

# ODYSSEY ORACLE

## ODYSSEY ESSAYS: WHY VOTE?



*"When I vote, I feel  
people standing  
behind me in line,  
like my Italian  
grandmother--born  
before women had  
the right to vote."--  
Jean Feraca*

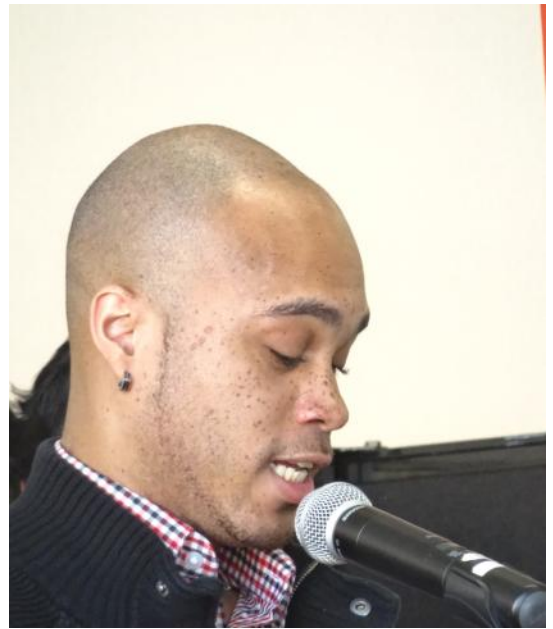
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After slavery was abolished in 1865, African Americans were still not technically considered citizens of the United States, and it wasn't until 1869 that it was even legal for an African American man to vote. After that, our rights were stripped from us by laws like the grandfather clause and Jim Crow. Then, in 1965, President Johnson outlawed political barriers preventing minorities from voting. So being of African American descent, I find this a very touchy situation for me. Just imagine being looked at like a second rate citizen or being labeled as illiterate and too dumb to vote.

Even to this day, our right to vote is being challenged in many ways, with voter ID laws and the recent appeal of part of the Voting Rights Act of 1965. If we're supposed to have these inalienable rights as listed in the Constitution, then why does someone in power always find a way to suppress them? Every step forward our country takes, we always end up two steps behind. Why is it Congress's place to decide if I have a right to vote for the people that I'm going to be governed by?



Our ancestors went through a lot even to get our country to the place that it is in now. Is it perfect? Not by a long shot. Having the right to vote gives us the power and voice to actually stand up and make a change. Our forefathers' blood, sweat, and tears made it possible for us to do a lot in this country. So with that being said, take into consideration some of the hardships that our country has endured and is still enduring. That should give you every reason to make your voice heard—and vote. **(DeAngelo Hood, Class of 2015)**

Voting is a free choice today. If you are a man, vote. If you are African American, vote. If you are a woman, vote. If you are a legal citizen, vote. If anything qualifies you as an individual to be able to vote, vote!



There was blood shed in order to grant the right to vote to poor white men, women, and African Americans. So why not honor this sacred right? This shed blood gave you as a citizen a voice—a vote that you are choosing to silence, a voice which you are renouncing, and ultimately a voice that you are losing.

Vote, for there are people among and around you that do not have this right. Give a voice to those who

cannot be heard. A simple vote makes you a representative of a whole generation. It entitles you to the power that already belongs to you as the people of the United States.

You are responsible and empowered to ensure that the government is an institution founded for the people BY THE PEOPLE!

So go on and choose those that you want to represent you. Cease the roars of your people with actions, abolish the imposed mannequins, and do not give them the power to suppress those you love. Raise your voice! Now is when!

Vote! Vote! Vote! (**Sahira Rocillo Ramírez, class of 2015**)



It has been stated that democracy is wasted on the masses, or something to that effect. Essentially this statement is true when we citizens of the U.S.A. choose not to exercise our most empowering and desperately sought right, now granted by the U.S. Constitution. The expression of one's desire to live in an economically and socially successful, vibrant, healthy, secure, peaceful, and loving society can best be demonstrated in one simple yet unimaginably powerful act: VOTE.

Voting not only gives one the power and potential to effect a change within our daily lives, lifestyles, and the laws our society currently abides by, but on those of future generations as well.

We, in a sense, are given the opportunity to help mold and shape the future of our great nation, and, by extension, the world. Imagine a future in which no child needlessly suffers from hunger, lack of adequate shelter, healthcare, education, guidance, and love. With a small adjustment in our country's primary concern and interests—from that of cold-hearted and selfish personal gain to one of compassion and caring for our fellow countrymen—, we can effectively provide for every citizen's primary need and beyond. A minor redistribution of wealth in our country could change our level of health, educational proficiency, business acumen, and overall quality of life so that we as a country would be stronger and would develop a greater sense of unity and nationalism.

The future imagined has been envisioned; the vision must now be acted upon in order to be actualized and attained. The action required is before both you and me in the form of participation in the upcoming and all forthcoming elections of government officials.

I choose to participate, thus giving the future I envision and hope for my son and all Americans a chance to be realized.

The choice is yours; however, understand that if you do not vote, you have, in fact, made a choice through inaction. (**Keith W. Johnson, Class of 2012**)



Our history has proven that it only takes one person to change the course of the future. From Thomas Jefferson, who wrote the Declaration of Independence, to Barack Obama, who had the dream of becoming the first African American president, they weren't afraid to take a stand for change. It is also your one vote that will change history. It's not about who you vote for, but it is about us creating the foundation for future generations.

I can remember the first time I voted. I remember how nervous I felt when I first walked into the room. When it was all done and over with, I felt this feeling of accomplishment. I was part of the bigger picture, and my vote made a difference.

You can give me a million and one reasons why you may choose not to vote, but my question for you is this: with this privilege and your ability to shape the future, why wouldn't you want to vote?

**(Nissa Uriostegui, Class of 2015)**

Late on October 9, we received word that the Voter ID law was banned in Wisconsin and that our state Attorney General J.B. Van Hollen was still seeking ways to ensure its implementation before our November 4<sup>th</sup> Election Day. Considering our track record here in Wisconsin as it relates to equity for all citizens, it would seem that requiring an ID to vote would only serve to create further inequity. If this is the agenda, then voting is the best way to ensure that we have fair and equal representation. Let your vote send a clear message about where you stand with respect to equality in our state. Is the status quo your preference, or do you want to see change? The only way to have your voice heard is to cast a ballot.



Whether you are a Democrat or a Republican, access to the polls is a right that you have as a citizen of this country. Requiring an ID to vote is simply a way to make the process less accessible to all citizens. Use your vote to show where you stand with regard to equity and access in Wisconsin. Why not? It's your right. **(Hedi Rudd, Class of 2012)**

In 2008, the United States met the fate of history taking place. After centuries of oppression, a flower of hope arose from the bosom of America. Two races of people trickled side by side down the river of time, flowing into each other's veins, leading us back to one drop which emptied into the estuary, affecting us equally. A man of two backgrounds now leads the country, which reflects the true reality of America.



Votes made Obamacare possible. Votes ended a war. Votes brought America justice. Votes reduced your student loan interest rate or payment. Own your own belief, and cast your vote.

New voter ID laws created to target the poor, elderly, and uninformed are leaving many that have children, multiple jobs, disabilities, and health problems questioning if their vote will even make a difference. Am I registered? Have I moved since the last time I voted? Where do I go? Will my vote count? Target the laws that target you. Vote by removing those who implement legislation that does not favor your interests. Whether it is for president, governor, mayor, or any other elected official, your vote represents policy endorsed by you. You matter when you make it count: vote! **(Betsy Pelto, Class of 2009)**

American men and women! Being able to vote every chance you get is important. African Americans used to not have the right to vote. Voting is the one thing Americans should do wholeheartedly because it gives us the opportunity to choose our government officials and take part in the decisions that are made in this country. How and where to vote should be the question, not why vote.

If you don't vote, how can you honestly celebrate the Fourth of July? If you don't vote, how can you become disappointed or upset with the outcome of an election? If you don't vote, it takes away your right to complain. Voting gives us a chance to display equality among people, no matter what race, creed, or sexual preference. Voting is a power, not a privilege, so use your power. I had the chance to vote for the first time in my life in the second election for President Obama. Once my vote went into that box, I became a part of history. Vote for your children's future. Teach them the importance and the power of voting and that their vote is the vote that makes the difference. Vote for your ancestors that didn't have the opportunity to vote because of segregation laws. I vote because my vote stands strong.



Through my eyes, my vote is the most powerful vote in the box. I vote because my vote makes all the difference. **(Tosumba Welch, Class of 2013)**

Let's go back in time to July 1848 when a woman named Elizabeth Cady Stanton composed "The Declaration of Sentiments" because women had no civil rights. That meant that they could not vote or have anything to do with politics whatsoever. Let's take a look at the 15<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the U.S. Constitution: "The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude."



The atrocity that has been going on with the need to have an ID in order to vote is preposterous. It is just another way to keep our vote from counting. When I say our vote, I am talking about the young, African Americans, and the elderly. Why vote? Because it is our inalienable right that we should be able to vote. This right cannot be stolen, sold, or taken away from us in any kind of shape, form, or fashion. Too many people have fought and died for our right to vote. (**Lenora Rodin, Class of 2015**)

I recently graduated from Madison College in May 2013. I joined the Student Activity Board. I started going to monthly meetings and, while there, was asked my opinion. Little did I know that being on the SAB required me to vote. I was thinking, why should I vote when it's not going to change anything? Well, I was wrong! I voted so many times that I made a difference for not only me but for over 48,000 students. I was asked for my opinion when I thought for over 30 years that my opinion did not matter. Just when I thought that voting didn't make a difference, I was voting for better student rights at MATC. Guess what? We won!



I thought to myself that voting was not going to make a difference, and I thought wrong. So think about it: if you want to see something change, go vote! (**LoLita Phillips, Class of 2013**)



People should vote because that way they have a say in how society is run. If you vote, then you can complain or change a law. For example, if you vote in favor of a health care plan that will affect you positively, that is better than letting other people vote for a health care plan that might affect you negatively. Voting is the way to go. (**Veronica Tinajero, Class of 2015**)

Why vote? This question has been in my head since the day my teacher, Emily Auerbach, asked it. I always thought that voting was not important because sometimes it is painful to see the corruption around us. After she asked that question, I started thinking about why it is important to vote. I have never had the privilege to vote because I am not yet a U.S. citizen. Voting is a privilege. You are giving your kids, your community, your state, and your country a voice. I am not trying to talk about politics. I am just trying to make you take advantage of that privilege you have been given. Lots of people went through a lot just so you could have that privilege. You do not make a difference by not voting; you make a difference by voting. So please give me and those who cannot yet vote a voice. (**Heydy Pichardo Reyes, class of 2015**)



# CHANNELING FREDERICK DOUGLASS

*It is 1852, and escaped slave Frederick Douglass has just read an editorial stating that slaves cannot dream of liberty because it is “a conception which belongs so naturally to the white man.” The editorial goes on to argue that it is “a cruel task to disturb him in the enjoyment of that life—slavery—to which God has destined him,” that slaves “bask in the sunshine and are happy,” and that “Christian slavery . . . is the brightest sunbeam which Omniscience has destined for his existence.” Frederick Douglass responds:*

Dear Editor:



I am appalled by your editorial from *The Southern Quarterly Review*. I am a former slave, and I can tell you from personal experience that slaves dream of liberty every day. Would you like to forfeit your daily

wages to someone that owned you? Would you like to be whipped for having a mind of your own? I think not! A slave's conception of liberty is the freedom to pursue happiness, whereas the white man's conception of liberty is the freedom to beat, rape, and murder his Negroes. If God had destined me to slavery, would he not have taken away my thoughts of a better life? I'm glad my master's wife disturbed my "enjoyment" of that life by teaching me the ABCs. How cruel of her! There is a revolution coming, Mr. Editor.

**(Matthew Kruger)**



You say a Negro doesn't dream of liberty. This is very true. We Negroes eat the thought of liberty. We taste the thought to one day be free! Truth be told, the white man can't grasp the image of Negroes' liberty. The cruelest

task of them all was to bring us to your land and call it our destiny. I can only believe that

Omniscience will destine us Negroes one day to bask in the sun of liberty. **(Janina White)**



How can you say we enjoy life? We have no life. We work from sun up to sun down. We get punished frequently and whipped when least deserved, living fearfully and watched all day every day. How can you say that God wanted us to suffer

from hunger and cold? I witnessed things that no other child should. How can a man beat a woman when he can hear her children begging him to stop? We didn't choose this life. We were forced to come here. We have dreams of freedom. **(Margarita Cid Luna)**



I am appalled that you believe I can't care for myself. I learned to read and write on my own. I have been taken away from my mother at an early age, treated like swine, beaten like a rug, dragged like a tree stump,

and scarred mentally and physically from the brutality I suffered at the hands of white men or masters, betrayed by the closest and abused by the worst. I, my good Sir, am capable of earning and providing for myself. Slavery must be done. **(Myisha Ellis)**



To “bask in the sun” is something that I have never done. From sun up to sun set, a slave works in the fields. You have never had to live on a monthly allowance of clothing of one outfit and one pair of shoes or on a food allowance of eight pounds of pork or fish and one bushel of corn meal. “Love your neighbors as yourself” (Mark 12:31): there is no commandment greater than this. How can you talk of “Christian slavery”? Who could call themselves Christians and condone slavery, which is the dehumanization of man? **(Kelly Hayes)**



There is no enjoyment in being beaten and whipped until blood flows from the wounds on your body. There is no enjoyment in working in the freezing cold rain, sleet, and hail. There is no enjoyment in starvation and desperation. I am witness that it is neither my destiny nor any other slave’s destiny. It is easy to blame God for the white man’s intention and selfish motivations. You use Christianity to represent your kindness, knowing there is nothing Christian in the way slaves are treated. I repeat, there is nothing Christian in starvation, brutality, and neglect. **(Jessi Hodges)**



Can one be happy with the life of never being safe from perpetual punishment, wretched whippings, and savage slaveholders? Where do you come up with this? Shall you take a stroll through life in my run-down,

sometimes-barefooted shoes? You, a man of fruitful freedom, sunshine, and happiness, do not believe in the same for me, a man of sad slavery. To argue that “we” are happy means you know nothing about what we slaves endure. Would you be willing to spend a year or two enslaved and then reply to me? **(Nitia Johnson)**



Your words are those of an intelligent man, but your thoughts are those of an ignorant man. You said in your article that I, because I am a Negro, am destined by God to be a slave. How do you know this? Have you asked God? I believe this is you trying to quiet your guilty conscience that is screaming at you telling you that slavery is wrong. **(Heydy Pichardo Reyes)**



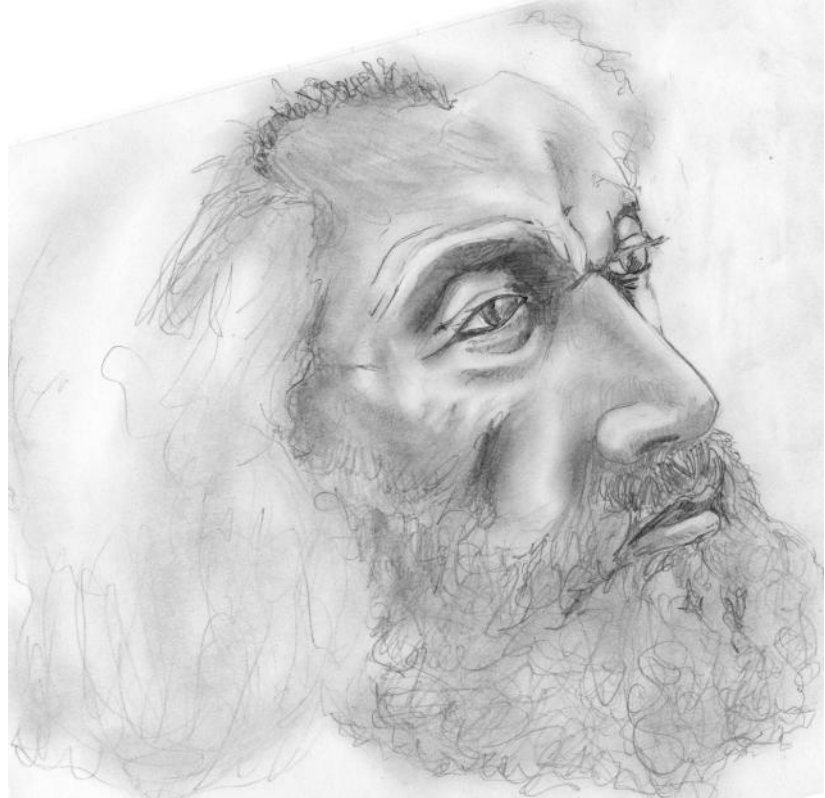
I live in constant fear for my life, fear for my wife, fear for my children, fear of God’s fresh air being snatched from me, and you honestly believe that God destined me or any human being to live under such conditions! The birds in the sky have more freedom than I. No, I say: God has nothing to do with this catastrophe called Slavery. This is the work of Satan Himself. John 4:24 says that we are to worship God in spirit and truth, yet the slave constantly has to lie out of fear of being put at the end of the overseer’s whip or sold off from his family for his honesty. Awareness and understanding we do have, but freedom and joy we have not. **(Lenora Rodin)**

All I can do is pray for you. I ask God to humble your heart and take the hatred and



ignorance away. We have the same God who sits up high and looks down low. He made us equal.

God's destiny is for all men to be treated equally, to have liberty, and to love one another as He loves us. God's destiny was not intended for his children to be beaten to death, worked like dogs, half fed, and taken away from their parents at birth. God said how can you love me but hate your neighbor? (**Mikiea Price**)



*Sketch by Stanley Sallay, '07*



What can be so joyful about being treated like cattle or much worse? What can be more calumnious than to say that God has created me and my brethren, just a few shades darker, just to ensure

your wellbeing and to serve you for a lifetime? How can you base such cruelty upon Christianity and use your God and religion to justify the lashing of the flesh of your God-given brother? How can a man maintain his integrity, honor, and credibility in front of an ever-witnessing God, all the while being the most evil, most ferocious, and bloodiest punisher and executioner? You cannot grasp the conception of freedom which belongs, by God given right, so naturally to the black man. (**Sahira Rocillo Ramírez**)

I worked from dawn to dusk in your fields and made them fructiferous. I gave you what you



wanted—wealth and power—through my effort and under painful lashes. Do you think that being the object of violence, abuse, suffering, horrid oaths, and many more horrendous insults are punishments sent by God? Of course not! God

is love, mercy, and compassion, qualities that do not exist in you. What is your purpose in praying to God every morning and asking for benevolence and kindness when your acts are contrary? (**Natalia Rodríguez Miramontes**)

Everything you said is a lie. Negroes do dream of liberty. We do not enjoy our life of slavery. God did not give us this life—you did. We are not happy to work so many hours in the fields. We do not have enough food or clothes. We are not able to get an education. You take



away our children. We do not get to know our mothers. Finally, we get whipped any time you want and for no reason. You should not write nonsensical articles. The way you see our lives is the way you want to, the way you like to, the way it will benefit you, but it is not the truth. (**Veronica Tinajero**)



Did God not make man in his likeness? Did God ever say that Adam was white or he was a master? Just like Adam, just like you, just like me, every slave dreams to be free. I knew this from a young age, and I fought through battles to become free. Brutally beaten and wrongfully worked is no life for a slave. I had some masters that tried to teach me and others that tried to break me, but my soul wouldn't let them take me. (**Nissa Uriostegui**)



Did God tell you to capture black people to sell them like meat and to have sex with their wives and daughters? Did God tell you to kill innocent people because you are a cold-hearted person? Who are you to dictate my life? Are you God? What man or woman is happy to have their freedom taken away from them? We have to beg for food, our children get taken away from us, our women are raped and forced to have white man's babies, and our black men are belittled in front of their families, making them feel less than animals. How can you say this is Christian slavery? God has a different plan for us. I will bask in the

sunlight when I and my people are free. (**Brandi Whitlock**)



I am responding to your outrageous, outlandish editorial about the so-called Negro. You are an oxymoron to me: a legalized kidnapper and a religious wretch! You are truly remote from the real world. I will not waste my time and energy reading such filthy and ungodly opinions. (**Derek Dodd**)



Can you imagine the pain and suffering that I've endured, the pain and suffering that I've seen, the pain and suffering that I've heard from slave women and slave men? Can you imagine being whipped on fresh wounds? Can you imagine working day and night every day of your life for nothing but to not be whipped? Yet we are the same—we bleed, breathe, sleep, eat, and everything else in this word the same! Your education came free and easy. My education and knowledge was self-taught and cost me dearly, for I have walked through fire to obtain the knowledge that I now hold. Bask in your shamefulness, Sir! (**Christopher Villalpando**)



How dare you imply that anyone could live the existence of a slave with any type of enjoyment or satisfaction? How can you live a life being controlled, belittled, and dehumanized by another race? What God-fearing human could live daily with himself,

seeing another human dehumanized just because of the color of his skin or his place of origin? Let me assure you that you have brought great insult upon the Lord Jesus Christ to insinuate that there is such an indignant position as Christian slavery. Jesus Himself would never condone such a dehumanizing position for one of his children in life. I am a child of GOD, never destined for slavery!

**(Patricia McKnight)**



We did not ask to be enslaved, beaten, and starved, or to have our women raped and murdered. We are all made in God's image and deserve to be treated as such. There

will come a time when the slaves will finally be free—free to be who we want to be and free to do what we want to do, free to be exactly what we are supposed to be, free to be FREE!

**(Melissa Dominguez)**



What God do you serve? My God teaches me to love not hate, build not destroy, help not ignore, and to treat others the way I like to be treated. To believe that the slave does not dream of freedom is absurd! Who wakes up dreaming a life

filled with violence, families torn apart, working in a sun so hot that you can barely breathe, discriminated against by everyone, and having no identity? On Judgment Day, what will you tell God? What will be your excuse for mistreating His colored children? As I am welcomed into Heaven and you are cast into Hell, I will look at you and smile, still



extending my hand, because I am filled with love, unity, and peace. **(Lakoyé Buford)**



My rebuttal to you would be to ask, how can it be God's will for his people to be oppressed against their will? Our "keeper" Mr. Colonel Lloyd put fear in us and took it upon himself to punish us. I remember one incident

where he made an old man uncover his bald head, kneel down upon a cold, damp ground naked, and gave him thirty lashes. This in my eyes is not God's will. **(Dorothy Katana)**

# EIGHT YEARS FROM NOW

It is Fall 2022 and I am happy and comfortable with who I have become. I went to the UW and got a degree in computer engineering, and I am now working at Epic. I was able to buy a nice home and dependable minivan for my four children and me. My oldest son, Claudio, is 20 and attending college. Antonio is 19 and also off to college. Anna is 17 and a junior in high school, and Francisco is 15 and a freshman in high school.

I am proud that I went on to get my master's degree and that I was able to set an example to my children. After years of homework and late nights, I was able to get the children out of low-income housing and into a dream home. Even though my boys are in college, they are still living at home. They will always be Mommy's little babies.

I have been dating this wonderful Christian man for a year and a half. My daughter is convinced we're getting married. I leave that up to God, like I always have, and count my blessings. **(Nissa Uriostegui)**

I will be a graduate from UW-Madison. I will be a pediatrician and still living here in Madison. My life will be better. I will be busy in the hospital but happy. My kids, now teens, are so proud of their mom for making it. My name is Margarita, and I'm a pediatrician at the UW Hospital. **(Margarita Cid Luna)**

I will be 43 years old. I plan on being established in my career. My daughter will be away at

her second year of college. I believe I will be single, enjoying my freedom. Freedom—yes, I will be free, finally off all court ordered supervision. 😊 I dream of simple things: low-cost living so I can enjoy what life I have left with minor stress. I am proud I survived, proud I'm successful, and super proud of all my daughter is. **(Jessi Hodges)**

I see myself at 32 years young very happy and established with my 13-year-old daughter. I am finally done with my Ph.D. and enjoying the good life of security with my daughter, Charlie. I see us as independent as ever, exploring new things, traveling back and forth to Kenya as we please. She is learning in my footsteps as I take her to the firm of some kind that I have built from the ground up. It will be a great, successful dynasty that we establish on our own. I am preparing her for high school, scared of what's to come for the both of us. **(Dorothy Katana)**

I see myself living in California, probably Napa Valley. I will have my master's in education and will be working on my Ph.D. I am teaching in a



private elementary school by day and then continuing my education at night. I am happily married and have been for a while now. I am finally ready to start thinking about starting a family. **(DeAngelo Hood)**

I will be 33 years old. I will own my own restaurant and will be living in Atlanta, Georgia. I'm married with two children: one 14-year-old girl, a 4-year-old son, and a stepson. I see love and charisma. I spend my days in and out of the house, making catering orders and managing my own business. I'm proud of my education and how it opened me up to become someone better than what I was eight years ago. My name now is Myisha Jones and I am a business owner with three wonderful children and a lovely husband. I have been educated by the best in the culinary arts. **(Myisha Ellis)**

I will hopefully still be living in my eighth floor apartment on the lake. I will have a bachelor's

degree in communications and will have completed a truthful autobiography of my life on drugs and on the streets.

I will be drug free and spiritually closer to God. I will continue to write music and grow old gracefully. The second half of my life will be used to get closer to GOD. I'll have new healthy relationships and continue to strive for higher education. **(Patricia McKnight)**

Eight years from now I will be 32 years old. My husband will be working as a Nurse Practitioner. We will have our own house and will have at least one kid. As for me, I will have at least my bachelor's degree. I will be working for a good company. I will be working part time until our kid is old enough to be in school. I will be volunteering in a program like Odyssey teaching them how to save money, invest money, and save for college. **(Heydy Pichardo Reyes)**



I am mowing my own backyard. I own a house in or around Dane County. I've been doing outside work my whole life, and I still love it. I have a decent amount of property and love to maintain it on the weekends. I'm proud of my daughter, who is now in her second year of college. My name is Matt, and I'm living my dream. **(Matthew Kruger)**

Eight years from now, I see myself living like a Queen. I have four kids, a big house that I'm buying, and a degree. I will be settled comfortably in my career. I am older and wiser. My daughter will be 15 years old, so I will be raising a teenager. My boys will be ten. Life is great. I am looking back over my life and thinking that I did that there. (**Mikiea Price**)

Eight years from now, I will have graduated from the U.W. and will be working with the young women of Odyssey to help them develop into strong African Americans. I will have been married 16 years, and I will have a master's degree. Eight years from now I will also have a degree in women's ministry. If the Lord is willing, I will have eight more grandchildren for a total of fourteen. (**Lenora Rodin**)

I see myself raising my second child. My daughter Mia will be 13 years old, and I may be struggling with this stage of teenager. I am proud of myself because I finished college three years ago. I have a job that I enjoy at the clinic. Also I'm still living in Madison. (**Natalia Rodríguez Miramontes**)

I am living hopefully free of struggle, with a better education than I have now. I am working with people who are going through the same struggles I had. I am living in my own home. My oldest will be in college, making me proud. My youngest is driving me crazy. I see many people striving for a better life. I see the world changing, and hopefully I can be part of that change. I'm proud to say that even with all the obstacles in my way, I can honestly say it made me a better person and mother. I am

able to teach my kids to strive no matter what is in their path. I am living without having to worry about how they are going to live. Hopefully I will be spending the rest of my life living on my beautiful island, Puerto Rico! (**Melissa Dominguez**)

I have graduated from college with a B.A. in computer engineering. I live downtown on the 28<sup>th</sup> floor working for a company taking care of their computer programming and software. I also have a few properties in real estate that I rent out with a positive income on every unit, and I'm currently and always looking for more investment properties.

I take care of my daughter when she needs money because she's now grown. I work out and have a few people that I personally train on the side. Also, I take advantage of the money markets and enjoy investing in commodities using the C.B.O.T. I am always open to investing and finding other ways to produce revenues, such as event planning and promotion. I do this when the opportunity presents itself, and it usually happens once a month or so! (**Christopher Villalpando**)



Eight years from now I will have my own company in Logistics and my own restaurant. My house will be on the coast of Costa Rica, and I will be taking care of my kids and my wife. When I look around, I will see the beautiful ocean and my kids playing on the beach. My wife and I are drinking martinis and dwelling on the past of how we got here. I will say it's my success through the Odyssey Project and her accomplishments as well. I will be proud that we made it this far, and we shall go farther. **(Joseph Lentz)**

I will be 33 years old, and I've just finished school to become an OB-GYN. The crazy part is I am still living in Wisconsin in this bipolar weather. My daughter was recently nominated for the Martin Luther King award for her amazing poem, and I'm proud of her. It seems like winter is coming early and will be a harsh one! Nowadays, my daughter and I take dance classes together and are connected on a level like no other.

**(Michelle Conley)**

I have my master's in social work and am a well-known writer. I am married and residing in California with my family. My life is full of happiness and a great support system, and I have a status to uphold. I see beauty and disasters when I look around, but I feel grateful that I can be a light in someone's tunnel of darkness. I am proud of the woman I've become, so full of energy, positivity, and life. I conquer fears and challenges with confidence.

**(Lakoyé Buford)**

My name is Sahira Rocillo, and I'm 34 years old. It has taken me eight years to finish my bachelor's degree at UW. I graduated last spring with a major in English and minor in Art. I'm in the process of obtaining my citizenship.

My son, Dorian, is nine years old and knows it all! I love picking him up after elementary school. He loves going to the bookstores and libraries to read stories and comics and/or to sketch. After that, we go home and eat. We are still living in Madison. I'm applying to teach English to young adults. We are saving money to go to Florida to the Harry Potter Theme Park next summer. I can't wait. **(Sahira Rocillo Ramírez)**

Eight years from now, I will be living the good life. I will have a nine-year-old daughter who is my best friend. I will proudly wear a wedding ring because I will have become some lucky



man's wife. We will be on vacation, in my roots of Jamaica, and making plans to move to another country. I will reminisce shortly about home in the U.S. where we have a nice house by the lake in Madison. I think about my students who have to deal with a substitute teacher for another week until I, their original teacher, come back. By now, I can communicate in three different languages and am a professional dancer and violinist. **(Nitia Johnson)**



At 31 years old I will be a Registered Nurse! I will spend my days working in the labor and delivery ward assisting mothers in bringing beautiful babies into this world. Hopefully my love will have proposed by then and I'm Mrs. Williams! My children will be 16, 14, 10, and 9. I still will live in Madison and love the safe weather!



When I look around, I'll see stability, stronger bonds, four proud sons, and a husband or fiancé I can count on for a lifetime. **(Janina Williams)**

I will be 46 years old and hopefully have a degree or two. I am still married (I hope) and living with my dog, Nina! I still will NOT, I repeat NOT, have any gray hair. I still love fashion and dressing fly ☺ I might move to a different state, maybe somewhere warm. My kids will be done with college; well, at least my daughter will. I don't want any grandkids yet. I want to have a great job that I enjoy going to, spending some time traveling around the world. The thing I am most proud of will be my degree and my kids doing great in life. I spend my weekends reading, shopping, and doing projects. I just enjoy life. **(Brandi Whitlock)**

I am an OB/GYN doctor, and right now I'm working at the hospital. I finally completed my goals and live in Madison, but in my own house. My life has gotten better. I'm more independent and free. I go for runs every

morning. I am still trying to study for the next step of OB/GYN. I look around and find myself at home, seeing all I have was worth the hard work. My mom's proud of me and so is my family. I am happy and proud I made it and all by myself. Now I can help my family with money. **(Brenda Juarez Cruz)**

I am a midwife. I work at Meriter Hospital. I live here in Madison. I have a 14-year-old son and a 12-year-old daughter. During the summer we go to Mexico to spend a couple of weeks at the beach. During the school year, my husband and I work, my children go to school, and on the weekends we go to museums, concerts, and relax in the house. I am really proud of my family and am also really proud of myself. **(Veronica Tinajero)**

Eight years from now I see myself flying to work in my new 2022 Bentley, taking my son to a private school in Madison because this is where the best education lies. I see my son and myself working with wonderful teachers who are willing to go

above and beyond to give my child an opportunity for success, as I had with Emily. In this era, many die due to accidents in the air rather than people dying over drugs or simply not wearing seat belts. The value of my knowledge is worth more than the currency in the United States. Many have the ability to do more and to live FREE. By free, I mean having more options to not live in poverty because Obama made it possible during his last term. Lastly, I see my family happy to make it into the family business rather than living off my 401 K or unemployment. **(Prodajaé Huntley)**

God willing, eight years from now I'll be writing music for the music industry and will own a restaurant. I am wealthy in every aspect of that word, healthy, married, and raising healthy children—maybe two. Also I am doing motivational speeches in schools. I don't know where I'll be living, but I love Chicago. I want to make a difference in children's lives, and home is a great place to start. My life is beautiful and humbling. I wake up to Lakeshore Drive and the beach out my

window, cooking breakfast while meditating after my morning exercise. After I'm mentally prepared, I walk outside and begin my journey of teaching every dark hood how to wake up like me. I'm proud of me and motivated by the love of my children. The sun shines in my house even with the blinds closed, but outside of my home there's darkness that I'm determined to help brighten up . . . **(Shaneika Sanders)**



# OPEN LETTER FROM AN ODYSSEY VOLUNTEER: RUBY FILLIAN

Perhaps it's reading Douglass's Narrative for the first time or eavesdropping on class, but I am feeling compelled to share a little of my story with you. I don't presume to know your journeys but I would say I have shared some of the same experiences, appearances to the contrary.

I am the only one of my family to graduate from high school, yet my sisters and I all obtained college degrees.

My father was a complicated man with a formidable anger management problem that landed him in a Federal penitentiary just after my first Christmas. At times physically and verbally abusive to his wife and children, he could also be extremely loving and affectionate to his family. He dropped out of high school in 10th grade, was self-employed in a variety of small businesses, and as a self-made man, considered higher education to be a waste of time.



My mother, one of thirteen children, completed the 8th grade. Her mother had died when she was 13 and there were younger siblings to raise, plus I suspect it was deemed unnecessary to educate women beyond that point in the small Iowa farm village she grew up in. She tended her father's house until she married my father at age 30. She was one of the strongest people I've ever known, raising me and carrying my unborn sister while her husband was doing time, and then, a mere four years later, having a child born with Down's Syndrome. Four years after that, at the age of 42, she would find herself pregnant again. My youngest sister fortunately turned out to be a normal birth.

Needless to say, I had no role models for higher education in my immediate family. At age 10, we moved from Des Moines to a farm town with a population of about 2,000 people. I had escaped early on into the world of books and music and quickly discerned that the best way to escape my tumultuous home life and the provincial town I lived in was by somehow getting to college. But how? I knew I would get no encouragement or financial support from my father, and my mother, although supportive, had no money of her own. I remember breaking down in front of the high school guidance counselor because I had not scored well on the college entrance exams and was afraid I would not be able to go to college. He arranged my

admission into a little junior college and personally paid the application fee. From there, I went to a small private college on a full financial aid package and graduated in 1977.

It felt like a matter of self-preservation for me to leave despite knowing that my younger siblings were still at risk. My father, convinced that he could not manage his business without assistance, took his next oldest child out of high school in the 10th grade. I think my getting to college encouraged her and after a few years, she found her own way there after getting her GED.

My youngest sister was now really feeling the heat. At 14, she ran away from home but had second thoughts and called me from the road. I convinced her to come home to our frantic parents. By age 15, she was pregnant and had dropped out of high school. She had my nephew two months before her 16th birthday. I encouraged her to get her GED and convinced her that if her sisters could do it, she, too, could get a college education. She did so while living in married student housing and raising my nephew. My nephew, now 34, not only went to college but now has an MBA.

Being part of the Odyssey Project has prompted me to remember this long-ago chapter of my life and to want to share it with you. I write it to encourage you and as so many already have, to say it is possible to overcome daunting odds in the pursuit of a better life.

Some years ago, I stumbled upon a Marianne Williamson quote that is often attributed to Nelson Mandela. It has stayed with me and I would like to share it with you:

"Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, and fabulous? Actually, who are you *not* to be? You are a child of God. Your playing small does not serve the world. There is nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people will not feel insecure around you. We are all meant to shine, as children do. We were born to make manifest the glory of God that is within

us. It is not just in some of us; it is in everyone and as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give others permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others."



# LETTER TO THE CLASS OF 2015

## FROM JAMES MORGAN '13



Greetings and welcome to the Odyssey “family.” As I write this, I’m currently sitting in a cell, cage, “cave” at the Dodge Correctional Institution. As I reflect upon this circumstance, I wish to extend to each of you my appreciation and gratitude. Sitting before me is the Odyssey Oracle of October 1, 2014. Therein I have found the strength and courage to keep a healthy perspective on the situation before me.

Your writings are powerful and revealing, reflecting the commonality of “our” struggles (poverty, abuse, rejection, miseducation) and our ability to overcome; to become simply “enough” for ourselves and others whose lives we touch.

We come to the Odyssey Project as individuals and in a brief span of time become a part of a human mosaic. Bonding, we find that our journey ensures that we (you) will be forever changed and forever embraced.

That is the message I wish to convey. Your Odyssey experience is about you and the many epiphanies you’ll encounter for a lifetime! Never forget that the application of knowledge is how you acquire power. More importantly, know that your gifts are to be passed on. As an alum, I encourage you to be all that you seek. Class of 2015: you ARE the Odyssey.

Forever changed, forever embraced,

*James Morgan*



“Roland Kirk” by James Morgan

Blind yet visionary Roland Kirk exemplifies the Odyssey experience because he overcame obstacles to become the only musician to play three horns at one time. Many of us Odyssey students have been faced with obstacles and perceived limitations to our achieving goals, hopes, and dreams, yet through perseverance we can become champions of our Odyssey!