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Self Reflections: Revisiting My 2019 Race Monologue

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Self-Reflections:
Revisiting My 2019 Race Monologue

Senior Project Submitted to
The Division of the Arts
of Bard College

by
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Annandale-on-Hudson, New York

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this project to my friends here at Bard. Thank you all for all the Love you have given me - even when it was tough Love. I have learned from all of you, and you have all helped me to become a better man. I hope that I have been as good a friend to all of you as you have all been to me.

Thank you.

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I would also like to acknowledge Mr. James Baldwin who, through his writings and speeches, has become a teacher to me not just on matters of race, but on artistry, Love, and Life itself. Thank you Mr. Baldwin, wherever your spirit roams.

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I would also also also also like to acknowledge my father, Kevin Freel, for introducing me to the conversations that have set me on this current path of examining not just my country, its history, and its problems, but myself too. I must also acknowledge and thank him for being a great source of Love and support. Thank you, Dad.

And I must acknowledge and thank my mother, Virginia Cason-Burnstine. She has been an endless well of Love, support, and guidance for my entire life. She has always reminded me to first and foremost be myself. "Everyone else is taken". Thank you, Mama, for everything you have done, and continue to do for me.

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Introduction

“Your responsibility as a human being is to treat other people like human beings. And if you fail at that, you fail at everything”

-James Baldwin

I wrote the original monologue, “It’s a Journey”, when I partook in an event called the Bard Race Monologues. I was a sophomore at the time. The Bard Race Monologues have been annual events at Bard College for a number of years, stretching back to at least the early 2000s, I believe. During the event a handful of students, all of whom have written their own monologues, perform those monologues to an audience of their peers. As the name suggests, all the monologues pertain to the subject of race in some form or another, with each separate year of the Race Monologues having a different theme. The year I performed, the theme was “Identity”. And so, I wrote about my identity as a White man, tracking my life through growing up in the Northern suburbs of Chicago, attending predominantly White schools, moving to college, and my experiences at Bard up until that point.

Writing the original monologue was an exercise in self-reflection and honesty. My main goal when I was writing was to simply be open and transparent about the events that had led me to that point in my life, while always looking at them through the lens of race. I wanted to talk about where I was coming from, how that place had shaped me, and how I was now trying to shape myself in this new environment. As a result, I focused primarily on events in my life and how those events made me feel. I structured the monologue like I was telling a story, moving

from one place and series of events to another, tracking my journey and development as this story progressed.¹

Now, two years later, I've taken up the task of rewriting this monologue to again reflect on where I have come from and where I am now. Upon rewriting this monologue, there were several things I noticed that I felt needed specific attention.

First, even though, as I said before, writing the original monologue was an exercise in honesty and self-reflection, I found that I didn't go as deep with the self-reflection as I could have. I seemed to be asking and answering the questions of "Who", "What", "Where", and "When", but not the "Why". *Why* was I feeling this way? *Why* was I doing these things? *Why* do I spend so much time in Black and Brown spaces with Black and Brown people? *Why* am I so interested in this question of race? I don't believe I was asking these questions, or answering them, when I first wrote the monologue, so one of my goals when rewriting was to go deeper with the experiences I was presenting and the questions I was asking. For example, in the original monologue I write about how I became disillusioned with and angry towards my suburb, but I did not delve into why I felt this way. In the rewriting of my monologue, I made sure to delve deeper - not only with this section, but with the entire monologue.

Something else that I noticed about the original monologue was that there were elements of me playing to the crowd. Some of these moments I kept, but some of them felt too much like I was bashing Bard, its students, and the people who live back in the suburbs I grew up in. It felt like I was doing this just to get a laugh or a rise out of people. I wanted to tone this down because, as much as I wanted to vent my anger and frustration, and as much as I still do in the

¹ The original performance of the monologue is available to view on YouTube. Type in "Bard Race Monologues 2019", and the video should come up. I perform in "Part 1", but I suggest watching both parts all the way through. There is some very beautiful and powerful work that is shared in those videos.

piece, I also didn't want my rewritten monologue to just be a roast. I wanted it to get at something deeper and more substantial. So, rather than just get angry, I again asked the question of "Why?", and tried to get underneath not only my own anger, but also the behavior of the people I was angry at. I did this in the hopes of fostering not only an understanding within myself, but also within my audience, as to where I was coming from, and where others may have been coming from. I believe that fostering understanding is a necessary step in walking through any problem or issue, and so, while I am no psychologist or therapist, I do hope that my deeper diving, not just in these parts of the monologue, but throughout the whole thing, reveals something to my audience that can help them move towards greater awareness, growth, and understanding.

Keeping in line with this goal of revealing in the hopes of increasing the awareness and consciousness of my audience, I wanted my rewritten monologue to have a clearer throughline, or message, that my audience could gain from. Over the last year, I have been listening to a lot of speeches by James Baldwin, and one of the main ideas that Mr. Baldwin returns to throughout his speeches is this idea of self-responsibility - that your first responsibility is to yourself - and not just in taking care of yourself, but also in taking responsibility for your behavior and your actions. This idea that we take responsibility for who we are and what we do not just for ourselves, but for those around us - for the people in our lives. This is a lesson that has become very apparent to me in my time at Bard, and is a lesson I believe that anyone and everyone can and should apply to their own lives.

Sticking to the context of race, I believe this lesson is especially true for myself and other white people. As I lay out in the rewritten monologue, we have created and live in a society that

infects us with racist and bigotted ideas from when we first enter it through to the rest of our lives. And so, part of our responsibility, not just to ourselves, but to the people around us - to our fellow human beings - is to figure out what, how, and why our society has done to us so we can begin to undo it within ourselves, and, hopefully, begin to undo it within our society. Because a society is made up of people, and if the people are improving, hopefully the society is too.

These are some of the main changes and edits I wanted to make to my monologue. I hope that they all come through clearly, and I hope that you not only enjoy reading this piece, but gain something from it.

A note on reading the monologue: Any bit of text that is crossed out is not to be read as part of the rewritten monologue, even if it is just one word or one letter. That is old text. I wanted to keep it because I saw it as a way of maintaining another level of transparency about where I have come from. Please read the crossed out text, but think of it as deleted scenes from a movie: They are still valid and have something to say, but are no longer part of the story. Thank you for your understanding.

“It’s a Journey”

“Self-Reflections”

Hey y’all. My name is Ryan Cason. I’m a theatre and film major here at Bard, and I’ve always been a lover of stories. ~~From *The Ugly Duckling* to *King Arthur*~~ I grew up with stories always being read or told to me, and I ~~came~~ **have come** to believe that stories are one of the best ways we have, as people, of ~~sharing our life experiences~~ **communicating** with **each** others. **Stories are how we share ideas, teach lessons, show others who we think we are, and imagine who we want to be.** How ~~the~~ **our** audiences take these ~~experiences~~ **stories**, and what they decide to learn from them, is up to them. The job of the storytellers is only to tell their stories as truthfully and honestly as they can. So let me tell you a story.

I come from a very White, affluent part of the world. The town in which I ~~currently live~~ **have spent most of my life, Glencoe, Illinois,** is ~~currently 93%~~ **89%** White, even though it is only twenty miles away from Chicago, one of the biggest and most diverse cities in the country. My high school was 86% white **at the time that I went there,** with the largest minority being Asian, **and the smallest being Native American, and with most of my classmates being either Christian or Jewish.** ~~I could count on my hands the number of black people who went to my high school of over 4,000 kids.~~ At first I wasn’t very aware of this, or if I was I did not give it much thought. To me, a ~~White-ass~~ school in a ~~White-ass~~ suburb was normal. That’s what I had grown up with **for** most of my life. Yes, I had actually lived in the city of Chicago for a few years as a little kid, but even then I lived in mostly White neighborhoods, and the only real contact I had with someone who wasn’t White was my babysitter, a Mexican woman named Lulu. I also had coaches and teachers throughout school who were Black, Brown, or Asian, but most of the conversations I

had with these people never extended beyond what I was doing with them, be it school, sports, or other after school programs, and the conversations certainly never turned to the topics of race or racism. ~~So, at~~ And so by, the beginning of high school, race was more of an abstract idea for me than something that was real and felt. It was something that was removed from me. It only meant something in my life when it had something to do with lessons in school or current events on the news. I remember being taught about Reconstruction, Jim Crow, and the Civil Rights Movement, as well as about people like Dr. King, Rosa Parks, and John Lewis throughout my schooling, and I remember looking up to these people as role models for what kind of person I should be. Again, though, the conversations about race and racism that arose from those lessons were always removed from me and my whiteness. I was essentially taught that race and racism were things I didn't have to worry about or consider. They didn't pertain to me. They weren't my problem. As a result, I was also being taught not to ask any deeper questions.

This lesson - or this teaching - continued further into my life. I began to pay more attention to the news in high school, and I remember hearing about Eric Garner, Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown, Sandra Bland, Tamir Rice, and many other ~~black men and boys~~ Black people who were killed by police, and the protests that then arose from those deaths. Looking back on it now, I find it disturbing and troubling that the conversations about race and racism I was having at that time were almost always in response to these very violent events that seemed to be happening outside of me and outside of my community. The only way we could talk about race - or the only time that we took to talk about race - was when the subject was put into our faces and we had to talk about it. Other than that, we could continue to hide because that was the world we were inhabiting. ~~Yet~~ And, at the time, at least for myself, those events were just that: events.

They were things that I only heard about through the news, and yes, they upset me, ~~but they upset me in the same way that they may have upset the news anchor who was reporting them~~ **but they only upset me to a certain degree**. I may have cared about the ~~political~~ issue **in the abstract**, but I had no personal attachment to the issue. I did not know the people killed, I did not know their families, and I am not Black so I could not relate to ~~that~~ **the** experience of being Black in America. In fact, **at that time, nearly all of my friends were White**. I barely knew any Black people to truly call them my friends. I was a rich White kid living in a sheltered community far away from the very real ~~dangers~~ **concerns** of the ~~real~~ **rest of the** world. The only genuine cares I had were my classes, my friends, and if my crush liked me back.

She didn't.

As I got **a little** older, however, spent more time **back in the city Chicago**, made more friends ~~in Chicago~~ who didn't look or talk like me, paid more attention to issues **of pertaining to** race, had uncomfortable conversations regarding the subject **with my classmates and friends**, and learned more about ~~the real world and~~ the very racist history of my little **White** suburb, **and how that history connects with the history of the rest of the country**, I became increasingly disillusioned with my "home". I ~~grew to hate that place~~. **I began to become angry at the place**.

Walking around town I viewed the sidewalks, buildings, trees, and **even the** people with a new kind of contempt and anger I ~~had never~~ **hadn't** felt before. I was frustrated. I was disgusted by the affluence, the indulgence, the ignorance, and ~~the~~ **what seemed to me as a** mindless carelessness that consumed so many of my classmates ~~and~~ their parents, siblings, and friends. They hadn't learned what I had and they didn't seem to care. They were only concerned with college, their drugs, parties, sex, and maybe ~~they cared~~ **a little bit** about the world outside.

~~As for myself,~~ I think I was so angry because I was beginning to realize how much I was lied to - how much of the truth about my community and my country had been kept from me. I began to realize just how purposefully isolated my suburb was, and how it was tied to the racist institutions and systems of the United States that were designed to keep myself and other White people on one side of the line, and almost anybody who isn't white on the other side.

Many of America's suburbs were created with the help of what are called "restrictive covenants". These were essentially agreements among White homeowners in already existing neighborhoods to not sell property to people of color, mostly Black and Brown people. These covenants were one of the tools used to create the suburbs I lived in, and some of them continued to use such covenants until just a few years ago in the early 2000s. This is the world I am coming from.

And I began to feel the urge to leave it - to break out. ~~I couldn't wait to leave my high school~~ To get away from my high school. To get away from my suburb. To leave what I had known to be my home for most of my life. ~~I couldn't wait to~~ To go to college, and leave my White-ass suburb, and take my own White ass to somewhere less White so I could distance myself from ~~the~~ that privileged white world I was...and ~~am,~~ forever am a part of.

Something happened at my high school graduation. Our guest speaker, a grad of my school, said that the name of our school, New Trier, would never leave us. That no matter where we went, New Trier would always be a part of us.

Not on my watch.

I wanted so desperately to get away from that world, and, for the moment, college seemed like that kind of escape. Little did I realize I was about to leave one very privileged environment

for another. ~~enter the almost exact same kind of environment, except this time, the affluent and indulgent White people tried to make themselves look and feel different by claiming they were liberal and progressive, dressing up like they had no money, and framing themselves as victims of something. Needless to say I was pissed off that I had come back to the same old shit.~~ The clothing at Bard may have been different, the names may have been different, and the places my fellow students came from may have been different, but much of the mentality was the same. Among many of the students, mostly other White students, I found the same disregard for the things they did not understand, the same lack of respect for the people and spaces around them, the same sense of childish entitlement, and now coupled with the apparent inability to say “excuse me”. There was not only a lack of spirit, here, but an excess of cynicism. So many of the people here seemed to have little respect for themselves, and much less for others, creating this sad, anxious, and even depressing environment where judgment was common, and genuine kindness was scarce.

Beneath all of this was the school itself. Bard is a place that is wonderful for focusing solely on your mind and expanding your intellect. But when it comes to your soul or your spirit, I learned that Bard is not the place to be. In this drive to create “a place to think”, it seems that the rest of our humanity, especially our emotions, got left behind. People here are already so in their heads, and the school keeps them in their heads with their work, their studying - with all of it - creating this weird, nervous environment of bottled up energy with nowhere to go that leaves so many people here in a depressive funk. I found myself in this funk many times when I first came to Bard, and many times since, feeling like there was no one I could turn to, and no way to make my feelings known. I again felt stuck. Trapped. ~~and in some ways this shit was worse! At least~~

~~my classmates from back home had some spirit and energy! We had football games, basketball games, homecoming, the Winter Fest, and everybody went to them. Here, I found so little spirit, energy, or love for anything that didn't involved getting drunk, high, or hiding from life. They had so little respect for themselves, and much less respect for others.~~

Despite **all of this**, however, **there were still rays of sunshine. For one**, Bard was, **and still is**, ~~still~~ a much more diverse, **in most every sense of the word**, ~~place~~ than where I had come from, and I was **able to** ~~exposed~~ **learn about and immerse myself in** ~~to~~ new things I had never **known about before**. ~~heard of before~~. I had never heard of a BSO ~~before~~, I ~~had never known~~ **knew** about organizations like BEOP or POSSE, **I had never been in predominantly Black and Brown spaces**, **and** I had never “danced” salsa before, and I put that in quotes because...you know. ~~And I for~~ **sure** had never been in a place where I could regularly be the only white person in the room, ~~should I search out those places on campus~~. Within my first few ~~months~~ **year** at Bard I learned an incredible amount about ~~cultures and people~~, **cultures, and experiences** I never had the opportunity to learn about in the direct way that I **now** could ~~at Bard~~. I ~~had~~ **was having** conversations and experiences I never could have had back home, and I was loving it.

One of the most important things I realized, though, ~~The most important thing I learned, though, without a doubt, is~~ **was** that even though I thought I knew a lot about race, **the more I learned, the more it became clear to me how little I actually knew, especially when it came to the subject of race**. ~~I actually knew very little~~. Back ~~home~~ **in Glencoe** I considered myself super knowledgeable about ~~race~~ **the subject** because, ~~compared to the majority of people around me, I~~ **was** I paid attention to the news and took part in several school-groups that talked about it. I thought that, compared to many of the people around me, I was “super knowledgeable” about

race. But ~~I~~ what I had learned about race in high school still came mostly from books, documentaries, or conversations with other White people. I hadn't actually learned about race or racism from the people who actually have to put up with it. My knowledge of the subject was removed from any kind of lived experience. ~~had barely learned about issues of racism, isolation, or fear from the people who were actually experiencing those things. I mostly talked about these issues with other "knowledgeable" white people who also cared about these issues, and we claimed to be educated in them because we paid attention to the news and spoke to a couple people of color about them.~~

And so, upon coming to Bard, ~~Upon coming to Bard, however, to call~~ have called me ignorant would ~~have been~~ be an understatement. I said and did many things that were either misguided, naïve, or even hurtful. And other times, I was just being rather stupid. ~~I still knew more than a lot of my white classmates, but attending events like the Women of Color Gala, the PossePlus Retreat, LASO Dinners, or even just sitting and talking with my new friends made me realize how little I knew.~~ One of my first blunders here was at a screening of the movie *Get Out* where, in a discussion that was being held after the movie, I quoted Martin Luther King...to a group of Black people.

Don't do that.

~~At times things were uncomfortable, and the thing that made me feel the most uncomfortable was often my own insecurity at putting myself into those spaces where someone like myself wasn't normally present. I knew from the start that it was going to seem strange to a lot of people that I was stepping into spaces where a white person was a rather unexpected sight.~~ But, despite these and other fuck-ups, I continued to spend a lot of my time in Black and Brown

spaces, whether it be by attending events like the Black Body Experience, or by simply hanging out with my new friends. ~~But~~ And there were times where I felt uncomfortable, and even self-conscious. Overtime, I learned that this uncomfortability came from my own insecurities about my own racial identity - insecurities that made me feel like I was intruding in some sort of way; ~~and this~~ At the time, though, this feeling was very prevalent, and only became more so prevalent as I learned more about how ~~my~~ isolated and angry my new friends felt at Bard. ~~of~~ color felt about the White world around them. The more I learned about how isolated and angry my friends were, I couldn't help but feel strange because I was this White man stepping into these very Black and Brown spaces, and the more I heard my friends - especially my Black friends - talk about how the White power structure around them frustrated, targeted, hurt, and even tried to kill them, I began to think about myself and my own place within this power structure. This is what I mean when I say my uncomfortability came from my own insecurities. My new friends, both intentionally and unintentionally, were challenging me to look at and think about myself in a way that I never had before. To look at race no longer as an abstract or outside idea, but as something that directly affects not only the lives of the people around me, but my own life. To think about what race means in my life, to look at myself as a White man, and to figure out what that means. They were, in a way, trying to help me grow, while reminding me that the work to make that happen would be on me to do. ~~Here I was, this white guy who is basically representative of everything a "colonizer" would be: white, straight, and christian, yet here I am spending time in very Black and Brown spaces.~~

This is what I know, now, though. Back in my Freshman year at Bard, and even into my Sophomore year, what I knew was that I felt like I was intruding, but didn't have a very good

idea as to why. And so, I continued to spend time in Black and Brown spaces, I did my best to be respectful of those spaces I was stepping into, and while I never felt unwelcome, I did learn that there were times I should step out of those spaces - and sometimes I learned this in some very humbling ways. And at times I learned it was best for me to step out of those spaces, sometimes the hard way.

When I attended the PossePlus Retreat in 2018, I remember being in ~~one of the~~ a small ~~groups~~ break-out group, talking about biracial identity. I myself am not biracial, but I was curious and wanted to hear about other's experiences. When the larger group came back together we were asked about what we had learned. I stood up and volunteered, saying that "while I am not biracial, I learned that people who are biracial sometimes view their identity as a switch between one race or the other". After I finished speaking, someone who was biracial and therefore had more authority to speak on the matter, got up and clarified my statement, correcting it to what he had actually said before. It was a small moment but it made me realize that maybe it was best for me to keep my mouth shut for a little while, and instead of talking about things I ~~did not know about~~ didn't have any real experience or knowledge on, and therefore no real authority to speak on, I should listen.

My feelings of insecurity and self-consciousness continued, however, and it got to the point where I was beginning to worry about how my new friends may or may not have seen me. I became so worried about being intrusive that I began to fear that I was making my friends uncomfortable with my being in their spaces. This worried me because, to me, a friend is supposed to be a person who makes you feel comfortable and safe enough to be yourself.

What I again realize, though, looking back on this experience now, is that all this fear, all this worry, all this insecurity, was stemming from the fact that I had not yet fully come to terms with my own racial identity - with my own Whiteness. I was taking in and processing so much information about race, Whiteness, myself, and how all those things come together - and it was strange. In a way, I was going through a grieving process. All these things I thought I knew, and things I fully didn't know, I was either learning or having to completely reconsider and rework within my own mind. I was feeling, in essence, an incredible amount of guilt. The more and more I learned about who I was in regards to my racial identity, and where that identity was coming from, the more guilty I felt about it. I had not yet reached that point of acceptance where I would be able to look at all the facts that were being presented to me, and simply take them for what they were. To simply accept that this is who I am, and this is where I have come from.

I was stuck in, and in some ways, still am, this space of "What can I do?" - this feeling that if I do something, I will feel better. There's a problem to this, however, that needs to be pointed out. I said, make *me* feel better...and not others - which should be the goal of taking action - of "doing something". This is something that White people - that many of us tend to do. To act, in whatever form that action takes, not from a place of genuine Love or care, but from a place where we get to absolve ourselves of our guilt. And, in some ways, whatever. At least we're doing something. But, what I have learned is that, for action to be truly effective, it needs to be genuine. And you can't get to that point if you're still obsessing over yourself. So, when it comes to myself and other White people, one of the best things we can do, is to take the time to step back, and deal with ourselves first and foremost; and this is because we, White people, as a collective, have created a world where we don't have to deal with ourselves. Where we can

simply go about our lives without worrying about the things we have created, and how those things are affecting both our own lives, and the lives of those around us. And it is this world that we must push ourselves to come to terms with, as well as with how we created it, why we created it, and how it, in turn, has created us. Otherwise, the things we claim to be against, will persist. One cannot move forward without first understanding where they are; and one cannot understand that, without first understanding where they have come from. Without first coming to terms with themselves, and their own past.

This is what was being asked of me at this time at Bard. This is what I was being challenged to do. I was being pushed to come to terms with things I had never been pushed to come to terms with before - thus creating these emotional reactions.

~~I felt more self-conscious about my whiteness because I knew that I was at least partly representative of the White world that caused my friends so much pain and frustration. I was afraid that I made them uncomfortable with my being there, and I remember talking to one of my friends at the Black Body Experience, telling her one of my biggest fears is that my friends of color feel they need to change themselves or their behavior around me. This worried me because I didn't want my friends to feel uncomfortable around me because that's the exact opposite of what a friend is supposed to be. A friend is supposed to make you feel comfortable and safe to be yourself. I remember saying that I'd prefer it if my friends of color told me to leave than change themselves because I'd rather have them feel comfortable and safe than the opposite.~~

Despite these feelings **reactions**, however, I continued to spend time with my **Black and Brown** friends ~~of color~~, hanging out with them almost exclusively and spending less and less time with my White friends. There was love, companionship, care, and a desire to listen **that** I

hadn't felt before with my white friends, ~~and~~ **And** despite my uncomfortable feelings, I still felt welcome, ~~and I felt more comfortable being with them than in the uber-liberal, spoiled, and white environment that was the majority of Bard.~~ In time, the feelings of intrusion began to fade and ~~turned~~ **turn** simply into **an awareness of my Whiteness - or, at least, the beginnings of an awareness - as well as an awareness of myself overall.** ~~a consciousness that I was different, and that this difference is not a bad thing.~~ **Are there times where I feel out of place? Yes. There were - and still are - times where my insecurities rise to the surface and I have to work through them again. This is part of the deal, however, and is to be expected. I am trying to work through bad programming, through my own internalized racism - something that we all have, to varying degrees, as one can't live in this society and fully escape from it. Since I was a child, I was taught, through many different avenues, how to interpret the world in racist and problematic ways, and those teachings don't want to leave without making some noise first.** ~~But those times are nowhere near as often as when I feel my stress melt away when I'm with my friends. My day gets instantly better when I see a table full of beautiful, friendly faces, bright smiles, and warm eyes. I feel more happy and at home with my friends than I do anywhere else at Bard.~~

~~This is not to say I have this all figured out. I am still trying to understand myself and where I stand in the world regarding my own race, my views on race, and the fact that I am a white person who elects to spend most of his time with people of color.~~ **And these** These are not things that are **fully** figured out within a year or two, **or a few years at college**, but instead, it's a journey. It's something ~~that take many years to figure out, along with~~ **that, I am beginning to realize, takes a literal lifetime of continuous** ~~a lot of~~ soul searching, tough talks, and humility: **in order to work against the racist ideas, fears, and insecurities our society feeds us. And it is work.**

It requires a greater awareness of one's actions, the ability to honestly examine oneself, and the desire to move towards a higher place of consciousness. This, I believe, is what is asked of us, and what we must rise to meet. Our responsibilities, first and foremost, are to ourselves - to the improvement - to the REAL improvement of ourselves. The improvement that, as I said, leads to a higher place of consciousness, a greater capacity to Love, and a greater understanding of one's own humanity, which then leads to a greater understanding of humanity in its entirety. Only then, I believe, can we begin to heal ourselves, each other, and the world upon which we live.

I hope that by telling you ~~a~~ **this** piece of my story ~~I have been able to~~ ~~has helped me to~~ ~~pass on~~ **communicate** some of my experiences, and what I have learned over these last few years. Now it is up to you, the audience, to make **of it what you will.** ~~what you will of it.~~ My hope, though, is that from this story you better understand how important it is to listen. **To truly listen.** **To not only hear what others are saying, but to take it in, work to understand it, and allow it to reveal something about ourselves.** ~~That is another great lesson I have learned while attending Bard.~~ Listening to others, **engaging with their stories, and reflecting on how and why those stories affected us,** is one of the best ways, **I believe, that** we have, as people, of showing how much we value ~~others~~ **each other,** ~~and~~ **And** we must value each other because each of us has something to say; a story to tell that ~~our~~ **both audience and storyteller have the opportunity to learn from, should they make sure to listen, and ask the right questions.** ~~could learn from if they made sure to listen.~~

———Before I end, though, I want to return to this idea of self-responsibility: I believe that one of our responsibilities as human beings - as people - is to figure our shit out not just for ourselves but for the people in our lives. This responsibility is true on every level, and, now speaking

specifically to my White audience, this responsibility is especially true for us. We have created a world that dehumanizes others, and, in the process, we have dehumanized ourselves. And so, to me at least, our task is very clear. Yes, we have to address the problems within our society - but a society is created and made up of people. So, in order to remedy our society, we must first remedy ourselves. We must do the work to understand what has been done, why it has been done, and how it has not just affected us, but created us. Once we can understand, once we can begin to see what is, and has been, in front of us, we can then begin to sort it out. There will be many fuck-ups, missteps, misunderstandings, and hurt feelings. I certainly have had my share of all of these, as I hope I have made apparent. ~~I am not saying I am a model for how white people should be. I have fucked up many times and will continue to do so, but I do want others to know how important listening is and how much it is needed in today's social and political climate.~~ But, I also hope that I have made apparent how needed and overdue this work is. I wish to ~~I~~ see, sooner rather than later, more people step out of their comfort zones to take the time to listen to, learn about, and understand, not just those who are different from them, but, first and foremost, their own selves., ~~spend time with people who are different from them, and take the time to listen and understand~~ Nothing short of our shared humanity - and our shared survival - rests on this ability to communicate, listen, understand, and, if not Love, at least respect and let live. It takes serious work, and sometimes that work backfires and we get a healthy lesson in humility. But it has to be done. In this day and age, we can't afford anything less.

Thank you. ~~But the rewards are priceless. No one can buy friendship or trust, it must be earned and once earned, it must be enjoyed, for there are few things, if anything, that are greater than a good friend, and that is all I hope I have been to mine.~~