learning styles nurtured. This quickly revealed to me that
Michael was a man of discernment, taking an analytic look at systems; a man concerned for family and community, invested in black empowerment, ultimately a man connected to his world with means to effect change.

We arrived at Baltimore Polytechnic Institute and Michael takes some time to pay attention to his son’s progress and motivate him to do better in his upcoming games with chess strategy apps and keeping track of his chess moves, with the help of his chess coach. The environment is a family setting of supportive families and kids either in the midst of a match or playing with their friends on the side. Throughout the day Michael introduces me to several professionals within this network. I even met a woman who works within the State’s Attorney’s office and she offered me a card for contact. It occured to me that opportunities like this must circulate within the same networks and had I not went to this random chess tournament, through a seemingly distant connection, I was much less likely to connect personally to professionals. This was a lesson in itself about how interconnected communities could be and the various opportunities and access they provide to their inhabitants. Aside from the lesson I learned from shadowing Michael for those few hours I also gained valuable tips on community organizing.

**Experience**

- He often travelled for work in commercial real estate, investment advisor, summer camps, merchant banks and education from freedom schools and academia.
- “You realize it’s just people....once you start paying attention to how things are happening” in reference to the systems around us. When we first began he jumped into Complexity Theory involving VUCAAD systems (Volatile Uncertain Complex Ambiguous Adaptive Dynamic)
- He never had an interest in politics. However, his best friend and church buddy, the younger by a generation half brother of former Baltimore Mayor Kurt Schmoke who never himself wanted to be involved in politics. He was known for being one of the noblest and virtuous of guys, what many men and woman who knew him all, oddly describe years later as “an Angel”. Michael claimed he was only mad when someone tried to take advantage of someone else. Eventually, he journies to South Africa where he
is killed in a bus accident. Michael was hired through his brother and hence begins his formal exposure to politics.

Identity
➢ He grew up in Baltimore throughout an era in which black degradation was fueled by crack/cocaine. He notes how it changed the chemical nature of the black community.
➢ An alumni of Baltimore Polytechnic Institute ‘86, in which school he has also enrolled his son
➢ Grew up in a neighborhood where fighting and violence was normalized

Relationships
➢ He referenced *The Art of Difficult Conversation* when explaining how he maneuvers complications in communication. He identifies the problem as a set of assumptions you’re currently unwilling to question. He suggests our attachment to our purpose and role may prevent us from seeing beyond our perception
➢ Understanding of “People are human”
➢ Learned how to influence and persuade from youth through his relationships with women and by knowing what moves their spirits and soul
➢ “Support [others’] higher vibration”
➢ Virtues Exercise
  ○ 1. Speak their language
  ○ 2. Accept boundaries
  ○ 3. Turn the experience into a Teachable Moment
  ○ 5. Honor the spirit. Be present.

Community
➢ A community has shared values, shared principles, shared identities and practices. It is a place in which you contribute and from which you receive your necessities
➢ He referenced Peter Block’s *Community: The Structure of Belonging*
➢ It is a gift giving place, where compensation or wages do not set the basis for relationship

Engagement
➢ He believes organizers should participate in an anti-racism class to prepare them for working in communities experiencing injustice. The language is specific, precise, and humanistic; and without such background organizers would be philosophically confused.
➢ Everyone has experience with injustice but is unclear about how to articulate their understanding: “You don’t become a doctor just because you have deep experience with pain”

Skills/ Unique Traits
➢ Michael grew up in an ecumenical environment, around different religions and cultures
➢ His family was raised in Maryland through crucial conflicts; his great grandfather the War of 1812, his grandfather through the Civil War, and his protestant father through the
cocaine era. He cites this as important for the transmission of knowledge between generations, increasing his connection to his roots. He calls this higher family bandwidth.

➢ His diplomacy and ability to see others’ humanity
➢ He marries his old wisdom from his family with contemporary opportunities and new technology
➢ He takes action with radical intent and an ability to innovate
➢ His understanding of the VUCAAD systems. Below are the intensity of challenges within these systems

  ○ For Simple Problems: Observe, Categorize the issue, and respond appropriately
  ○ Complicated problems involve institutions and may rely on an expert to apply their specialty/skill
  ○ Complex problems acknowledge that “the truth is a dynamic flow” and there are intersections existing that may allow for many truths. This involves many solutions, and may involve conflicting ethics
  ○ Chaotic problems are seemingly hectic situations or emergency situations. They require immediate action, observe the effects, analyze the results, and respond with more information to the situation
  ○ In all these problems the goal is to identify large problems and simplify them into chaotic, complex, and complicated components to navigate decision-making towards solutions.

Lawrence Grandpre

I originally met Lawrence at Leaders of a Beautiful Struggle’s meeting on Building a Black Agenda for Education in September. I was drawn partially by the recommendation from my professor, Rory Turner; but particularly because of my background in counseling, mentoring, and tutoring black youth in Brooklyn and Baltimore, through programs like the YWCA and the Goucher Scholars Program.

The goal was to convene Black leaders in key institutions and their “sustainers”, members invested in LBS,
to discuss issues in Black education. To create a plan for a united effort to develop black curriculum that ensures black youth’s capacity for oration and debate in regards to law and policy.

This makes sense as LBS’s founders and most of its staff find their background in debate. My first contact with LBS was when Dayvon Love spoke at Goucher during my freshmen year, followed by his year-long contract as a rep of BRJA to facilitate Anti-Racism workshops for faculty. Witnessing their dedication to reducing racist structures, I sought out their organization when seeking a model of sustainable community organizing that concentrates and directs Black Power.

Lawrence is a quieter man than Dayvon, Rockin a free flowing ‘fro and a great mind; he serves as Director of Research of LBS. Driven by his passion for debate, Lawrence has led research which supports LBS’s initiatives and policy road maps; as they strive to reclaim control and autonomy for Black lives.

His efforts ensure their theories are infallible as they inform their organization’s practices.

Experience
➢ All of the Leaders of a Beautiful Struggle founders were brought up in the world of debate. After graduation he became a debate coach with a focus on policy. Through this experience he learned how to talk about issues and deal with people.
➢ In the 90s Urban Debate League introduced Black folk to debate through their focus on policy
➢ LBS developed from Towson University’s Debate Team, which pushed students to understand critical race theory

Identity
➢ Lawrence complicates identity by saying the grid model does not apply to him, claiming a multidimensionality within his identity
➢ He came from a working-class family in a black community but went to white schools in rural areas.
➢ He signifies the importance of generational identity as he went to high school before social media was present in schools which change their relationships within society.
➢ LBS’s position, not existing as a non-profit, allows it to avoid the complications between governance and non-profit management which often sacrifices the needs of the community. Having taken financial sacrifices in their compensation allows them to build credibility and social capital within the community.

Relationships
➢ He questions those that insist upon working in gritty neighborhoods. He believes organizers should address and reach the multiplicity within the Black community.
➢ He honors contacting our elders who have direct experience in the Civil Rights Era for knowledge that isn’t simply academic.
➢ He believes community meetings are effective for pulling black folk from different sectors.
➢ LBS’s model for Sustainer Accountability meetings allowed the outlets for community engagement to expand. It adds capacity that already exists within the community and helps develop leaders not directly involved in management.

Community
➢ He believes the term grassroot has lost its meaning, identifying that it doesn’t seem that organizing truly starts within the community.
➢ He believes community consists of actual support rather than the digital community we have constructed.
➢ He believes that working-class black folk should have the power of community and institutional power should be given in support of their asserted interests.

Engagement
➢ Assess issues from the public and understand relevant power structures.
➢ Organically build power/capacity within the community itself.
➢ Form coalitions instead of non-profits as they tend to focus on professionalism to sustain 501c3 status, which makes them subject to the status quo. Working within these structures can be an impediment to leaders from marginalized backgrounds.
➢ When you think of organizing you must think of a body as our community and where you place yourself. Our body is divided into organs that do discrete work and create a circulating system.

Skills/Unique Traits
➢ He is skilled at debate and coaching debate. He comes from an alternative, social justice oriented, intellectual training ground; valuing black self-determination.
➢ He strives to see critical conversation, despite political correctness, that allows thought to flourish and communicate to different groups.
William Glover-Bey

I had the pleasure of meeting William through TurnAround Tuesday, a movement formed through BUILD, geared towards job preparation and finding employment for returning citizens. Identifying Baltimore’s recidivism problem, TurnAround Tuesday aims to develop the leadership and storytelling capacity of citizens returning from prison, to increase their chances of finding employment post-incarceration.

I was first introduced to Turnaround Tuesday through Terrell Williams, a leader of the organization, when Professor Jen Bess invited him to discuss their work. Impressed by his storytelling ability and leadership development, I reached out to Terrell while serving as Senate President to coordinate a student leader training around the use of Relational One on Ones. They are used to build relationships and begin partnerships as we construct a plan for a common goal. The organization has a strong grasp on the concept of social capital and how to nurture, develop and direct that energy.

I had no idea that I would bond with William like I did, but the warmth in his heart is unfettered and his compassion makes him an irresistibly lovable person. Partnered with his unwavering faith in God, his words seem to speak to a higher vibration which fall upon your ears like magic, and after … just resonance.

Truth.
Attending the Tuesday morning workshops and Working Wednesday night meetings,
I got to witness much of the impact William left on those around him
As a positive and encouraging force,
Made lighter by his sense of humor.
As a returning citizen, now an Addiction Counselor and leader in TurnAround Tuesday, William has helped many community members in crisis find stability and peace as they attempt to regain control of their lives.

Experience
➢ He claims to have grown up naive, shallow in his thought process due to his lack of academic thought. His common sense was right or wrong. His street life taught him hard lessons seeing people more determined to take than to care. He is protected by a higher power than himself. He is not driven by greed and this nature drives him to provide support for others. Jail compelled him to look at his life, saying “This is when God got his attention”. He realized there was a war inside of himself. He was usually this high-energy guy and people wanted to be around him and help but he doubted himself. He saw himself in his self doubt and strove to be what other people saw in him.

Identity
➢ “A person who does God’s work”, helping his neighbor and doing harm to none. A man who does whatever is necessary to help others come out of darkness

Relationships
➢ He is conscious of how you communicate through his tone of voice
➢ Always presents his authentic self and finds connection in similarities in backgrounds. His life “fashions” his relationships and their development
➢ He allows others to become vulnerable through his own vulnerability

Community
➢ Working with BUILD has taught him about community and learning how to listen. There is a difference between Leadership and Management because top-down management may never see the bottom. Rather, community should create a space that invites people with like minded concerns and issues together.
➢ The bottom line has to be: How can we help each other?

Engagement
➢ Bring community members together to construct a common goal
➢ Transform problems into issues to make the problems tangible, and solution-based
➢ Listen to community members with stakes in the issue
Skills/Unique Traits
➢ His attitude and his spirituality help him navigate how to take care of himself and be a blessing to others.
➢ He “knows how to connect to anybody”. He listens with an encouragement to tell him more. He’s genuinely curious and feels empty, amazed at anything people say. Additionally, he’s not afraid to break barriers. When he sees something bizarre he asks, “How did that happen?” which allows people to openly share without the sense of judgment.
➢ He uses his competitive nature as a measuring tool for his growth (and potential)

Tahira Mahdi
The summer before I returned for junior year, as Senate President and Resident Assistant, I participated in a weeklong leadership training for college students in Baltimore where I met Tahira, one of the group facilitators. I connected with her during a lunch that week when she told me about her background in community psychology.

Her studies sounded similar to the interdisciplinary that I had created around community organizing and motivated me to continue understanding the psyche of communities that experience trauma. I saw her as a role model of how I may engage the study of psychology, which I feel is usually removed from the lives of people that therapists and counselors wish to serve.

Tahira told me about her dissertation on community psychology as she is striving towards her PhD. You could feel how important it would be for her to accomplish this goal. After Baltimore Leadershape I kept in touch to hear about her progress on this paper. I knew consulting her for
her experience in this new field would be interesting and relevant to my own research. I learned of her analysis of the fluidity within the Gogo community; and she recommended me texts on Critical HipHop Pedagogy, which propelled my inspiration to pursue writing my thesis in the form of poetry, rap, and narrative as I explore language and storytelling within the Black community.

Experience
➢ Her experience as a graduate student in community psychology directs the focus of her work, taught to use her agenda to organize
➢ She is a member of the Go-Go community.
➢ She has worked with Equity Matters, and Michael Scott*, having conversations about race and considering ourselves as people with power. She was a liaison, so she was responsible for connecting networks.

Identity
➢ As a grad student from Prince George’s County she feels like she can connect to “university to non-university people”. She’s also familiar with being the only black person in the room. As a black woman she tended to think different than most scholars. Her understanding of community was different from focus on membership, coming from an identity that tends to exist on the boundaries and in exclusion. This influences her understanding of community as fluid and growing.

Relationships
➢ She attends others’ events and meets people at larger events. She notes that the same people show up for similar topics, which is beneficial in identifying commonalities for relationship building. For her relationships are built in the moments we create time to support one another.

Community
➢ People who have a feeling of “we” together. You feel it when you are in a space together.
➢ Communities share goals, history (shared knowledge of themselves), and values.
➢ Unlike the literature or scholars suggests it’s not transactional
➢ They have common symbols and ways to communicate.

Engagement
➢ “Being there”. Be in the community and attend events so that community members are familiar with you. Individual members acknowledge that and recognize each other once you have built a reputation. Once you have a reputation, community members will entrust you with responsibility and reach out for help

Skills/ Unique Traits
She is critical before she believes anything and strives to understand it herself
Introvert but energetic when wanting to connect to people
She tends to compliment the strengths of others in the group and is skilled at synthesizing information

Menes Yahudah

I met Menes the summer before senior year as I was shadowing Rory and assisting the planning committee for the Baltimore Rhythm Festival. I got to sit in on drum lessons, as Menes taught rhythms and West African history. Menes has a warm, inviting smile and slow booming voice that pulls you in as he takes you along his story.

Also in charge of Urban Foli Djembe Orchestra Performing Arts and firmly rooted in the Greenmount West Community Center, Menes does much youth development in the center, and at the schools; using his djembe and its music to bring communities together and remind African-Americans of our cultural practices’ roots in African culture. He has been a stern but understanding instructor, making me nostalgic of learning steel drums throughout middle school with my teacher Nyasha Rhoden.

Both were some of my hardest instructors and their lessons shaped my ability to grow through hardship in order to create something beautiful enough to share with others. Reminiscent of, if not himself, a griot; Menes winds stories together to teach morals and speaks through idioms to affirm his statements. This makes him a powerful narrator as he opens himself up to the world, a new chapter, an untold truth.

Experience
He grew up in a house filled with drums because of his father. At 2 he dropped the drum and broke his thumb, his first memory with drums.
Menes has grew up in an era during which crack “fucked up” his neighborhood. People were simply looking for a quick fix rather than dealing with issues. The climate in which young boys served older men reversed power dynamics within many families in the community.

He has an explorative nature; joining the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra, and travelling the world with his drum to Asia, Europe, Australia, Canada, Caribbean Islands, and Africa. He has a strong desire to travel the world and believes the children are lost now because their souls want more.

Identity

- He identifies with his organization, Urban Foli (Djembe Orchestra Performing Arts Inc.)
- Menes is from Baltimore; moving from Patterson Park, East Baltimore to Park Heights in West Baltimore.
- He was raised with an African mentality although he was raised in America. He realizes he should have been more appreciative of African culture when he was younger.
- His father had roots in the Old Testament. This is related to the Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity from which African culture is derived.

Relationships

- He believes he can connect to children because most grew up in a similar background as himself.
- He relates to people through the drum, as the djembe has origins in many countries.
- Using the power of the drum, Menes hopes to reach the dormant qualities within people and wake them up, so that children can make a conscious decision to “touch their community”.

Community

- A place that has anything you need in the area and is mutually invested in sustenance. It is an environment that works in the best interest of people within the group.

Engagement

- As a “Child of Baltimore City” many people in the neighborhood are associates of his parents
- When he visits schools he builds loving yet playful relationships with the students, whom miss him when he’s gone for awhile.

Skills/ Unique Traits

- He is able to cheer up someone who is feeling down on themself
- He realizes that everyone wants love and can identify their pain
- He knows how to use the system but not feed it
My passion to serve communities and neighbors in need through activism has led me to develop a critical power theory, verified through practice and reflection. After my undergraduate experience; my inner wisdom, developed throughout my life, deepened and this Senior Thesis reinforced my certainty in the effectiveness of strategies that I have learned throughout academia. Following a literature review that grounded my ventures to previously examined fields, I began with a critical autoethnography written in poetic narrative. Critical autoethnography allows the writer to critically evaluate the intersections of identities within one’s own life. For its format I used Shambhala: The Sacred Path of the Warrior’s chapter outline to guide my journey. While reading that book, gifted to me by my godbrother, I found each chapter resonated with me in ways expressed through poetry that I had written. I formed the critical autoethnography through these reflections to demonstrate my untampered thought process as I develop the virtues discussed in the book. Shambhala seeks to connect the basic human wisdom of various world cultures to find commonalities in the path to create a caring and compassionate world, by becoming this change.

I suggest community organizers begin with this endeavor in order to reflect upon why they may wish to engage in the communities in their life. I assert that organizers should engage in activism relevant to their lives through personal experience or relationships, to develop a base understanding to ethically help communities navigate power.

This is followed by 6 ethnographic interviews with community leaders in Baltimore. Ethnography of leaders is essential because it allows you to build a base for networking, conceptualize power mapping, and seek counsel from the elders within a community. I transcribed our experiences into narrative to maintain some of the magic of those relationships,
while providing main takeaway points they provided to interview topics that I presented: Experience, Identity, Relationships, Community, Engagement Strategies/Methods, Skills and Unique Traits. These topics were chosen in this order as they outline aspects of organizing power that I’ve learned throughout my Interdisciplinary Major; Power, Influence, and Leadership. BUILD utilizes a strategy in their Relational 1 on 1 technique in which they begin partnerships with other organizers by asking, “What tangible experiences in your life influence the areas in which you are passionate about organizing?”. This allows each participant to understand the experiences that motivate cohorts, ensuring trust throughout organizing efforts. This is extrapolated by allowing intersections of their identity to be shared on their terms. Understanding the complexities of one’s identities and experiences, informs us on how one may then relate and connect to others. The elders’ definition of community emphasizes how they see those relationships interwoven between groups. Once an individual can identify community and its complexities, inquiring about engagement methods reveals organizing strategies for building power and social capital, directed towards remedying inequity and marginalization within communities. This is essentially the question we hope to answer and asking these professionals for their input in this manner yields applicable responses. After receiving their wisdom I open up the floor for them to share traits that make them unique, because it is these eccentricities that make an individual into a valued community member and leader. The interview topics remained open so as not to direct or bias the interviewees’ responses.
The following pages are a synthesis of community principles that fellow organizers should employ, derived from the expertise of the aforementioned community leaders. Much like the use of sampling and records to remix old tracks or quoting notable scholars, it is essential that we cite our sources of knowledge to reference wisdom. This deepens the credibility of your research and demonstrates dexterity. We invoke the words of our predecessors to conjure certain memories, and the following synthesis plays with the words of these leaders as I organize them into sensical material.

This piece is a “remix” of the words from 26 artists for each letter, using a line from each to construct a “Found poem”
Community Commandments

1. Connect community members to resources and gatekeepers
2. Be authentic to your pain
3. Grow comfortable with vulnerability
4. Honor the virtues of others
5. Understand power structures, functioning systems, and key actors
6. Organize. Understand the community as a living organism
7. Mutual support through presence and spirit
8. Raise the youth and honor the elderly to harness wisdom of the village
9. Promote a gift-giving society
10. Understand collective responsibility and stake in community
11. Always seek to build understanding

The commandments above challenge the dogmatic ways in which we live our lives. The lives we live as if others don’t exist. I insist our resistance must become our resilience. Twisted into position. No longer oblivious, together we achieve transcendence.
I met with my advisor Yousef Al-Bulushi as my first year was ending at Goucher. I was developing my interdisciplinary major: a study of systems and structures, in which I would apply my experience with activism and organizing to change social conditions. Once I had created my 4 year course plan drawing from Peace Studies, Psychology, Political Science and Anthropology he reviewed my courses and gave one critique that stuck with me throughout college. He pointed out my hypocrisy in studying systems of oppression without acknowledging the privilege I do have. I perceived social justice through my own injustices but how do I perpetuate violence? He encouraged me to enroll in a Women Gender Studies (WGS) class before I graduate.

As I was pursuing writing this Senior Thesis in the form of poetry and rap, I sought Dr. Nyasha Grayman-Simpson’s advice in the psychology of Black men studied through rap. She introduced me to Drea Brown, a WGS professor. Our first conversation inspired me to enroll in her class my final semester: WGS 250: Poetry Is Not A Luxury. Practicing the empathy required in Black Feminism was a challenge that taught me new ways to resist oppression through joined liberation. Being taught by Drea was an honor as she played Solange music videos in class, connected the theoretical to popular culture, and asked us how we feel where academics might ask what we think; endeavors that engrained the experience into our memory. I applied my knowledge to address my own shortcomings, as I strive to not replicate oppressive dynamics in my own organizing.
The following is my appeal to the humanity of men in America and serves as a model for others:

    Men seek to connect to the world that we inhabit. In our American context our masculinity is often challenged, creating an atmosphere of performance. Though masculinity is not inherently negative, men have acted in harmful ways to others in an effort to uphold a persona of strength and invulnerability. We’re here today because violence can no longer be the means to resolve conflict and we must be able to develop emotional sensitivity. We must be able to satisfy our needs and express our desires, while having the grace to respect others’ boundaries, despite threats to our pride and self-confidence. I am a man who stands for these values and hopes others will assist me in rewriting the narrative through which masculinity impacts our world. This is not only advocating that men stop sexual violence, but that we also end insensitivity to PEOPLE as they exist, as we strive to increase the understanding of our basic humanity.

    Restore the Night week was an inspiring opportunity to collaborate in and witness community organizing in my environment. Sarojini Schutt constructed this initiative, a transformation of Take Back the Night, to intervene in rape culture on our campus; providing education, resources, and modes of action throughout the week. She began with an issue that strikes a chord with her, and reflected upon her identity to understand her needs and positionality as a woman of color. This inspired the relationships she developed as different organizers were invited to contribute to the week within their own capacity. My own experience with toxic masculinity; witnessing the difficulty in emotional expression and vulnerability for men in my life, alongside my positionality as RA of the first all-male dorm on Goucher College’s campus, increased my sense of responsibility for directing the culture. However altruistic I may be, it is undeniable that love motivated me to stay engaged and see these efforts through. Loving relationships and mutuality spur action in response to injustices, a powerful intrinsic motivator.
Becoming A Man

A haze of days, blurred into transition
A passive resistance to my inner wisdom
    My heart spoke most clearly
    But my voice boomed
Scratchy, as I itched to reach manhood

Scratchy like my father’s beard
When he leaned in to kiss his son’s cheek
    Rare occasions in rough love
Tough. Trophies littered the backroom but none for a father
Only posterized nipples and braun that pushed the sun farther west to set

A man. Set in his ways, set for the day
    A day of work, spare moments
Time for a burping lesson. Take in the air.
All the air in the room until all others suffocate in silence.
A belch released. At last, a feeling from the gut.
Yet lessons fade with age, as do bonds untended
    And men unmended

A strong heart turns cracked lips into loving conversation
    Love lends a listening ear
I learned by watching my mother
Or rather from her watching me
Participation in her classes
    I’d seen her love spread
To my new sister
To small radiant faces
    To me

A thankless gift. A love to be regifted not restricted.
A gift of my inner wisdom, a recollection of our divine system. Its beauty
    A cosmic war to hold back tears
And the gods release
I meet her embrace like it was the first time
    …
All over again
The space created by Sarojini allows for others like myself to contribute to activism and find their voice within a patriarchal culture that oppresses us all. My own role, aligned with the goal of Restorative Justice, became one of leading men on conversations surrounding gender based violence. I advocated that we all have a role in perpetuating violence, yet we all have the capacity for change and redemption. Seeing survivors and community members rejoice at the sight of such an initiative reveals the significance of community engagement that allow others to find themselves and to be empowered.

This endeavor has produced many revelations and spurred transformation through intensive experiential learning. Activism and community engagement are not merely topics on which we can theorize in academia while remaining distanced from the communities and people experiencing trauma. It must be learned through practice as the essence of humanity is learned through experience. Doing self reflection allows us to understand our positionality within the world. From there we can begin to understand how we may relate to others and build community. By being part of community we are connected to people for mutual support performed through understanding and action, change. Speaking to humanity, speaks to our collective responsibility within this breathing organism. The breath that connects our spirit like wisps of wind. As we seek to build a world of compassion, we must move forth with sensitivity and openness to difference. Accepting this difference allows us to join the multitude.
Classification, Division, Separation.
What is and what is not. Adjectives are the root of all evil.
-RMF
On the Road to Freedom

We are not within the lives we live
If we do not enter the world with love
You’d truly see the world if you took a breath of air
And realized the pastures are open
They simply require the heavens’ support
Torrential rains fallen. Our trance...broken from the daily program.

Data sheets that compute our latest program
Update. Our digital performances have gone live.
Pillars of our institution no longer offer their support
Cold machines at best, if they ever knew to love
Circuits are patched so that no cable is left open
And blood vessels of the governing body are exposed to the air

Seemingly a god, held aloft in the air
Assuring that we participate in the program
Interpretation of our fate left out in the open
This is how we must live!
A world that circulates love
As a vital life force, the foundation of support

A foundation to build bridges that will support
Momentary connections, bound to air
Two stones grounded in their love
Circuits set to functions within their own program
This...is how we live.
I simply choose to bare my chest open

My soul’s not for sale, but the store’s open
A moment for a token, I appreciate the support
From family, or business that keeps us a’live
Like dandelions sustained by gusts of air
We mind our business but fail to manage our minds. You cannot simply program…
Love

Love!
And so I hold my heart open.
Love! And so I break free from the program.
Love! And so we build support.
Love that raises my hands to the air
And allows me to exist in a world that loves me to live

To those I grant love, I desire support.
To those for which my mouth opens, I need air.
To those within the program, we must live.
This thesis embodies how I perceive the need for new politicians in our increasingly divided world. As I strive to be a community organizer, one may ask, “Why not just pursue public policy and law? Become a politician?”. I advocate for new leadership, envisioning rappers and artists as generals that survey the land and lead our communities into the future. While politicians create policies that mandate how we must live, they are often removed from the lives that people live. I believe social change occurs through one’s appeal to humanity and speaking truth to our feelings and emotions. This is the work of artists and poets. In a world seemingly set to function despite our emotions, I advocate that we move forth through this world with love and sensitivity.

“Are you in an organization, a collective of individuals moved at power’s whim…or are you in community, surrounded by people invested in your growth due to unconditional love?”
Any last words?

_A receipt of his Last Supper_

_Transcribed into his court hearing_

**not guilty**

Can I get a second chance?

May I have seconds?

…

A second to breathe

A second plate

A second place trophy for a second chance at life

Meer seconds until the bullet connects, the gravel drops

Endless seconds perspiring in this unforgiving desert

Just give me a sec and my breath and tears and skin will replenish this forsaken land

til we may reap the fruits of my labor

A second supper to reconvene the sinners around wooden courts sentencing Satan’s spawn to

eternal damnation

Satan’s spawn, or so it seems since we can’t vanquish the demons within

Dandelions born in harsh lands, we hope to sow in a more forgiving patch

The wind blows..seconds tick away as we grow in this concrete block from which we rose as we

spiral towards the sun

Amen.
For an Arizona and a pack of skittles

You could go down to Max’s Food Market

I remember days you could cop those for a dollar seventy-four cents

Now an op could cop you at the expense of lead pressed into your chest,
like fingers rubbing together

MAKING NO SENSE

Then head over to Evergreen and get

One Large Tea. Six Sugars. and ~milk~

Don’t forget the six sugars.

$1.25

Cold cuts from C-Town

$2 American Cheese

$3 Ham

$2 Salami

Pull the benefit card. Don’t forget the code.

Never forget the code.

When we enter the store don’t touch nothin.

Don’t reach for anything

Unless it’s back to your community

Right down the block from Grove Street

“Between Woodbine and Palmetto”

I tell the taxi driver as he picks us up from the Food Bazaar in the cut behind Ridgewood Pl
On the precipice of Brooklyn
and Queens
If you ventured too far into Queens
You may eat like a king
At the K&K Buffet
Where it’s all you can eat
$12.99 per Adult
$9.99 per Child
And if you can’t afford much
Come back and pluck a deal from the Dollar Tree
Where you can eat it all
For a dollar each
Or meet up with ur mans for some Mickey Ds
$1.09 Double Cheeseburger $1.09 Large Sweet Tea
$1.09 2 Apple Pies $1.09 Small Fries
Whatchu mean Dollar and More menu?

Take the L train to Morgan Ave,
where a hop saves you $2.75,
So Mahmoud can chef up a breakfast sandwich on the grill
$3.25 Bacon, egg, and cheese on a roll
or do you prefer your eggjugcation dipped in gentrification
dripping in cracking white shells

The yolk moldy because folk are rotten and misplaced within

A bag of apples for $1.31/lb

But what do you do with the bunch

When it’s apples or oranges

It’s you or me

Our skins like night and day

Red and orange, Porous and freckled, Taut and soft

What’s the difference?

Minuscule but accumulated into hard walls

Cornering us into a store for consumption

We’re bricks

Bussed between Ralph Ave and Farragut Avenue creating bridges of brotherhood transcending the Atlantic

Fronto wrap $5

Tony’s Pizzeria 12:42 am

One large pie $14

*but Two Bro’s is $2.75 for two slices and a can of soda?*

Bet.

God forbid you go to “The City”
Arizonas be $1.75 when it say 99 cents on the can

Dafuq

But Manhattan has the best rec centers

Annual Membership Fee: $150

Post-Workout Sesame Chicken Combo: $5.25

Walk off the weight as I take the Williamsburg Bridge home

Walk off my soles as I trek home

Unpaved roads that save no souls

But all souls return to Brooklyn

Right here at Mannas Soul Food Spot on Rockaway Ave

Where you pay by the pound

125 pounds

And trust when I say *that shit crack*

A crack that uses the finest of whites to paint lines

Lines to keep the white out but black in

And in fashion

I crack like the shells and break away

A soul decayed and here I’ll stay

Here lies *Rosko*

Addict to sugar. It seems the rush of life has led to his crash. May the cotton candy clouds be as sweet. And remove this bitter taste from my tongue so I may speak more freely.

A soul, yet persistent in the food.
A salt ingrained in our culture.

And grains fall as time slips away...

Thanks for coming this far.

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A Never-Ending Conversation

Something I’ve learned as a facilitator has been the importance of opening questions to the public. The following responses answer, “When do you feel most in community?”. Honoring the wisdom of community members and leaders, I ask others to contribute to my assertion for ethical community activism.

“I feel most in community when I am eating food or drinking tea or playing games with people who I can trust and talk about anything from politics to favorite music to personal stuff with. People I can goof off with and be serious with. I also feel in community when I am neck deep in activism work and I can feel the person or persons I am working with are all on the same page and we share similar visions and can fuel each other, but also keep each other balanced. Everyone brings something to the table and when each person can bring that and equitably share the space in order to achieve a common goal, that is community to me.” Sarojini Schutt; Restore the Night Week (planning committee), Goucher College

“I feel most in community when I’m connected enough with people in a community to want to change it and make it better” Cecile Adrian; Goucher College, Collage Club, Westtown School

“When there is mutual understanding or when there is a common goal. I love when I am jamming with my friends and everyone is playing their own instrument, but we are all playing together. It’s like we have mutual respect but a common goal of making music. Or when there are late night conversations with your friends about deep topics. It’s that mutual understanding and mutual respect that helps me feel the most. But I can also feel negative things most strongly when I am invalidated or when that respect is not given.” Joe Alston; Community-Based Learning

“Around people I am comfortable, though that can change in many situations and often I can feel uncomfortable with communities that I should feel more comfortable with but sometimes I just don’t. It’s hard to explain it’s like the world is not perfectly adjustable to the way I think and to some degree that should also be considered in community, feeling challenged to not stay put in what group you are surrounded around.” Myles Lundberg; Gay, White, Democrat, American, Italian-American, Irish American, Lapsed Catholic

“When I’m home. It’s a complicated reality as home for me is spread between two neighborhoods: Ridgewood and Bushwick. These neighborhoods share a blurred boundary along Wyckoff Avenue, where
the cultures of both sides bleed into one another. However, the neighborhoods are distinctly segregated, where whites by and large live in Ridgewood and people of color live in Bushwick. When we moved to Ridgewood, we left behind all my aunts, uncles, and cousins that didn't have the luck of finding a place elsewhere. We'd visit often, and so I felt at home most in Bushwick when I saw family despite only living there as an infant. Recent waves of gentrification and deportation removed all of my family from Bushwick, so now even though those Brooklyn streets are familiar, nothing else is. We think of home geographically, but as the son of immigrants in a diverse city, home is everywhere and nowhere: the US and Latin America, Brooklyn and Queens, Bushwick and Ridgewood, speaking Spanish and English. I am at home in these various dichotomies, ones that often fight one another, and as a result, home is ever-shifting and turbulent.” Vicente Martinez; Columbia University, Ridgewood/Bushwick

“When eating food together with people in my culture” Sm Morshed; Bangladeshi Community

“Music events and when everyone’s out [...] in good weather” Isaac Gittelsohn; Residential Life, Peace Studies Department, Community-Based Learning, Music Groups

“I feel most in community when I am surrounded by a climate of mutual respect and a likeminded approach to tackling problems. where there is love and appreciation for who I am, and what has made me who I am” Clayton Reynolds; Activist-Based Communities, Queer Communities

“To me, I am most comfortable to be myself, and in community, [when] we encourage eachother to become our best self , through helping others. [Within] several communities, a feeling of FELLOWSHIP. [Feeling support] to exchange ideas, knowledge, encouragement In whatever raw form that is” Azaria Lanig; Black Woman/ Caribbean/ Young Christians of Color (Intervarsity), community of family friends, turtle lovers, social justice groups

To continue contributing to this question please DM me on instagram @rebel_buddha_a1
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About the Author

I'm just tryna make it to the headlines
But I add lines til it's in my thread lines
The flow genetic, so now it's in my bloodline
So my kids take lines to the head, until they dead? Fine!

Politic'ing drugs got me losing my damn mind
Can't make change, too busy makin' these damn rhymes
Sellin' out the cell, but now you servin' the man time
Afraid of commitment but recomittin' the same crimes

Swore not to be my father but we committin' the same crimes
Too late to hit the party, so I gotta hit my damn grind
I grind during prime time to find time to crush limes
When life hand you lemons, just quench the thirst of mankind

But mama know ain't a man kind
A father might, I just know that he ain't mine
Broken bridges, like we riddled with landmines
I just wanna connect, please pick up the landline

A line of coke, connects from here to west coast
Pocket of dough, so I can keep my bread toast
Rockin the boat, but never let the feds close
And before I go! Let me tell you 'bout the flow..

The flow ether, we heat seek ya, we need leaders
If he got the grades better let him lead ya
A stray dog barkin' in the hood when we need teachers
But a nigga take a stand, tryna be a preacher!

I just hope I reach ya
I just hope I reach...
we heat seek ya, we need leaders
If the wave is hot, we just pray that you please clean him
    Believe him...
    We just keep dreamin'
    We just keep...

The flow ether, we heat seek ya, we need leaders
If he got the grades better let him lead..ya
    Better let him
    Better let him lead
    I bet 'em that he leave...

[We spend all of our time and efforts sending our young black men to get an education to bring that back to their community. We're tryna reach equity in a system that was never made for us, we not even thinkin' outside the box anymore. Hopefully, if we keep building the next generation someone will do it. For every black person that graduates, Cheers to that!]

A whole liter! We need leaders!
If he got the grades better let him lead ya
Until we complete... Never defeat, only the feet of those who lead...
    Until we complete...we'll never see defeat.
Acknowledgments

Note to Self
Thanks to all those who made this possible
As J Cole once said, “This is the credits. This is role credits nigga, if you
don’t wanna sit through the credits get your ass up and walk out.”

First I just gotta thank my mom
Christina K. Jackson-Smith
For sacrificing your all to give me a chance
And being a role model for how to navigate my life
Striving for success while shouldering hardship

Thank you to my advisory board
Rory Turner, Dr. Nyasha Grayman Simpson,
Jennifer Bess and Nina Kasniunas
For your guidance in my academic journey
Providing advice that integrated the wisdom of your respective disciplines

And thanks to Professors
Yousef Al-Bulushi, Drea Brown, Ailish Hopper, Rick Pringle,
Kelly Brown-Douglas, Esther Gibbs, Steven Decaroli,
Janet Shope, Eric Singer, Cornel Rubino, and Seble Dawit
for classes that pushed me to think critically or creatively
I’m glad to consider myself a scholar amongst yourselves
I been gone a long time but Imma always come thru
Although we’ve gone our own ways, I see ya building
We just gotta stay in touch and build together
Ya inspire me to keep trying to reach out to people
Knowing we could come from so many different backgrounds
To unify behind an identity, a crew without a name.
Makes you realize it doesn’t matter
It’s about building that family
And so I’ll always remember those who had my back
And keep you close
To the many great accomplishments ahead of us!

Thank you to my Brooklyn Latin community
A hotspot for young black intellectuals
Taking on the world one mind at a time
Rest in Power Ijeoma Uzoukwu
A reminder of what this system can do to great minds
Your passing comes as inspiration pushing us to honor your spirit

Shoutout to Black Saturday Records, Sonny, Asoh Black, K Zoned, Wavy D
Ya might not even see this but I peep you workin
Your drive let me know I come from a strong crop
Props to William Larcenaire aka Mad Genius
For supplying the beats and collaborating as another mad mind
Seeing your craft blossom was beautiful, I hope you keep it alive
Wannye bruh
You keep the cyph goin fam, what can I say
Our energy on a different wavelength
That crowds can’t maintain
...
Let’s keep trailblazin

Manigga Sunny
Thanks for holding it down, coming out for the parties
Truly understanding where a nigga is coming from
Remindin a nigga that shit ain’t sweet
But we finna eat anyway
Deadass
Thank you for always hittin me up reminding me to stay on my grind
I’d never forget but it’s good to know I got a Sasuke out there

What’s up Danny?
I’ll see ya when I see ya
You were a real one from day one so now that I’m off this school shit
Imma check you too

Isaac and Ayinde,
Ya were some creative ass roommates
That kept me inspired coming into school
Change the world with your beautiful music and art!
Much love to the community I found in Goucher College
All the people that talked through difficult conversations
Also, Timur you the bro
Fuck thanks to the institution that made it possible for us to have to go this hard
I’m Undaunted
Look what you made me do!

Shoutout to $ycle and 80 Block
Check out instlarcafe.com for some Groovy Kids gear
Em I respect your art and I know you’re making something special
Our parents might not see that but it’s up to our generation to start paving the way

Quran, Breanna, Keke
I love y’all.
Struggle in our lives makes me go harder to be a stronger brother for you to depend on

Bobo
I’m glad to welcome you into the family
I know we didn’t see eye to eye growing up but I know you have love for my mother
I see how you protect and provide for a family
Here’s hoping we can build together as equals

To my father
I miss you. I might know you but I’m not sure
Your efforts to be in my life do not go unnoticed
And to my grandma
Mariah Hodges
Thank you for keeping me rooted in my family
And our history
I write hoping to string together our past
To lead us into the future

Sarojini C. Schutt
I love you
Thank you for long conversations that helped to smooth my thoughts
Personal pieces like these are not a labor of the writer’s alone
So thank you for seeing the light in me
And helping me grow into my Rebel Buddha

Finally, thank you to the interviewees
Shantay Guy, Michael Scott, Lawrence Grandpre, William Glover-Bey,
Tahira Mahdi and Menes Yahudah
You’re all amazing leaders in your own right
Baltimore is blessed to have such great souls acting in its favor
Yet there is still much work to be done
As I hand in this work of scholarship
I hope to join you all as professionals

To anybody else I didn’t mention I love you too, fuck it!
That’s what it’s all about
I love you I love the world I love life

And if you didn’t make it into here don’t trip cuz I ain’t done writin’

Until next time.