

[cue Obama speech]

[cue ambient noise of people in a house]

I lie awake staring at the smooth white ceiling that glows in the moonlight.

A familiar melody of the rustling blooming leaves from the trees of my backyard play as the cool summer breeze travels throughout the night.

“I can’t wait to finally go to college,” I think.

“Chapel Hill just feels like home.”

“The people here are like family.”

“You’re going to want to cherish every moment you have here.”

These are truths that I’ve been told.

I think about anything more I can pack before the 15 hour car ride from my suburban home in Long Island, New York, to the new home I will make in North Carolina.

As I do every night, [creaking sound], I get out of bed and pry open the only window of my room

[window opening sound], trying not to flake off any more of the shedding white paint.

The summer air smells fresh with dew.

I try to etch the scene into memory—the vibrant green grass I play fetch with my dog in everyday, the rough wooden deck and countless splinters my brother and I have pulled from our feet, and the beat up basketball hoop that somehow held up through years of after-school games with friends, all enclosed by the stereotypical American white picket fence.

Looking out from my bedroom [cue sound of leaves rustling], I cherish the perspective that this aged, wooden window has given me throughout my life.

[cue sound of car driving on road+70s music]

Now, I’m sprawled out on the backseat of my family’s minivan, surrounded by rumbling suitcases, dorm decorations, and school supplies.

My dad’s 70s rock music plays quietly mixed with the sound of my mom’s NPR podcast seeping from her earbuds. [cue these sounds at low volume]

I roll down the window half way and embrace the fresh Virginia air that flood the car.

The bright orange sun sets over the mountains, and I embrace the warmth as the humming of the car puts me to sleep.

Cut to another scene, another window, and another memory.

I lie awake in my dorm staring at the eroded brick ceiling that glows in the moonlight.

But, nearby, my window remains closed. I don't like opening it anymore.

I remember walking down Franklin Street, arms full of groceries as I head back to stock my dorm and prepare for the first week of classes.

A box of Cinnamon Toast Crunch falls from one of my bags and, as I reach to pick it up, a group of drunk college boys kicks it off the sidewalk and into the road.

One of them yells “Go back where you came from chink!” as they snicker and walk away.

Now, I can hear through these walls my suitemates mocking the culture of my people and burst into laughter.

“I can’t wait to finally go home,” I think.

My closed window muffles the sounds of excitement of other students outside—my new college family.

But, unfortunately, I now like it this way.

These are the truths I have discovered.

The racial divide and discrimination between individuals of North Carolina breeds a toxic culture.

Racial profiling, racial targeting, and racial slurs continue to polarize campus culture and degrade our coalition as a community.

I myself cannot simply open a window and remake a culture of discrimination—a problem that runs much deeper than any individual. But there are possibilities for change.

I remember witnessing the great fall of the Confederate statue, Silent Sam.

The commands of the policemen were inaudible over the chants of the protestors to topple the unyielding monument.

Sirens wailed down Franklin Street, and newscasters and cameramen desperately tried to capture the historic moment.

The sound of heavy metal crashing into the resisting dirt resonated throughout all of Chapel Hill.

[sound of metal]

This is one that I will never forget.

The voices of victorious students proclaiming they have made history echoed throughout the night

[chatter of student talking and laughing], and for the first time since coming to Chapel Hill I felt that I was experiencing a new memory—one that is linked to making meaningful change and exhibits the beauty that our culture and people potentially hold.

[cue sound of breeze and leaves rustling]

I slept with my window wide open that night.