

## PURPOSE THEORY

I put on my European designer shoes that my Mom found thrift shopping during my time back home over winter break. I had just returned from Brazil and was eager to spend time with my family.

We loved to shop, especially at the expense of the Plato's Closet gift cards I won during the annual Christmas celebration at my grandma's house that I wasn't there for. I put on the vintage 1970s fox brown wool coat that my Mom found at a thrift store months earlier, which she only bought in preparation for my first winter at Vanderbilt. It is the first week of the spring semester and we received the most snow I've ever seen. Six inches of glistening white powder and the University waded for hours, trying to host instruction the next day, what is for me, tomorrow, as I write in a cafeteria that I've never eaten in. Earlier today my close friend Clarence and I conducted eight interviews talking to elite college students

of color across the country, all in part to build the networking agency I founded just three days ago. My experience in the 100 Black Men of America adequately prepared me for the job, which means we locked in. Maybe that's my next big project. Maybe it's not. I know the things I've learned conducting the first series of interviews have already covered the cost of my time and energy. Along with the \$14.99, I paid to get Zoom premium.

I put on my fancy leather shoes, my vintage coat, along with a pair of gloves, and the flat cap I bought from Target on Black Friday that looks like the one my grandfather used to wear. I packed my leather backpack that I bought from a former slave market in Brazil, and I headed outside ready to do... well, something. I didn't know what I would work on. I brought my computer in case I wanted to do homework. I brought a couple of books in case I wanted to read. I packed my first book because my brother gave Kiese Laymon a copy at Rice University's Martin Luther King Jr. celebration of life event. I brought my iPad in case I read articles and wanted to take notes.

I haven't done any of those things tonight.

I won't do any of those things tonight.

Out of all my facilities, I'm writing to you again.

I didn't choose the location I would write at. I didn't choose what I would write. I didn't choose to write at all.

I trucked through the snow in my new shoes, slightly worried the water would damage them, very worried the freezing water would penetrate my socks. I walked to main campus enjoying the newfound imagery as the place I've grown to know over the past six months has been covered in

snow. While listening to the music that motivates me, I made good progress navigating the slushy puddles cluttering the ground before... my headphones turned off. I continued across the bridge because it was much colder in the elevated, exposed space above 21<sup>st</sup> Avenue. I continued a bit before inspecting my headphones, to which I pondered because something was happening that I had never seen before. Five illuminated white lights, flashing three times after pressing the power button. Vexed, I opened my phone to Google what it could mean; “Low battery” it says.

My headphones were charged.

I was certain.

I entered a state of lucidness because it's moments like these that I look around and say to myself, “What is this trying to tell me?”. I know how powerful the butterfly effect is. I know the story of how one social media post forced alternate realities in my life. Personally, I call this phenomenon the universe, most religious folk would call it their god.

After looking around for a minute, I disabled my Bluetooth and turned it back on. My headphones connected and music started playing.

I didn't have it yet.

I walked for about one hundred yards, taking the various turns needed to reach my favorite study spots. In the middle of a field passing, operating susceptibly, still searching for the purpose of my journey to main campus... my headphones turned off.

This time for much longer.

The same flashing lights appeared. I was growing frustrated, mostly because it was ten degrees outside. I stood

in the middle of the snow, fidgeting with my headphones beginning to question if an Amazon seller sold my Mom fake Beats. Defeated, I put my headphones in my bag and pulled out my AirPods. But before I zipped the bag up, I decided to try one last time. One, two, three, four, five white LEDs lit up consecutively. This meant my headphones were fully charged and connected. I put my AirPods away and my headphones on. I played the most thought-provoking instrumental I know, the same one I listened to on my way back to Dallas from my brother's move in day at Rice University. My headphones were doing something.

I do not mean glitching.

They were sending me a message, but I didn't have it yet.

They were signaling me to pay close attention. I asked over and over, "What does this mean?". I thought about why it was trying to delay my travel.

When I am late to class or miss a stop light, I come to think that if I had been thirty seconds earlier, I would have tragically passed away in a terrible accident – an accident that would've only happened if whatever stopped me, didn't stop me. I've adopted a posture that says everything happens for a reason, I just can't help but always try to find that reason.

I wondered if my headphones stopping my trek was intentional in the context of crossing paths with people. As I approached an intersection in the pathway, a group of people that I otherwise never would have seen approached at the same time. I wondered if these people were important to me, and I didn't know it yet. I wondered if they would become my new best friends. I debated speaking to them and saying "I am

supposed to speak to you. I don't know why but I know I am supposed to.”

I did not speak to them.

That wasn't it.

Very soon after those people were out of sight, I walked up the ramp to one of the buildings that I had studied in a couple of nights prior. I liked this spot because I usually get a lot of work done in there, and tonight I needed to work. I pressed my cell phone with my electronic student ID up to the scanner. The LED strip flashed green, then immediately red, meaning the building was closed. Under normal circumstances, this would mean I'd go to a building on the way back to my dorm that was open 24 hours.

These were not normal circumstances.

This locked door was strictly an indication that my purpose for tonight, January 16, 2024, was not in there. Exiting the building's vicinity, I approached an intersection where 99 times out of 100, I would turn right.

I continued straight.

I continued walking until I reached another set of doors. Once again, I pressed my phone up to the scanner. Two flashes of green illuminated the dark surrounding area which meant the door was unlocked. I entered the building confident that whatever my headphones were doing, my purpose was in here. I walked with excitement because I wondered if my future wife was around the corner. I asked myself if I'd meet the mother of my children who would one day change the world. I kept my eyes peeled until... my headphones turned off. I fidgeted with them in this space for about a minute before I started to think. I sat down in a booth

at the university's most popular dining hall which I never go to, wondering what was next. I began to treat my headphones like a Magic 8 Ball. I thought to myself, "Will I find a girl here?"; they did not work. I asked, "Will I do something important?"; five white lights lit up consecutively.

My headphones were connected.

I continued walking, becoming aggressive with my questioning and intense with my analysis of seemingly random things. I reached the genuine end of the building, meaning that I could walk no further without exiting a set of doors. I turned around and as I looked to my right, saw a poster that read, "International Lens". This was a message if I'd ever seen one, but I didn't know what it meant.

I still don't know what it means.

I stood there with my mouth hung open in disbelief as I began to think of potential applications. I just planned a trip to the Dominican Republic, during an interview earlier today one of my peers from the University of Pennsylvania talked about his aspirations for studying abroad, I've thought much about studying abroad since returning from my two-week stay in South America, and I've spent the past week obsessed with contemporary social mobility throughout the African Diaspora and the Haitian slave revolt of 1804. I had these outlets for what "International Lens" could mean for me, I just didn't know which one was right. I waited intently for my headphones to turn off again.

They did not.

As I turned back towards the doors, for a second, I mean a literal second, I caught a glimpse of a university advertisement displayed on a television screen that read:

## NOW HIRING

### Undergraduate Writing Consultants for 2024-2025

I waited by the TV until the ad resurfaced, to which I promptly took photos with my cell phone. I walked down a set of stairs, questioning if this was the reason my headphones were turning off. Maybe the delays in my trip were designed to steer me in view of the television ad.

My 3.4 GPA is not good enough for that position.

I decided to sit down and write about this experience.

My headphones have not turned off since.

I have homework due soon, but I will not start that until this here is finished. All last semester I found myself neglecting homework because this here, is significant. You and I are significant. Maybe I will have spent enough time writing so that when I leave, somebody important will cross my path. Maybe the text I am writing will inspire those who read to do something magnificent in their life.

I will exit this building with the intention of speaking to every person I see because I believe there is a paranormal essence within my right now. Ten seconds ago, as the security guards walking past me spoke, I listened carefully for any clues as to why tonight is the night something profound will happen. Maybe this is a defining moment in my life, and I don't know it yet.

This is a defining moment in my life, I just don't know how yet.

The possibilities persist. The absence of fruition is not an indication of impossibility, just the affirmation of

potentially delayed execution. Purpose might not reveal itself tonight, and it may not be soon. But to the people reading (nobody), my headphones turned off for a reason.

What does that mean to you?

Derive contemporary application from the experience I've devoted my night to tell you about.

What does it mean for me?

Maybe the greater context of this section will influence the lasting perception of a book I started at 4 A.M. in my Confederate Memorial dorm room many months ago. Maybe "X", will find its way into rooms I've never been to, subsequently, granting my name access to rooms that I otherwise never would've have known about.

Hopefully, I can challenge readers (myself) to do better with the opportunities given to them. A challenge to erase X from the page, even when we can't.

Especially when we can't.

To be okay, coexisting with variables in a space that a person cannot be okay in.

The pique blinking cursor on my screen can free us from the hidden detriment of our minds. Blinks that will tear us (me) down from the algebraic scaffolding that produces something from the nothing that X gives. When silence was the only answer afforded to me. Realizing that the absence of conversation says far more and translates deeper than words could ever.

I hope you find this all in good standing. I've always wanted to tell you how I got here, even when you thought I didn't.



I've battled many things over the past five years, but you've always been my greatest feat.

Then defeat.

Then feat once again.

Until defeat.

I conquer your existence until I let you conquer mine. Please don't be mad at me, at this, at us. I'm just trying to explain this thing the best way I know how.

There is no more or less you and I could have done to prevent me from writing what I am.

There is no more or less you and I could have done to save us from inquiries that author devastation in the space that I've created for you today.

Did she love you more than I did?

Says a mother to her lifeless son.

A catoptric tristesse note was left in my room, explaining why she asks what she does.

I returned to my room and rid the paper of construction.

Not the ink.

It's been a little over three years and my Mom might ask herself what she asks me every night.

I hope the ink on these pages can help her find the answers that she needs, but no book has the spine to carry what I've done.

I suffered.

I was depressed.

I was angry.

I was in pain. Until I wasn't.

I was all those things, so you never had to be.