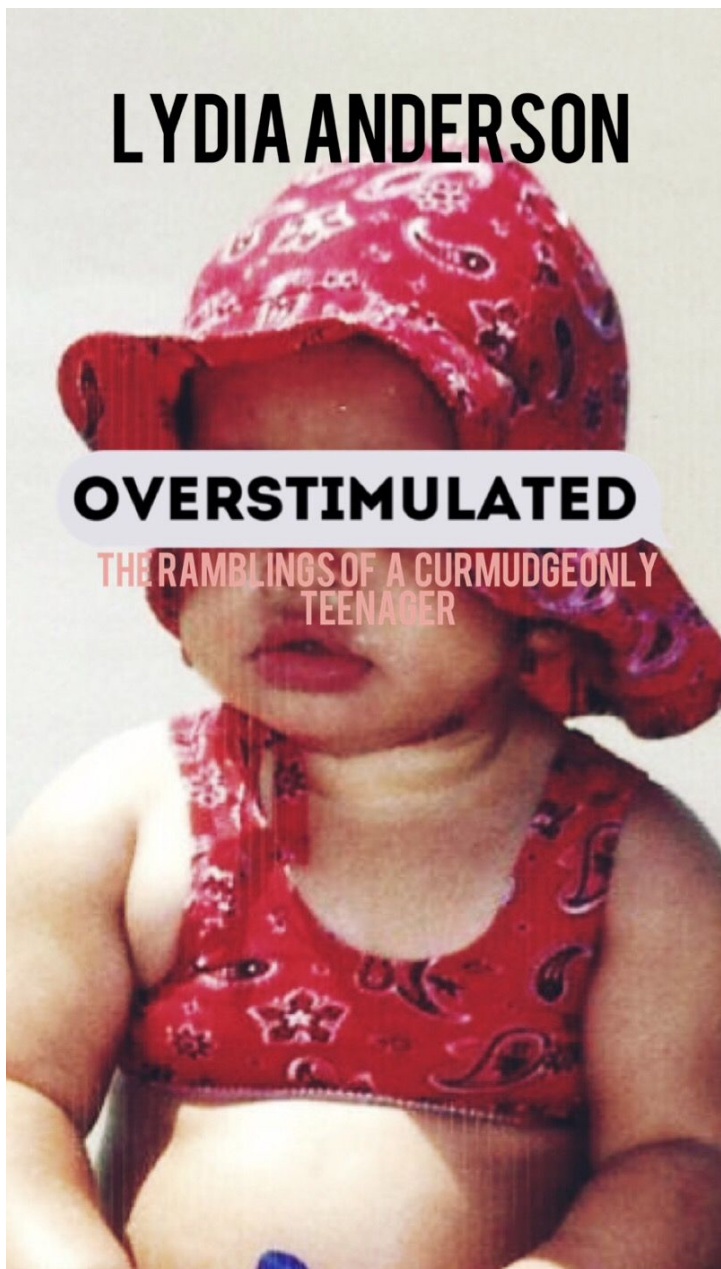


**LYDIA ANDERSON**

**OVERSTIMULATED**

THE RAMBLINGS OF A CURMUDGEONLY  
TEENAGER



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*This book is dedicated to my family, I doubt that I'd be thriving like this  
without them.*

## Foreword

This book is a product that I generated for my senior capstone project. I wanted to write a body of work unlike any other I had attempted before. In my writing, I do not often talk about my innermost thoughts or feelings. When I am made to do so for school work, I often fake that I have feelings about something that I actually don't really care about. So for my capstone I wanted to write something from the heart. I wanted to be absolutely true to myself in my writing. I wanted to create something that was authentically me, something that felt real.

In this body of work, you will see a thorough break down of my feelings split into three different sections, Happy, Nervous, and Angry. The origins of how certain things came to evoke those emotions from me and why they do. Writing each of these essays was incredibly emotionally taxing. I am not accustomed to displaying my emotions for anyone to see. My purpose in writing this, beyond the obvious need to fulfill my capstone requirements, was to better understand myself. I wanted to break down my feelings and understand where they came from and how they've shaped my understanding of the things around. It is deeply personal, and as such, I hope in some small way, people will be able to relate to anything that I've written over the course of my final year of high school.

*“Happiness is not achieved by the conscious pursuit of happiness; it is generally the by-product of other activities.”*

— *Aldous Huxley*

*Happy*

## My Childhood Covered in Dog Hair

I can't clearly remember my life without a dog. Though I know for a few years, we didn't have one. In 2004, we had to euthanize our dog Benny. I cried as my father solemnly clipped his leash to his collar for the last time. I remember looking at the empty door frame of our house on 46th and Spruce, hoping somewhere inside that Benny would come back. Two years later, when I was six, my family piled in our 1994 Toyota Corolla and drove down to Maryland. Mom pulled into a gravel and dirt covered driveway that lead to a farm. The loud shrill clucking of Guinea Hens made me quickly clap my hands over my ears as I stepped out of the car. It was chilly that day and I only had a long sleeved red shirt and brown vest to warm me. My sister Ruby and I trailed behind our parents, who went to greet the woman who owned the farm. She wore a blue puffer vest, bootcut blue jeans, pale blue long sleeved shirt, and hiking boots.

Her name was Angel, she mostly took care of produce and on the side, bred dogs. Earlier that same year, a male and female sibling pair gave birth to a litter of twelve puppies. When the relationship between the parents of a litter is incestuous, the resulting puppies can't get their purebred papers. Since most breeders raise puppies with the specificity of having them officially purebred, this made the twelve puppies virtually worth nothing. She had managed to get ten of the puppies off the farm and to other owners, with two remaining on the farm. Angel guided us to the chain link fence where two spritely golden retriever puppies were jumping up and down. Angel unlatched the gate and we were immediately attacked with puppy love. Ruby sat in the grass and pet the auburn colored puppy while I focused on the blonde puppy. They were so happy and jumpy, especially when they were together. After we finished playing with them, Dad took us back to the car so Mom could discuss something with Angel.

Mom and Dad only wanted to get the one auburn colored puppy. They didn't want two dogs in one house with young children and they were very adamant about that. The original plan was to off load the blonde one on one of my Mom's coworkers. If the puppies couldn't stay together at least we knew the other dog's owner and they could maybe see each other. At the last minute he backed out and we didn't want to leave them to themselves. Mom caved and got both, we named the auburn one Clifford and the blonde one Albert.

Since then, they have been a source of constant joy for my family and I. Clifford and Albert have been with my family for 11 almost 12 years. They've been with us through two moves, three houses, four different schools and 48 birthdays. Every Christmas, Halloween, Easter, you name it. They are loyal to a fault and only seek to be taken care of. The family outings we took were almost always to a creek so Clifford and Albert could splash around in the water. They've made me laugh endlessly, even when I'm not supposed to. Clifford once drank the holy water at my grandmother's church at the Blessing of the Animals. I laughed until my sides began to hurt. Ever since that day in late 2006, I've greatly benefitted from the presence of my golden boys.

As a child, I didn't understand why I loved them so much. They quite literally did nothing but play, poop, eat, and sleep. As I've gotten older and had more of a role in their caregiving, I now know why. Dogs will love you solely because you're there for them. All you have to do is show up and care for them and boom, unconditional love. I did almost nothing for them when I was younger yet they still came barreling down the stairs whenever I got home from school, simply because I was there. They're always there, laying behind the Christmas tree in winter and on the AC vent in the summer. They make me happy because they've always loved and cared for me, in a way that I've always loved and cared for them.



## I Left My Heart in Reykjavik

During June of my junior year of high school my mother, my sister and I took a week long trip to Iceland. We explored the city of Reykjavik on a food tour and took a trip to the indoor flea market. We dined at restaurants by the docks and visited the Saga Museum. Although I loved every moment, my most cherished memory of our time in Iceland was our day trip to Videy Island. On the fourth day we bundled up and drove to downtown Reykjavik to catch the ferry. We almost missed the ferry on account of Mom's bad foot, but the ferry driver courteously agreed to wait for her. The motor of the boat hummed and we were off with Reykjavik turning into a shrunken spot behind us. Ocean water lightly sprayed me. Every breath felt fresher than the last.

After landing on the island, we decided to eat at the only restaurant in sight. Our window had an amazing view of a hill a few minutes walk away. From reading the various signs around the restaurant I knew that a sundial sat on the top. So I made a plan: as soon as we finished eating I'd set out to the top of that hill. The moment everyone finished I walked out ahead, my coat zipped up and my backpack strapped on tight. The wind whistled through the tall grass all around me. Standing in front of the hill somehow made it much larger than it was from the restaurant.

As I ascended, my feet began to feel weighted as each step became harder and harder. I persisted, grabbing at free dirt patches with my bare hands. I could feel my face turning red as I finally reached the top. The ground was more stable there, flattened by boots of climbers past. I stood tall next to the stone sundial, facing Reykjavik across the harbor. This point had a beautiful 360 open view of the entire island. I sat next to the sundial and pulled my knees to my chest, taking a deep breath. Suddenly everything I felt melded together, the tall grass, the cool rustling wind. I worked to reach this point and it was beautiful. In that moment my connection to Iceland was cemented, etched in the dirt.

My trip to Iceland gave me hope for what my life when I returned could be like. Wherever we ate, the majority of the food was locally grown, 100% of the energy used on the island is renewable. Icelandic people, at least everyone that we met, were unfailingly kind and welcoming. The sprawling natural beauty everywhere gave me an appreciation for nature that I've now grown committed to nurturing. I saw how effective environmental conservation can be in preserving these gorgeous natural wonders. Now with everything that I've learned, I have an interest in protecting these areas in my own country, making sure that our landscapes are protected. Had I not been willing to walk up that hill, I never would have the view of a better America across the water.

## Lin-Manuel Miranda

At a young age, I had an appreciation for musical theatre. I remember my grandmother coming over from her apartment, holding a faded blue canvas bag that contained old worn VHS tapes. She'd sit me in front of the TV and put in a tape while she made me a bowl of rice the size of my head. I'd sit there, glued to the TV set, watching *Seven Brides for Seven Brothers*, *Grease*, *The Wizard of Oz*. In all my time as a lover of musicals, I can't remember a time when I saw people of color represented equally or quite frankly at all in musicals. Any show that involved people like me were always the same few; *Ain't No Misbehavin'*, *The Lion King*, *The Color Purple*. I wanted narratives that were less along those veins. That was when I stumbled upon the original Broadway cast recording for *In the Heights*. Not only was the cast entirely made up of black and brown people, the music emulated the cultures of black and brown people.

I felt comforted and delighted by the fact that someone was making a musical that showcased a familiar narrative, of a narrative outside whiteness. At the center of this was a man called Lin-Manuel Miranda. Since I first heard *In the Heights* I have been following his career as a composer and songwriter. To my delight, the musical *Hamilton* came out in 2015. Although a narrative about the founding fathers, it was portrayed by an entirely minority cast through hip-hop. People were paying hundreds of dollars to get seats at the *back* of the theatre, just to get the experience. *Hamilton* opened a door for people of color that had long been shut, one that allowed people like me to prosper in a predominantly white represented field.

What makes me so delighted about Lin-Manuel Miranda is how his presence in the theatre world has changed the culture. Many, many narratives that cast and represented people of color of course existed before he even started his career. Though they mostly went unacknowledged, unlikely to be revived on Broadway ever. What I appreciate about him is his commendable talent at showing the theatre world that it needs to change, to adapt to survive. Young people aren't going to want to see outdated 50s musicals like *Guys and Dolls* or tired

favorites like *Phantom of the Opera*. We want to see ourselves in the performances. He showed the old hats of theatre that stories that are told through hip-hop, by people of color, can be just as popular, if not more popular, than other musicals.

Listening to *In the Heights* and *Hamilton*, I know that Lin-Manuel Miranda is somehow influencing something greater. A generation of kids that will feel secure in their place in musical theatre, that won't feel isolated and forced to play certain roles. For that I am eternally grateful and awestruck by his work and him as a person.

## Helping Others

I've found that more often than not, people's reasons for helping others often amount to self gratification. While there are people who do things purely for others, we as a species usually do things for our own personal benefit. I was no exception to this, until I began to Student Assistant Teach (SAT) at my school during my senior year of high school. SATing, or Student Assistant Teaching, is a course usually for seniors, who want to help out a certain teacher in their classes. Usually, you're grading smaller assignments, reading the warm-up problem or question, grading notebooks. In my SAT experience, I am occasionally called upon to help the freshman in Mr. Kay's English class with their writing.

Until I began to SAT, I didn't understand why any sound human being would want to teach, or even *willingly* teach high school. I know how obnoxious I and other teenagers can be during the first half of high school, or even further into the second half. The generic teacher answer is usually "I like being apart of someone's learning experience, being the person to guide them through their education." Or something along those lines. When teachers would say that to me, it always sounded cheesy and overreaching, until I started to experience it myself. As I read the essays that my students sent to me, I was able to see how the advice I gave them influenced their writing and overall classroom experience.

The satisfaction I get from helping the kids in this class doesn't feel selfish, at least to me. I like being of use to others, being able to help people, being able to make things easier. I remember as a freshman in high school, my SATs were often the people who advocated the most for me in the classroom. So when I became a Senior myself, I knew that I wanted to do the same for freshman. Mostly, the joy that I get from helping others comes from the fact that I like to be of use to others. There are often situations where I don't know how or if I can contribute, which makes me feel useless. But when I can contribute, I usually do what I can to help.

*“In any weather, at any hour of the day or night, I have been anxious to improve the nick of time, and notch it on my stick too; to stand on the meeting of two eternities, the past and future, which is precisely the present moment; to toe that line.”*

—Henry David Thoreau

*Nervous*

## College

Let me start by saying, I should've listened. I should've listened to the people in my life who told me not to wait until the last minute, to send in an early action application, to do and have my essays done before winter break. I, being a procrastinator and occasional idiot, chose to ignore their warnings. During winter break, I had started to do the supplements for the colleges I was applying to. For those who don't know, Supplements are additional responses or writings that a college or colleges might ask you to do. They unilaterally suck and of course I'd been dragging my feet with them since the day I found out I had to do them. It was a few days before I had all four wisdom teeth taken out. At that time I had only a paragraph or two to finish in my supplement for Howard University.

I'd been staring at the computer screen for a few minutes, watching the cursor dot in and out. I stayed like that, in a trance, for at least half an hour. It wasn't that I didn't know what to write or how to write it. My problem, as I now understand, was the fear or rejection. As it is so common for millions of high school students across the country, I knew I'd be rejected from some or most of the schools I applied to. Rejection has been the kindling that has assisted the fire that is and always has been my anxiety, the flames licking at my ankles always trying to grow ever higher until they reach my train of thought. College, or the college process rather, has been my worst experience with my anxiety that I can remember.

My fear of rejection played into my anxiety and an endless stream of questions popped into my head. What if I didn't get in anywhere? What if I don't get any financial aid? What if I have to stay in Philly for college, will I ever be able to get out if I do stay for college? Even *thinking* of putting myself into a situation where rejection was inevitable was not something I wanted to have to deal with. So I was procrastinating, holding off the inevitable. Eventually, as is the case with all situations of uncertainty, I had to take the chance and do my supplements. With anything that is uncertain, the worst thing you can do is not try at all. My anxiety in most other situations was so crippling that I almost never tried to do anything. Making plans with people, auditioning for the lead instead of a supporting character,



applying to exchange programs, all things that I missed out on because I let my anxiety related to rejection build so high that I was afraid of taking the leap.

With college, I couldn't afford to chicken out. I was necessary for me to get over my anxiety and take those chances, my future quite literally depended on this. Though I may be still afraid of rejection, I've changed how I deal with it. Now, I do not cower in the face of it. I make plans with potential friends, audition for the parts I want, apply to things that I want to do. The college process, though truly awful, is not something that I regret having gone through. I came out of the fire burned but not broken.

## Unexpected Adulthood

At the beginning of my senior year, my Mom and I had a long conversation about College. For years, she's been taking care of me, doing little things that I didn't notice were important until she pointed them out. She poured my meds in my pill pack every week, made my bed when I didn't, buying all my

When I was a kid, I thought being an adult was easier than being a kid. You got to do things on your own, decide when you wanted to watch TV, you could eat candy for breakfast, and most importantly, no one can dictate what you can and cannot do. Adulthood is something I desperately wanted my entire childhood, the hope of one day becoming my own person. As my 18th birthday creeps closer, I want nothing more than to be a little kid again. High School has made me confront the problems in my ability to take care of myself. I am prone to spiraling into depression, to staying in my bed for days, to not eating even when I can feel my stomach grumbling for hours. Being an adult requires that you have some semblance of self care, some acknowledgement of the importance that routine holds in daily life.

What makes growing up so daunting, is the idea that you can't blame anyone else for your mistakes. As a child, you're able to offload the burden of error onto whoever is taking care of you. You're a child, how can *anyone* reasonably blame you for something you don't know how to handle? As you get older, there are no excuses for a lack of understanding or attentiveness in most situations. Taking care of yourself and your interactions are essential. I, admittedly, am terrible at taking care of myself, so growing up makes me nervous. Added the anxiety I have about my life; Will I have lifelong friends? Will anyone ever fall in love with me? Will I ever be able to take care of myself on a consistent basis? I've seen what failed adulthood looks like in others, how screwing up early on really has the power to mess you up. Figure things out fast before you make a mistake that changes everything. For me, that is what makes growing up very *very* frightening. I know that when I get older, that it won't be as difficult or foreign to me as it is now, that adulthood will happen to me gradually rather than all at once. For now, it is something that makes me fearful whenever I think about it.

## Roller Coasters

I remember my first roller coaster the same way most people remember seeing *The Shining* for the first time. In the summer of 2011, my dad took driving me, my older sister Ruby and her friend Cathy to Clementon Amusement Park and Splash World Waterpark. We walked in and immediately Ruby and Cathy gravitated toward the Hellcat, an all too fitting name as I would learn later on. The Hellcat was an old school roller coaster, made mostly of rotting wood and rusted out nails and bolts. The sign at the front of it was a decrepit aluminum sign with a faded illustration of a deranged tiger, under which the numerous warnings about riding this coaster were listed. I can only imagine in a momentary lapse of judgement, that I decided that today was the day for my first roller coaster, and it would be that one.

We all waited in line patiently in line until we reached the top of the stairs, where the worker strapped my Dad and I into our seats. I looked forward and saw the steep hill that is at the beginning of virtually every roller coaster. A knot began to form in my stomach, one that twisted my insides and filled me with an unmistakable white hot fear. At the same moment I realized that I'd rather be doing anything that go on that death trap of a roller coaster, a clashing emotion arose as well. Cathy and Ruby were sitting directly behind us, I couldn't chicken out in front of my big sister and her friend. No, that wasn't an option. I swallowed hard and squeezed my Dad's hand. The workers did one more seat belt check, before returning to the control board. The cars started to inch up the steep incline, I held tight to the metal safety bar, ignoring how warm it was under the late June sun. As we reached the top of the hill, my insides felt like they were going to cave in. The Hellcat dropped hard and fast, I felt every sharp twist and turn in my bones. I knew roller coasters were supposed to be fun, the delighted screams of Ruby, Cathy, and Dad told me so. When the ride finally stopped, I ran out. I wasn't crying, but I was shaking. I had whiplash for about a month afterward.

Ever since then, getting me to go to an Amusement Park is like pulling teeth. Against my better judgement I have gone on other roller coasters, never another wooden one though. Amusement Parks,

at least the kind adults and teenagers go to, are littered with roller coasters. Roller Coasters are designed to make you afraid, to get your adrenaline pumping.

Even if in the moment you feel awful, the after thought of most roller coaster rides, is that rush of adrenaline. Your heart is racing because you survived the death trap that people call fun. I've felt that adrenaline but never really felt it was worth absolutely annihilating my nerves. Roller Coasters terrify and thrill me at the same time, which is why my relationship towards them is so odd. I like them but the anxiety I feel while on them is not in any way worth that rush I get. They come with a guaranteed fear, like watching horror movies or going into a haunted house. I don't actively seek to be afraid for the sake of being entertained, making Roller Coasters the absolute worst type of recreation for me. I hope that in time, I will learn to like them. I want to someday go to an amusement park and actually enjoy myself. But for now, I'm alright waiting at the exit for my family to descend the stairs so that we can go on the ferris wheel.

## Recreational Writing

For my sixth birthday, I became a published author. Well, not published in the traditional sense of the word. My mom got this kit from AC Moore, from a self publishing place. You fill out the pages with a story you write, send it to their manufacturer and wait 6 to 8 weeks for them to bind the book. I created a book about my trip to Disneyland with my grandmother and sister. When it came back to us in the mail, we had two copies of a thin picture book bound in shiny red cardboard. It had my name and an author's page with my picture on it. That week I paraded it around the school yard, showing everyone the book I had written. I was so incredibly proud of it, this tiny book with my shotty first grade drawings with absolutely no plot. It's important because it was the first "book" I ever wrote and the only one I've ever finished.

I've finished assignments for school that entail a lot of writing, but I have never finished a personal writing project. For years I have been scribbling down various story ideas. Stories that tell the lives of many people across the world, stories of events that had the power to bring out the worst in people, stories that too often struck a chord within myself. My life is littered with half used notebooks, filled with sentences stopped just before they end, characters that found their death not in their story but in the absence of one.

For a short while in middle school, I wrote stories on a popular free story writing website. The site lets you write and publish by chapter. I didn't need to finish an entire book to share it with the world, only a chapter, which could be as long or as short as I wanted it to be. I was determined when I started writing on this website to finish at least one of the books I published on it. I did everything I could to prevent myself from losing momentum; I wrote chapters in bulk so it wouldn't feel like a chore to work on it, I set up times on the weekend where I would be writing exclusively, even went to the library to work on them. In the end, my efforts to keep up with my books were futile. I never finished any of the books I published on that website. One peak did come out of the several valleys of my live writing days. The few chapters of various books that I did publish, were somewhat popular. On one of my works, I had about 40,000 views. Somewhere on the

internet, my unfinished book lays dormant, having not been updated in over a year.

What I learned from these experiences with my writing is simple; my desire to write was sabotaged by my anxiety over how they'd be received. In the comment sections of my online books, people would write the kindest things. *Love this story, keep updating!, I can't wait till the next update, how long until the next update?* People liked my stories enough to want to read them to completion, which was what was causing my uneasiness. The nervousness that I attach to my writing is associated to my fear of letting people down. If I give them the ending I know they want, I don't stay true to what I believe is right. If I write what I want, there is a chance no one will be satisfied, thus ending my momentary popularity among these people. By doing neither, I remain in control and no one is unsatisfied. I get to keep my ending to myself, they get to wonder about how it *could've* ended. My desire to please my audience in this instance overwhelmed my nerves, leading to a different kind of response. Not fight or flight, but a kind of quiet resistance, something that resides between the two, unique in its response to adversity, or lack of one.

*“I am awfully greedy; I want everything from life. I want to be a woman and to be a man, to have many friends and to have loneliness, to work much and write good books, to travel and enjoy myself, to be selfish and to be unselfish... You see, it is difficult to get all which I want. And then when I do not succeed I get mad with anger.”*

— *Simone de Beauvoir*

*Angry*



## Comic Sans Business Cards

I didn't leave West Philadelphia on a regular basis until I started high school. My elementary and middle school were within a fifteen minute walk of my house, but my high school, Science Leadership Academy, was more than two miles from my house. This resulted in me having to take SEPTA five days a week during the school year. As anyone who takes public transit in any major city knows, the modes of public transit, whatever they may be, are covered in ads. SEPTA rents out the ad space to anyone who can pay for it.

Usually the ads are for TV Shows or Movies, plastered on the side of a trolley or bus. I remember one of the first times I went on a train, I saw the ads from local businesses. I became intrigued by a personal injury lawyer ad. Not because I or anyone I knew needed to sue someone or thing, but because of its format. It was an neon yellow square with bleak stripes of faded blue. A cartoon that looked like clip art pulled off a two second Google Search, with large imposing block letters. Of all the things in this not at all effective ad, what bothered me the most, was the lettering. To me, an effective ad for a service is not imposing, but firm. Bolded block lettering that takes up more than half of an already small ad space, is not only a poor decision but illogical. This was the first instance that I can clearly look to of my having a strong aversion to a font choice.

For most of my life, fonts did not matter to me. When I was younger, I couldn't have cared less about the differences between Sans Serif and Slab Serif, and for the most part I still don't. My issues with fonts aren't with certain types, but how people choose to use them. I get it, not every person who owns a small business can afford to bring in an artist to custom make a logo, but my god, if you're running a daycare for the love of all that is sacred there is no reason why your sign should be in Courier. There are just certain fonts that should not exist outside of very particular usage. Fonts are like the clothes of advertisements. Would you wear a good pair of sneakers or off brand toxic plastic Crocs? The answer is simple. I get frustrated because I'm sure these businesses and people have great services to offer, but their design choices do not reflect what they are trying to provide.

I believe that the world is more often than not, a superficial place. Most often no one is going to look past poor display choices, look beyond the cover to discover an intricate story. In order to truly succeed in the world, image is important and should be carefully maintained. Image is the only the entry point of successful content, it doesn't usually matter how great your work is if no one is interested in opening that door.

In short, fonts *do matter*. Before choosing that one font you really like, go on the internet, look at any of the thousands of studies on how certain fonts and formatting choices evoke an emotional response from people. Do everything possible to ensure that people will *want* to read further, by having an amazing cover.

## Oligarchy of Teachers

As a child, I was exceedingly annoying to most adults. I did what I wanted, never did my work, asked questions they didn't want to answer, and challenged their authority. This hasn't really changed except I'm much less confrontational thanks to a cocktail of Focalin and Zoloft. In the third grade, my teacher Ms. Alba was out on maternity leave for eight weeks so my class was assigned a long term substitute. He was a short, light skinned black man with oily black buzz cut, square glasses. His pants were long on him, a blue and white striped shirt and a dark colored tie. His name was Mr. Jones, he demanded structure and blind obedience. One day he walked in and passed out the class set of crayons and instructed us to draw a summer night. As a kid I loved drawing and was excited at the opportunity to do so. I immediately grabbed the standard colors; brown for my house, green for the grass yellow for the stars. I then chose to use a dark purple for the night sky, being the imaginative child I was. For the rest of class, I scribbled furiously, doing my absolute best to invest in this assignment.

Mr. Jones circled each cluster of desks like a vulture, picking over and critiquing a bunch of eight year olds. He makes his way to my table group and abruptly stopped at my desk. Mr. Jones sighed loudly and snatched the purple crayon from my hand. He berated me, an eight year old, about how unrealistic my drawing was, then proceeded to color over my purple with black. The entire class watched him scream at me over this. I can remember more than one occasion in which teachers have screamed at students. To clarify, I do not believe that teachers intentionally cruel to students. I understand that children and teenagers are incredibly aggravating. But that does not mean you should feel warranted in screaming at a child. In order to be a truly influential teacher, there must be a balance between intelligence and compassion. To me, every teacher that I've ever liked has understood that balance. Looking back on my elementary education, I am often disturbed by how often children, small children, are yelled at by grown adults.

There is never an excuse for being verbally abusive to *anyone* least of all a child. I am angered at the fact that teachers at the elementary level can verbally berate children. I can remember one time

a teacher threw a textbook at one of my classmates, out of frustration. When we were yelled at, we didn't tell our parents because we thought we deserved it. We were violently forced into submission, for fear of a teachers wrath. There were times that I deserved to be reprimanded, I understand that I was and remain a difficult person to teach. That isn't something I ignore. But yelling at students, especially younger ones, does nothing but reinforce a Dickensian form of power, that makes students fear the people that they should see as mentors.

In my high school career, I've only ever been yelled at by a teacher once, he was a substitute. I told the administration and he was put on the do not call list of substitutes. As a high school student, I have been allowed to process my feelings, question authority and critique my teachers. I believe that the autonomy I get as a high school student is the autonomy that every student should get as soon as they start school. Education is about learning and that cannot happen when students are so afraid of ridicule from the person or persons who are supposed to be a comforting entity. Classrooms need to be places of inquiry not places where children's imagination and inquisitive nature need to be crushed.

## The Circus Peanut in the Oval Office

I never believed that Donald Trump would become President of the United States of America. I was in tenth grade when the media frenzy over Trump reached its peak. At my high school, we have something called streams. Streams are basically a group of 30 or so students that take the same English, Science and History classes. My sophomore stream was sitting in our English Class around November of 2015. Copper Stream was talking about the effect of Donald Trump's campaign on America. The general consensus of the class was that his words and sentiments were a kind of rallying cry for lower class white americans that felt under represented and overlooked. No one thought that Trump would win, we weren't scared at the possibility of him winning because we didn't believe there was one. By almost every single political analysts calculations and predictions, Hillary Clinton would win by a landslide. There was nothing to worry about.

Now, a little over a year since he was sworn in, I find myself utterly confused by his entire administration. The Trump Administration is by far the most blatantly corrupt presidential administration that I have ever heard of or seen. Trump has been accused of assaulting and or harassing dozens of women, almost every other word he says is a lie, he's steadily undone damn near everything the Obama Administration accomplished. All the while, the people he's assigned to essential roles have begun to strip public programs of their resources. Betsy DeVos has backed a 9 BILLION dollar cut to education, Jeff Sessions has aggressively attacked sanctuary cities across the nation, Trump himself has kicked out immigrants who LEGALLY CAME TO THE UNITED STATES FROM HAITI. Overall, the Trump Administration has done an astronomical amount of damage in the past 14 months than I've ever seen in my, albeit short, lifetime. Once more, I feel absolutely powerless to anything about it.

People like Donald Trump have controlled America since the very beginning. Wealthy white men control capitalist countries from behind the curtains. Now that Trump is President, their reach has been extended even further. Once more, the ways in which we can rationally change our government are of no use, in my opinion. To me, playing by the law is useless in terms of influential, lasting change when those

in high positions of power aren't forced to follow the same set of rules citizens not involved in government are made to follow. Protesting, while important, isn't usually addressed until it starts to make the party that is subjected lose something substantial. Trump's popularity rating is possibly the lowest of any president, yet he continues to carry out Republican Agendas despite the overwhelming dissent from the American people. The message from his administration is clear; The opinions of the middle and lower class do not matter.

What angers me about the Trump Administration, besides every aspect of it, comes down to corruption. The corruption of our government has never been more public than it is now. Right after DeVos won the position of Secretary of Education, she made large donations to several government officials re-election campaigns. One of Trump's son met with Russian Officials to discuss the election, all of Trump's older children have the highest level FBI clearance given, Ivanka has an office in the White House! This administration only furthers what I already thought about government. That it only serves the people who control it, instead of those it is meant to protect. What I and the rest of middle class to lower class America needs, couldn't be more irrelevant in the way we are now. Knowing this creates a kind of anger, a kind of rage, that I have never felt before now. A kind of rage that takes me to a corner of my mind that I didn't know existed until now. My visceral hatred of this government is something I have to sit with until such time that I can be confident what my next steps as a disgruntled citizen will be somehow beneficial in the downfall of Trump's America.

## Money over Morality

Franklin Delano Roosevelt once said *“The liberty of a democracy is not safe if the people tolerated the growth of private power to a point where it becomes stronger than the democratic state itself. That in its essence is fascism: ownership of government by an individual, by a group, or any controlling private power.”* The root of my hatred for American Government is rooted in the inherently corruptness of how our Economic and Political structures function . We run on a model of Capitalism. For those who do not know what Capitalism is, it is when a country’s goods, services, etc. are controlled by private owners for profit. The “benefits” that many say come from such as system is creating a competitive market creates efficiency within two competitors to make a better product, which ultimately benefits everyone. This, at least in the American example, is a farce.

Capitalism sacrifices morality for the sake of wealth. Corporate Lobbyists have, across the board, used their influence in the House and the Senate to kill legislation that would potentially help millions for the sake of not losing large amounts of revenue. Republicans have been seeking to repeal the Affordable Care Act of 2010 since the day Obama signed it into law, in spite of the fact that millions *will die* without it. Health insurance companies spent over \$20 million dollars in 2009 on lobbyist activities to try and kill the ACA. The ACA is essential, yet Republicans and the people who sponsor their campaigns want it go down in flames. *That* is what Capitalism does to our society. It sees that healthcare, which is a human right, is quantified and sold only to those who can afford to pay.

The root of evil in our country comes from Capitalism. As a government and society, we have never put people before power or money. I am angered by Capitalism, possibly more than anything i’ve written about, with the exception of Donald Trump, who is a capitalist so he ties into my hatred. I believe that the purpose of government is to care for all citizens and give disadvantaged citizens access to essential services. Capitalism makes true, lasting equality impossible. It sees that those with the most money have the most influence which by extension makes it impossible for those without money have no true

influence. Capitalism is the cheap mortar that cause the house to crumble. It disregards millions and gives powers to an extremely select few. It is, without a doubt, a plague on modern society, that will eventually lead to the downfall of the American “Democracy.”



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