

Miseducated

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Project summary:

While writing this project, I pondered about my experiences with the prevalence of gun violence and masculinity in the community I was raised in. I grew up in Oxnard, CA in the Rose Park neighborhood. I wanted to reflect upon the misconceptions that I see in my low-income community and how it may lead to violence. I also chose to reflect on my own misconceptions about love and what it means to love someone. The title of my project, *Miseducated*, is derived from Ms. Lauryn Hill's project *The Miseducation of Lauryn Hill*, which revolves around the theme of love. As a teenager, I began to develop my own taste in music, I started with 90s and early 2000s gangster rap, though I was very picky about sieving through the content and saving less overly masculine songs. A beloved friend had a deeper love for hip hop and knew more contemporary artists than I, so he introduced me to their music, and I thank him for that. He showed me J. Cole and Kendrick Lamar, two artists with more depth in their lyrics and more conscious minds. This love of lyricism evolved into a love for more traditional poetry in my English classes. Sometime later, I found projects by Lupe Fiasco and my astonishment with his work took me into a new world of cryptic messages that required research to fully understand the allusions and references being made. The influence of these artists is reflected in some of my work. Intellectuality is a quality that I have always admired, perhaps because my mother always told me to pursue academics, as it would give me opportunities she couldn't imagine. These writings are works of realistic fiction, structured as prose and poetry.

A Question for My Future Self

Do you feel any more complete? Comfortable with yourself? Have you been reading more books like we always said we would? How is your career going? How are YOU doing? Do you still struggle with your love? I surely hope not, as we were very set on never breaking her heart again. If you've stayed true to that, have you married her yet? Did you propose under the light of an aurora in Iceland? Have you ensured that you bring her happiness? Do you still get sleep paralysis every now and then, and awake in horror at 4 in the morning from fear of what you did? How about nutrition and gym time? Built yet? Making sure to keep up with family and friends? To visit everyone every now and then? Even if our life didn't exactly follow our first plan, I'm certain we are not far from it. And if we have picked up something else, I know we're content. I hope you continue to do you, to the full extent you do.

I Am From

Cold Saturday mornings in the living room covered in heavy blankets
Watching cartoons and playing videogames with my brothers
From peeling myself out of bed for the 6 AM Sunday morning mass
Then peeling tomatillos for the chile verde to dress my breakfast
From a three-bedroom apartment in one of Oxnard's low-income housing areas
Inhabited by a Mexican woman, her four sons, and her mother
From not wandering off when playing outside
And constantly looking over my shoulder at night
From school at sunrise to homework on the dinner table at dusk
From tagging along on my tías' short trips on the weekends
Whether visiting Ventura's Pacific View mall or the Camarillo Outlets
From frequent visits to and from my favorite cousins, on my mother's side
To seeing my father and his side of the family every now and then.

I am from the smell of rice and beans, thinly coated with lime, it's how I remember
The thinly sliced red tomatoes my grandma would coat with salt and lime
From the euphoric smell of chicken tamales steaming on the 24th of December
In that big old olla I was always tasked with retrieving from the pantry top
From the smell of morning dew on the grass and cold air against my face
As I'd make my way from home to school
From the addicting smell of vanilla extract used in my mom's French toast.
From the sound of torn shoes squeaking on the concrete basketball court next to my apartment
The bounds to which I was confined to, with my brothers and cousins
Where we would play basketball, kick a soccer ball back and forth
Or anything else as we waited for our youth to pass
To the house of my dad's sister, whose distinct smell I could never find the source of
From the god-awful smell of menudo on Sunday mornings, lucky for me, was only when we'd visit.

From a small child with no idea of the experiences awaiting him,
No idea what a protein or biochemistry was, let alone a bachelor's degree
Though I always experienced an admiration for fictional scientists on my TV
I just wanted to play with all the toys my mom had worked hard to get
Diecast 1:64 scale cars, Ninjago LEGOs, Transformers, Ben 10, and Spider-Man figures
A navy blue Nintendo DS Lite that was replaced by a PS3, and it by a PS4, reconfigured
I just wanted to play games with my younger brothers, I didn't realize how good it all was
I would do anything to turn back time and live it all again as an aged benevolent specter.

How We Met

The first time I saw you might've been on TV
Maybe you were co-starring in a movie
Maybe you were the lead story on the evening news
Maybe how you gave everyone at EO Green the blues
I've grown up hearing lots of talk about you
From the word of my mother's warnings to
Commotion on Twitter after another mass shooting too
I remember talk about your glorification and admiration
From the mouths of my peers and the songs I'd listen to
Those young minds that suffered from your perversion
And more so those that you did and will decommission

I'd heard so much talk about you
I knew you were in my vicinity with the intent to stay
It was only a matter of time before I'd meet you
But you caught me at the worst time, completely off-guard
I remember, left field, you came up to me from my right side
My green button-up mustered [?] up your friend's confidence
I'd finally got your attention, but I was mid-conversation
A rude interruption but not one to be unacknowledged
Abiding, and honestly pure luck, you were on your way out
I never got to see your concealed self
but I knew your friend held you in-hand.

I Could've Been

A peculiar, old white Honda rolled by my alley one night
It's engine was rumbling for breath and the brakes squealed, not right
Had the paint chipping off, only had to be good enough to take-off
It stopped itself in its track and rolled right back
It was 11 PM, that was at my 12, on my 4 came another man
He revealed himself to me, emerging from the shadows
Covered from head to toe, only kept his eyes and left hand exposed
I shouldn't have been out so late, it is my own fault, I suppose
His face was concealed by a black bandana
It had the same pattern worn by grandmama when she worked strawberry fields
The firearm he wields, concealed in the pocket of his oversized black hoodie
A knit black glove on his right hand to hold his tool
In case he had to take some fool to school
A diamond-encrusted crucifix Christ hung from his neck
I think the ears his prayers fell on went deaf
Turned him to an agent of Death,
Like the IRS was collecting last breaths

I wholeheartedly believe it were best I died right there
He shouldn't have had the decency to ask if I was affiliated
He could've assumed I was initiated into that gang he had awaited
Finally, this moment, since I was a young teen, that I dreadfully anticipated
He should've fired as soon as I turned my head to him, filled me with phlegm
That first shot shouldn't have grazed me, should've pierced a hole right through my left lung
He should've dropped me to my knees and put another in my head for good measure
Don't call the paramedics to push me through those ER doors, just cremate me right there
He hopped in his homie's 90's white accord and fled as I soaked in blood I shed
Laid out on an enclosed black asphalt parking lot, I think I left a spot, and my blood is still hot
And all this red blood I had poured and lost, at least the body bag keeps it contained
Don't give my mother a scare, will he, won't he, I died right there from gang disdain
She's crying out for a miracle, but knows that life isn't fair
And there's no life in me anymore, my lungs' incapable of catching air
And mother, he stopped me in my tracks as a sinner
How ironic that my cleanser was also my killer
A reaper of life, no, a ripper of lungs and a giver of wings
Simply the puller of a trigger to send me where the angels sing, I hope
Then, certainly, I would have never seen the day I lost my love
Or asked the sun to never rear its head again if it's without her.

But I died right there, and so did all my sins that followed
A good thing that my ventricles and veins were hollowed
That my oxygen blood supply cut and ischemia wallowed

That my heart finally lost its rhythm long after my soul had failed
Long after that insufficiently enticing ship for redemption had sailed
And my guide came for me on a horse that was a ghostly pale

Or maybe I could've lived long enough to push through the gates that hold all maladies
I could've been personally penalized to death by the emperor without any formalities
The failure of my one kidney or lung disease to ensure it was a guaranteed fatality
My absent medical care would have never provided me treatment from Dr. Siddartha Mukherjee
Sentenced me to an Abu Ghraib of failed cancer therapies to top off my endless list of tragedies

I will never marry Alexa, or be the father to our first daughter
Never drop her off at college, and say later tonight I'd call her
Never tell her the world is just a smidge harder, just a bit smaller
But from her mother and father, she is much smarter, ten times stronger
But in this world she will never exist, cease and desist, because I'm a liar
Though I was humbled by my falter, and there's things I would alter
I could've been killed in January of 2022, now I appreciate it did not transpire.

Title Track Equivalent

They say he's old as Cain and Abel
Ancient as word-of-mouth fables
I hear he has wiretaps for ears,
Dice for eyes, pierce through his peers
Or so it appears that he has none, in his own lane
Crack pipes for lungs and he'll make you go insane
Make you blow out his, hers, and their brain
Smoke flows from his mouth, right down the jaw
Hands in everything and puppets like Jigsaw
I hear he speaks every single language on the planet
Hollow tips for teeth, politicians for mouth pieces, beat it
Don't come here for change unless you're buying a dime
The System for a heart, hi-hats and bass for beats
When he bleeds it's 45-percent by volume
He's got 'em running lines in the bathroom
Shooting up all the kids in their classrooms

Whole crew composed of gats and knives for combat
Sharpest tools in the shed and more where he got that
Carry a Kevlar vest to protect the chest, but you can't block that
And his disciples don't pick campuses, only choose their tools
He taught them school was for fools and now they're his to use
Pulled them from every alleyway and crack house known to abuse

He's got some over at Raytheon making bombs and missiles
In the Senate pushing billions for national defense from Islamic innocents
The way he turns heads, you'd think he were a Dodge Charger
Flows crack through streets like blood through veins
He said "knowledge is not power, college is for cowards"
Sent them over sea, collecting captives, hollering for power

All these things he told me would make me cool
All those things she said would make me smooth
Oh, come and check out these white shoes
Better run them before he decides to shoot
He packs heat, step wrong and he might let loose
He has what some folk would regard as the juice
He might let you hold some too if you join his crew, a rat pack
I wish I could've made it out with the creatives like Anderson Paak
But instead I'm stuck with motherfuckers who misunderstood Tupac

Got him outside the downtown collective of auto shops
Rolled up like bastard Decepticons on one lone Autobot
They let those things sing like blam, blah, pow, bang, and shot
His mother said she knew in that moment, her heart had stopped
He flatlined and they followed with pop, pop, made sure he dropped

These were the things they were told could make them cool
Possessed as if baptized in the water out of Scarface's pool
I learned hereafter they were made fools from a more sinister tool
The industrial prison complex monetary machine, and they're the fuel
I wish that I could take them to school, show them learning is all cool
Change our situations with education, and not with Sunday church school.

From a Dream

I feel myself blurring, like vision does as you struggle to wake up. My hands and body started to fail; my actual presence wasn't clear. I'm flashing between various locations, within my Goleta apartment and elsewhere, in the homes of friends and my home in Oxnard. Back in my kitchen, my hands begin to fail. I drop a glass of cold water and it shatters across the off-white tile. I soon follow suit and meet the shard of glass down there. Now I'm suddenly in my bed again, I hear a snarling sound coming from the direction of the room's entrance, like a dog when it feels threatened by a well-meaning stranger, or a malevolent entity. The growling intensifies, steadily, angrily, as the entity approaches the feet of my bed, and steadily inches towards me, until it's towering over me from my left shoulder. I need my hands to come to my aid and protect me, but they won't budge. They're at my side, unresponsive, and I need them NOW. I default to desperately calling for help, but my throat won't listen either. My lips won't open, and I can't even muster a pathetic sound to fend off this thing that's in the room, out of my line of sight. A moment passes. Reclaiming a fragment of my conscience, I begin to question if I had died in my sleep and if having been caught in a dream at the time of my demise allowed me to remain in this illusory state for eternity. I say 'allowed' because I consider it better than ceasing to exist altogether, at least for the time being. Growing anxious as to what has happened to me, I decide I want to awaken. On the count of three, I take a deep breath and force my eyes open, ready to face whatever awaits in the physical world. All that was present in the room with me were the airborne dust particles, illuminated by the dim rays of light shining through the gaps between the window blinds. On the popcorn ceiling, in a large red font, read '4:39 PM', projected from the top of my roommate's alarm clock. I laid there, still, on my back, listening to the world. The heavy, rhythmic sound of raindrops breaking on the asphalt outside, the quiet stillness inside the apartment, and my cell phone blaring an alarm for a flash flood warning.

On the Notion of Love

When I was little, I thought love was infatuation, an expression of physical attraction. That may not be free of error from misremembering. I do recall my mother warning me about breaking hearts. She told me to love with authenticity and purpose, to never use another as a means. She may not have said it exactly like that, but it is what she meant. I thought deeply loving someone was reserved for romantic partners.

Through my teenage years, I experienced connections and feelings that I thought were love, but they weren't more than misguided crushes. Some were able to be salvaged, maintain friendship, but others were not, and there is nothing intrinsically wrong about that, sometimes people aren't meant to be friends. This notion of "meant to be" implies the belief in an idea that our lives are predetermined, but I don't necessarily agree with that. Further on, I reconnected with someone that expressed an interest in me, so I returned the feeling. I failed to realize I still kept an underlying interest in someone else, a close friend. Over the course of some months, these feelings resurfaced and were encouraged by the mutual feelings of my close friend. I was in a dilemma that put me into a position where I had to re-evaluate my morals and emotions. Was it wrong for me to leave my girl and pursue another? Was I incapable of commitment and would this be a recurring dilemma in my life? I put everything into question because I wanted to make the correct decision, as if a single correct solution could be formulated for my scenario. I had an idea of how I wanted to live my life and wanted to be with whoever shared the same desires. As I understand, this is the only life I have been guaranteed, and with the linear passage of time, that life is not meant to come around twice. This is what makes me partial to living a life with meaning, surrounded by those I love and cherish, learning about the world we live in, not only on a social level, but also with an understanding of the molecular systems that allow life to exist. This I mention because it is why I chose to focus my studies on biochemistry, and also why I chose to leave someone for another who I believed, and still believe, shares more personal values with me. Someone I have enjoyed spending my life with. Someone I want to continue to exist with.

She taught me that love is not a feeling, she said that love is a choice. This made me realize the distinction between love and infatuation. Love is not necessarily an uncontrollable feeling on its own, that now sounds more like a strong attraction to me. To love is to look over various errors. Love is the conscious and purposeful proclamation. I had a similar dilemma recur, and this the remorseful mistake I allude to in the project. It did not end result in switching into a new relationship, but the consequences were graver. I would awake in middle of nights, in cold sweats and gasping for air. I had experienced an increased frequency of sleep paralysis, induced by hazy nightmares, likely resulting from fear of what was going to come of the stressed relationship. To combat this, I thought about the love that she taught me, requiring purpose and conscious decisions, and with this, I reconstituted the confidence in the judgment I had lost. I worked to mend the wounds I created and now have hope for continuing to exist with her. I hope to express love intentionally now, knowing why I have such feeling. And, at least for now, for longer if it's not a misconception, that is what I think love is.