

MEMORIAL 207

It's 1 o'clock in the morning and I'm sitting in the guest bedroom of a house I'll never be able to afford. Earlier today, around 5:30pm, my mom's former colleague, my now friend, second mom I should say, helped me move out of my first dorm room at Vanderbilt. I've spent the past five weeks packing, turning in essay after essay working towards the moments I could go home. I'm hoping to have made the dean's list this semester, although I fight tooth and nail every day in the Memorial basement trying to suggest grade point averages reflect socio-economic standing more than intelligence, and that the word "meritocracy" is a scam. I'm getting ahead of myself right now, let me rephrase, I fought tooth and nail for those notions, I will continue working to change the minds of my classmates who will one day purchase the house I am sitting in, it will just no longer be in the memorial basement.

We, humans, tend to think about special moments, times, externalities and all the like - years in advance and I am a culprit of this fallacy, and trust me when I say I saw myself operating out of my dorm room, bouncing around from dorm party to dorm party long before I step foot in that building, but I've never thought *this* far ahead.

The only emotions that my high school aged brain solicited for when I anticipated college came about whilst daydreaming orientation week and move in day. My first years' experience at Vanderbilt doesn't hold a candle to the things that I imagined, and that's because as a senior in high school the only impression higher education made on me was via partying with my brother at Rice University. I wanted to go to Rice, I wanted to experience the things I tasted as a recovering seventeen-year-old. I wanted a place to suit me the way Rice suits my brother. I'm unfortunately fortunate to say my school does not suit me the way it suited that senior in high school. I did not make the friends I wanted. I did not attend black only parties. I did not find "my people" in a place full of people who deliberately strive to not be my people. And tonight, as I near the end of this paragraph, I want to foreshadow like Kiese Laymon and produce something critically informed by the tittle or literary themes of whatever *this* is; I recognize the preceding sentence is crafted upon thoughts that the senior in high school would not conject.

Professor Laymon also teaches at Rice.

I want to engage soliloquies that function analogous to dark matter like Toni Morrison's *Playing in the Dark*.

It's always there, you'll never see it.

I want to explore the American themes adjacent to my anecdotal presentations like Ralph Ellison.

I want to pioneer text like Richard Wright and make the white folks mad, without making *my* white folks mad because “white folks” is all encompassing of exactly far too many of my pretentious and self-serving classmates.

Meritocracy that.

I want to author devastation in a space no-one has dared to be so vulnerable in like James Baldwin.

But the more I try to “do” like *they* do, and write like *they* do, I realize it’s *they* who affords my experience at Vanderbilt significance.

I spent months concocting an experience tailored to my personal interest and the connotations surrounding the word college, but the most I learned about the art of being human came from reading taxing passages, referencing other works on page margins, *Use Your X*, and drafting essays. Two covers and two hundred black ink filled, color pasting pages can change the way you experience human, in a way no black only parties or alcohol abuse can. *They* can also save you from the problems no bottle has the experience to handle.

In laymen’s terms: preceding college I hadn’t known but two books and two authors, but the reality of education at a liberal arts school means you’ll reckon with authorial choices on literary planes designed for people on different continents.

I started turning to books in times of distress, temperament, illusion, stimulation, and all else accompanying the walks of life.

This past semester, when new developments came about my father's eyesight, I opened Cortlan Wickliff's *Overdrive*.

I resonated with black ink on manilla pages, found applications from the anecdotes he presented, slammed the book on my hardwood Memorial dorm room floor, and screamed fuck because my dad couldn't afford \$40 worth of medicine.

I later found out my brother shared that same pain and that same perception at Rice that day.

Your "dream" school won't stay dreamy.

I opened Ralph Ellison's collection of essays and re-read sections of Richard Wright's *Black boy* so I could try on different circumstances to sooth my frustration.

I opened a word document and wrote a chapter in my memoir called "New Variables", hoping to see it reach the light of day, begging to write my way out of destruction. I started drafting that book during this past fall semester and I think it has the license to be substantive, although it might not ever leave my childhood home.

As I sit in this guest bedroom, I know the only thing I will walk away from my school with and employ in a range of contexts is the sentences I've read, the quotes I remember, and the ideas that challenge my engagement of things as I know them.

Two hours ago, I wanted to finish John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*, and I grew frustrated when I realized said book is in my suitcase, packed up in the car ready for the morning.

I'm writing this essay instead.

I'm not sure I am accomplishing any of what I've set out to do, which is capsule my first-year experience into one text, less than fifteen pages. But as I try, yes and no, to reflect on my first year at Vanderbilt, the only thing informing my past, present, and my future, is the books. I anticipated many different emotions preparing for 13th grade, I just never expected to get *this* far into them.

I guess it's kind of hard to anticipate or expect getting *this* far when I didn't know *this* far even existed. So, to the texts that have accompanied me through this odyssey, not for mere references but vital co-travelers, each page a compass pointing at inward expression rather than exterior dwellings, mesmerizing and dispelling my experience during the time I lived in my Memorial dorm room, thank you.

*Literarily Engaged (Trapped) –
Former Memorial 207 Resident –
Scoffing at the Use of Three Salutations –*

“Your Dad says this is a hard read” says my mom to me through the thin walls of my childhood home. The eyes meeting mine lit up as I gave my dad a draft of my memoir. I wasn't sure how to tell him what I wrote about, and I felt uneasy handing over such a graphic depiction of my life. I feel cowardice at the prospect of him reading “my pain” because his pain is a sight of true devastation carried out by a person who never complains.

If I could fully capitalize the word “never” in the former, I would.

I'm not sure my dad understands what a "hard read" means, and if he does then I guess I underestimated his literary navigation. I frown at that sentence, and I keep on writing because the only way to make amends for his socioeconomically informed lack of education is by continuing to write books he cannot understand. And when I finish splashing pages with color filled ink that everybody else is colorblind to, I will write books that my mother cannot understand. I will write the wordiest or words and craft the craftiest of crafts until I too cannot understand what emerges from the blinking cursor on my screen.

I type, misspell, delete two letters, and rewrite because I am staring intently at the letters emerging from the left side of my cursor.

As soon as I got home yesterday I bought another shelf from Ikea because I had no space for the books I brought back home.

It was *they's* books.

My brain has no space for the books I brought home. My literary imagination has no more space for references, quotes, narration, and derivatives with contemporary applications.

My brother will say my book is a hard read too.

I wanted to write something deep enough for my family to stop, pause, and ask, "what the fuck is he talking about". The first book I wrote was twelve thousands words and tailored to a child's mental capacity. With one title under my pen, I was scared to call myself an author in the authorial spaces at my school. I am no less scared then I was 9 months ago; I am still learning to write, revise, talk in a native tounge,

commend the criticism, and dispel functions of avoidance that I haven't found strength to dismember.

I'm just trying to leave somebody, somewhere, in a place of nobody and nowhere delineating from a linear framework. I think attacking the mass behind your eyes is the best way to do it, because if we don't reckon with what we think and what we feel, we'll never command where we're going and what we do.

This is a hard read and you'll have to get used to it.

I am a hard to read writer and I have to get used to it.

More often than not when I am reading a text, I am actively searching for interpretations that fit into conversations with other books, and ascribing meaning from the words on the page, regardless of what the writer's intentions were. Any time I write I am actively searching for notions and presentations that jibe in conversation with other texts and personal anecdotes stored in my brain that I can take meaning from. But for some reason the books that provide me with the most literature capital, the books that I read and have the most applications and universal interpretations for are books that concern the human brain and human nature. There's a distinct level of currency gained finding a niche quote that concerns institutionalized racism, and ones that concern the psychology of humans.

I do not find either of these subjects to be mutually exclusive. I do find that the text encompassing both facets, both human and historical black essence are the texts that tend to stay with me the most. The psychological interpretations afford a grand application therefore prompting significance, the African American histories

warrant my personal interest prompting an obsession with the words that awe my mind.

I just got home and all the books I own are together now. I cannot decide what to read first, so I am drawing out my interest onto this page and comparing genres. That's what this is, I thought you might want to know.

I think there are variables to be denounced which would allot for a better comprehension of how these texts work. We can call a quote or text with universal applications "UA". We can call a quote or a text with personal interest "PI".

UA text struggle to command my upmost personal interest, although it was once there, it has just faded. It only faded once I came into conversation with new PI texts, which allowed me to recognize the difference between UA and PI. Although UA has much more applications in life than a discourse on white assemblance, race conformities and titillation, it is the PI texts that occupied my mind so much that sleep no longer warrants an escape from a reality that I despise but rather a temporary displacement from the imaginative and constructive space I yearn to find myself a part of.

I wrote the previous paragraph in my notes app whilst trying to fall asleep.

PI texts have facilitated a grand distraction from the woes and pains associated with my previous life, that being the time I spent before moving into my Memorial dorm room, and for a moment I can take the chance to engage in the problems of people that come before me, or stressors of people that do not exist.

The text was left there and seldomly revisited over the following summer. Since I am no longer amidst the momentous reflections of my first year at Vanderbilt, it would be ingenuine to pencil in a conclusion and cap off the text.

That summer I read most of which I wanted to read and scoured every bookstore for hours at a time in search of new authors and new genres. About two months after my departure from Nashville, I realized the literary figures in which this text concerns make me feel seen, and critically engage what it means for me to be human. Gone are the days that I yearn for wealth, success and good fortune, because *this*, *they*, and the books I will continue to read are free from toxic mental strain. I love books, I love reading, I love writing, and I love being hard to read. I've been afforded this interest in part due to time intensive course work, but in grand part due to a woe-smitten, academia inducing, 14x8, Memorial Hall dorm room. As I await the upcoming housing assignment for my sophomore year of college, I can hope that my next private domicile is illuminating, cultivating, and forgiving... but it just won't be like you.

I wanted to go to black only parties.

I wanted to love my school for the social scene.

I wanted the culture to suit me the way Rice suits my brother.

I got you, and *they* instead, and it's been the best.

Farewell Memorial 207.

*From the author of a memoir started in your presence, and
the subject of an experience informed by your love,*

Brady Gibson