

YEAR 19, ISSUE 1

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ODYSSEY ORACLE

WELCOME, CLASS OF 2022!



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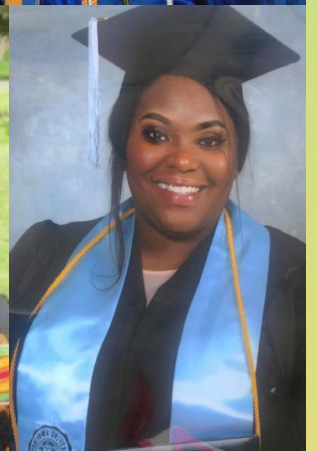
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Pictured on pp. 1-5 are some of our many Odyssey graduates who have earned associate's, bachelor's, and master's degrees from Madison College, UW-Madison, Edgewood, and other schools: Shaimaa Ahmed '16; Zeynab Ahmed '14; Ahmad Alkheder '17; Sherreallyum Allen '05; Keena Atkinson '10; Brian Benford '07; Sherri Bester '08; Lavern Brown '09; Michelle Brown '05; Kegan Carter '04; Luci Chikowero '14; Dominique Christian '09; China Moon Crowell '13; Yolanda Cunningham '12; Cameron Daniels '07; Tom Gardner '08; Molinda Henry '07; Tiffany Hite '04; James Horton '08; Yasmin Horton '08; Shaquida Johnson '12; Milli Lau '14; Shanita Lawrence '09; Josephine Lorya '08; Michael Lozano '11; Tasha McKenzie '10; Adrian Molitor '18; Shirley Norman '04; Nicole Barnett Pecku '09; Lolita Phillips '13; Jaleah Price, Odyssey Junior; Edwina Robinson '11; Sahira Rocillo '15; Mustafa Saed '16; Umaima Saed '16; Kala Taylor '16; Marisela Tellez-Giron '16; Mai Neng Thao '16; Dauntrea Vance, Odyssey Junior; Anthony Ward '04; Mary Wells '07

LETTERS TO THE ODYSSEY CLASS OF 2022

Dear Class of 2022:



I am so proud that you applied! It feels so great to start a new journey, and the first step to beginning that journey is to apply! Emily, Kevin, and all of the teachers are amazing, and you will soon learn to love them the way I have, and I did it virtually!

This year (2021-2022) has shown me just how great my potential can be. I am a mom of two boys, working fulltime and balancing their classes with mine, but Odyssey just fit into place with it all! I never felt stressed out about my homework, and that was the one thing I was worried about.

Since this class has started, I have applied for summer term as a UW special student, was elected a chair on the student council, and plan on working towards a degree in communications. If you would have told my last-year self that I did all of that, I would have laughed. Even during a pandemic, great things can be cultivated; you just need to be a persistent gardener! Get it, Class of 2022!
(Sarina Benford)



This will be a year of a lot of positive motivation and changes. Odyssey will be a long journey, even bumpy at times, but one thing for sure—don't give up. Emily and Kevin are wonderful teachers and are there to help you when needed, even outside of class. Don't be afraid to ask for extra help or even ask your classmates for help with the homework.

My advice to you is to stay focused, maintain positivity, and, when you feel like class is rough, reach out for help and don't give up. This class requires a lot of reading, so if you're not a big fan of

reading, that will soon change. But there are some interesting readings that will happen, like *Raisin in the Sun*. **(Anjelica Brown)**



I was so excited when I received a call from Emily stating I was accepted in the Odyssey Project! A couple weeks later, I was told that class will be virtual. I started to worry because:

- I was nervous because I wasn't very disciplined and struggled with time management;
- I was more a visual learner and was concerned about taking a class virtually;
- I also preferred to learn by interacting socially with my classmates, teachers, and tutors.

This was a challenge for me, but I was up for the challenge.

During the class,

- I learned how to manage my time more. One thing I appreciate about this class is the reminders we got via email with updates. I am a person who forgets things.
- I received help with school—the teachers and tutors and support staff were all there to help me succeed.
- Self-care—I learned to take mental breaks and to see how helpful they are in my learning process.
- Emily made me feel welcome; often times you may not feel welcome, but at Odyssey everyone is welcome.

The advice I will give to upcoming students:

—don't give up; there were times I wanted to quit—I remember I was so behind in my class work. I felt so defeated because this pandemic did a number on my family and me, mentally. I had a conversation with Brian and told him everything I was going through as a parent. Brian offered so many resources for my family and me.

—I still want to give up, and the class is almost over, but I'm not giving up.

I have two words to leave with you: KEEP GOING!!! **(Tisha Butler)**



What's supppppppp, Class of 2022!!! Lol nah, but for real. How are you feeling? Check in with yourself for a moment or two. BREATHE! This is your TIME! I am so proud of you, and I appreciate you for BEING! Yes! Just being YOU...

sometimes we get caught up in the hustle and bustle of LIFE, totally forgetting to breathe and give ourselves GRACE.

This past 2020/2021 has been a doozy to say the least. The pandemic with its socially distant learning has set many folks back as far as their mental state goes, as well as financially. With all the challenging circumstances that have been bestowed on us this past Odyssey year, we have had an amazing, supportive, OUTSTANDING group of tutors and staff. You all are in for a treat, and I would ask of you to have an open heart and mind to the infinite possibilities of growth and transformation. **(Sarah Galinski)**



I hope that you guys are back in the classroom and get to experience the real class setting because it was tough having to only meet my classmate through a little camera. Most of all, it was hard to speak with all eyes looking at you (so it felt) at the same time. In other words, if we made it to graduation during a global pandemic, nothing can stop you! Do not be scared or embarrassed to ask for help, no matter what the situation is.

Everyone there is so helpful and will find ways to help you guys. **(Erika Gonzalez)**



Hello, future Odyssey students! This was by far one of the best classes I have ever attended. When I first applied I was nervous, thinking I wasn't going to be good enough for the class, or that I was going to answer a question wrong or be judged. I worried all that time for no reason. The Odyssey Project wants you to be yourself 110% . There's no wrong or right.

I have always been a shy person, but I wasn't shy in my writing. So even if you're a shy person, don't be shy with your writing. Express yourself to full compacity. I know that there will be obstacles. Go right through them till you get to the end of the course reader and end of the course. Have a ball, everyone!!!! **(Valeria Gordon)**



Prepare for a journey that will change something within you. Today you may think this is only an English class, but you will come to learn it's so much more. Get ready for conversations that will challenge what you think you know. Prepare to take a journey through time, music, and new ideas.

The reason you chose for taking the journey of this class will change before it ends. I guarantee that you will not be the same and you will find a better version of yourself along the way.

The unique people you get to know as your classmates will inspire you beyond your wildest dreams. As you all work together, unknowingly, you all will reach the end. The teachers and support for this class are beyond amazing. Allow yourself to let go, have fun learning, and make room for the new you to come.

You made it. Congratulations! Welcome to Odyssey and enjoy the journey!! **(Melissa Herriges)**



Welcome to Odyssey, a journey where your skills and talents will be brought to light, along with your hunger for knowledge. There is a saying that “school ISN’T for everyone,” but to me school is for all. For all those who feel stuck in the same spot, for those who want to challenge themselves, and for those who want to find a voice through writing and poetry, Odyssey IS the place for you.

I came into Odyssey last year fearful that I wasn’t going to finish out strong, much like when I went to MATC after high school. Quickly that fear I had went away. The instructors are so friendly and so understanding that it takes away the stress that we all know school can bring. This is a chance to meet people with different backgrounds with amazing talents, and together you will become beautiful mosaic art pieces.

When coming into this program, it is important to keep your mind open and your doubts behind you. There are going to be a lot of your classmates who won’t have the same views as you do. You have to be comfortable enough to share a space where no one is judged, and everyone is uplifted through just a single Zoom chat message! Reach out to your peers. They are going through the same thing you are, and a team tackling a problem is better than going at it alone and feeling defeated. The most important thing... is to have fun! Yes, this is a class where you will have homework, but I cannot count a time where there wasn’t laughter coming from every person.

This environment is built to help and motivate you, and I can say it’s done a great job of doing that for me. Congratulations on becoming an Odyssey student! (**Kwan Hogan**)



Odyssey, my friends, has changed my life forever. It had awakened something in me in regards of furthering my education. From the very educational reads of the wonderful MLK to Plato, this class



has it all. How many of us get discouraged for X or Y reason to achieve something good in our lives? How many of us think reaching our goals is just an unreachable dream? I sure have been there; however, this program and Emily, plus the outstanding supporting staff, are here to help achieve this dream become a reality. Plus, the class is super fun!

And when you think you can’t do it, whenever you think you can’t make an assignment on time, always reach out for help, whether it is Emily herself, or the wonderful supporting staff and even your classmates. Do NOT give up, push through the end, and ask for help. The finish line is within anyone’s reach. I did it with two jobs. You can do it; I believe in you. (**Henry Irisson**)



First off, I want to say that you made a great choice in applying to this program. It has truly been an unforgettable experience for me.

I learned things that I never knew would be a part of the experience.

If you like deep, meaningful topics, then you are in the right place. Be ready to explore other ways of thinking. Be ready to see things from different perspectives. Be ready to challenge yourself and others as well.

This program helped me realize wholeheartedly what’s important and what I plan to do with the rest of my life. I hope you find that same benefit for yourself. Enjoy! (**Jessica Jacobs**)



Welcome to Odyssey. Some of you may be wondering is this the right class for me? Well, I can tell you firsthand—if you’re in this class, you are in the right place.

There are going to be days you may be scared to speak or to raise your hand to read; believe me, that was me. But you learn to break out of your shell because if you think you’re going to hide, think again. You will be shocked how this class pulls you in. Just know you are not alone—you and your classmates will be there going through the reading, homework, and journey together.

One thing about this class—if you ever feel like your voice is not being heard, know this is the time to speak freely. So don’t be afraid, hold your head up high, have fun, know that everyone’s got a purpose in life, and you’ve got to start somewhere. And if you’ve got kids, great—they can take the journey with you. There are going to be good opportunities for you, so take them and run with it. There may be a time where you’re behind on homework or need more time. Speak up, and you will get the help you need. I’ve never been so comfortable in my life until now, so say you need help.

You will like the things you learn, from the art to the poetry, and it will light your spirit. The flower will grow, so the rain must fall. You got this, so all you need to be is the sun. The sun doesn’t shine every day, so when it’s your time to shine, take it and lead with it. This is a journey waiting for you, and now you can take this journey together. Remember you are not alone. **(Yvonne Johnson)**



This *Is* Going to Be Your Year.

In Jan 2020, I was sitting with my dad and my sister in a restaurant in Chicago. They’d come out from Ireland to visit me, and after a week of eating, drinking, and good times I thought: “This is going to be my year.”

Well, the universe had other plans, as it often does.

Coronavirus hit, and I found myself without a job, visa, or future. For a while I put a brave face on it, but I was struggling, and the cracks soon started to show.

Now I sit here in April 2021, a few weeks from graduation, and I think it *was* my year. It wasn’t the year I asked for, and it wasn’t the year I wanted, but it was the year I needed.

Some of you will view the Odyssey Project as merely a stepping stone towards something more, and that’s fine. It is a stepping stone, a helping hand, and more.

The Odyssey is a beautiful group of people who are honestly trying to better themselves and the communities around them. They are a corrective to the atomization of society and a cure for cynicism and hopelessness. The Odyssey doesn’t ask you to memorize a bunch of boring dates or regurgitate canned answers to questions. It asks you to look inside yourself and find the answers that were always there.

And that’s where you have to meet them. They can show you the way, but you have to walk through the door. That’s the deal. So even if it makes you feel uncomfortable, even if it makes you look ridiculous, even if it straight up hurts, go with it, lean into it, speak your truth.

Nobody knows what’s next, and what comes after Coronavirus could be worse. We live in an unstable country, on an unstable planet, in an unstable universe. But come hell or high water, finish this program.

Regardless of circumstances, time is what you make of it. I learned that in the Odyssey, and anyone who faces their challenges with an honest heart can’t be considered a failure. With that strength any year can be your year, and any future is up for grabs.

Before you know it you’ll be writing this letter, and you’ll be a different person.

Good luck, and welcome to the family.
(Farren McDonald)



I know you're thinking: what in the world did I get myself into? Can I back out?? I know those were my thoughts when I found out I was accepted to the UW Odyssey Program. Well, relax, you are in good hands. The UW Odyssey staff is here to make sure you succeed. This is a journey that is going to change your life for the better and push you outside of your comfort zone. You will learn but have fun in every class.

Take advantage of the tutoring—it really helps, and all the tutors are wonderful. They walk you through the assignments and help you understand some of the challenging ones. Make sure to keep up on homework. If you fear an assignment and get stuck, ask for help. The staff is always available to help you.

Get to know your classmates. They all have amazing backgrounds and can be a wonderful support system. All of you were chosen because you have something special in you. I know I loved to chat with my classmates during tutoring and hearing them read their assignments. Do not be shy in class—take this opportunity to help you overcome shyness.

Go and have fun. This class will be over before you know it, and you will miss it! **(Michelle McKoy)**



You did it! You made the decision to set yourself up for success by enrolling in this course; now it is time to commit to it and your future. This requires discipline and dedication because you will encounter challenges, and your life outside of this course will not stop. Do not get discouraged; you can and will do this.

Read your syllabus at the start of the semester and make a class and study schedule and stick to it. Stay ahead of your course work, as it will be easy to fall behind, especially if you have other obligations such as family or a full-time job. Come to class prepared, ask questions, and make the most of

your time with the professors, tutors, and peers. Share your ideas, thoughts, and talents; you have so much to offer the course, and your participation and contributions makes the class all the more interesting. Communicate with your professors if something unexpectedly comes up, and make arrangements with them so that you do not fall behind. Know that your professors want you to succeed!

Odyssey is more than a class; it is a community where we all look out for one other and root for one another's success. Stay focused, stay committed, and ask for help when you need it. **(Stephaney Obi)**



You are probably nervous or anxious; so was I on my first day of class. That feeling will begin to disappear as you become familiar with your classmates. The most important thing to remember is you are not alone! You are on a journey with many others. What may feel like new territory to you is new territory to them as well. At times it may feel like the workload is heavy, but Kevin and Emily work overtime to make it as light as possible.

Odyssey has become a part of my family. I look forward to the writings from my classmates and interactions with them. You may have moments where you doubt yourself and your work. I have had many of them. Remember there is no right answer. Your experience is based on you and your unique interpretation. Here in Odyssey your opinions will be needed and valued. You will be surprised by all the things you accomplish if you just believe in yourself. Remember: change occurs once we step out of our comfort zones! **(Asia Pearson)**



I welcome you with open arms. Congrats on becoming the chosen few who made it in. The Odyssey has been both rewarding and challenging for me. If you're like me and have two jobs, trying to run a business, single mother, taking two

other classes, then you're in great hands. Odyssey can help.

It's important you stay in communication with Emily, and please, oh please, go to tutoring and request Nidia; she is the best. Drive deep in, pull out that inner writer; you will discover words and a voice you never knew that you have. Good luck; happy Odyssey. **(Thedora Smith)**



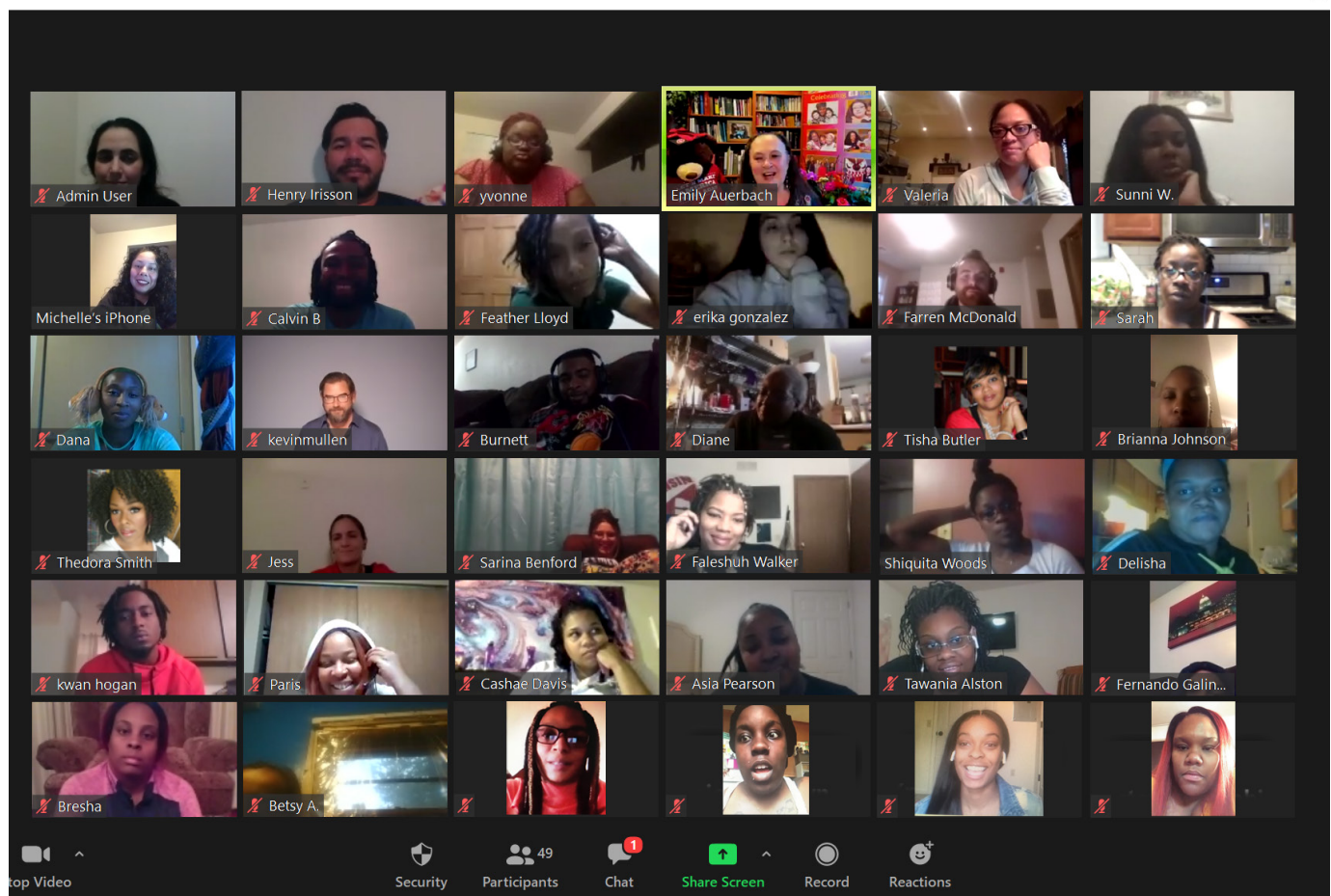
If you're reading this, just know you came to the right place. This class is an awesome learning experience, and you are meeting great people. I've learned a lot during my time of being a part of the Odyssey class. My advice to you is if you're stuck on something, always visit Tuesday's tutoring session and take advantage of that time. Take in every part of the experience and all the teaching. Try not to get behind because assignments will still

be rolling in. The number one thing is don't forget to enjoy! **(Keyanna Wilson)**



I know some of you are excited, nervous, or a little worried about what's ahead for you guys. Well, I'm here to tell you that you're going to have so much fun getting to know your classmates. The instructors are very helpful and resourceful. It is definitely a great opportunity to further your studies. I myself was nervous and didn't know what to expect at times, but everyone is so welcoming and encouraging in a time of need.

I'm very thankful to have been a part of the Class of 2021. It was challenging at times, but stay strong and you'll be just fine. I wish you all the best. **(Shiquita Woods)**



ALUMNI CORNER

DON'T QUIT

BY JOE ROBINSON '04

My advice to the new Odyssey class is don't quit. No matter how hard it gets, don't quit.

When you get off work at 5:30, and you only have 30 minutes to get the kids situated and get to class, don't quit.

When you get stuck in the middle of writing a paper or doing a project, don't quit.

When you find out that your father has cancer and has to have surgery and treatment, don't quit.

When you have circumstances that occur that make you miss a class and you get behind on your work, don't quit.

When you feel as if you're not getting anything out of a particular subject, don't quit. When people tell you you are wasting your time, don't quit. When your car breaks down, and it's twenty below outside, and the only way to get here is on the city bus, don't quit. When your spouse is complaining that your five children are driving her crazy every Wednesday night, don't quit. When one of your classmates makes you feel stupid for voicing your opinion, don't quit. When your boyfriend or girlfriend accuses you of cheating on them because you had to turn your cell phone off during class, don't quit.

And if you get to the point where you just can't find any more motivation to force yourself to keep coming to this class, my advice is to call Emily, and I guarantee you that she won't let you quit! There were many times that I wanted to just give up, but Emily would not let me. She believed in us more than some of us believed in ourselves.

Finally, I would like to say that, the first couple of weeks, I was in class trying to figure out, what is the catch? Why are these people offering us this course for free? There must be a catch. I found out what the catch was. Each one of the teachers was trying to trick us into believing that our lives would somehow be better if we completed this Odyssey class and then go on to graduate from college. I guess I must be a little naïve, because I fell for it, hook, line, and sinker.



Joe Robinson with classmate Tineisha Scott, who earned her Master's Degree at Edgewood College



Joe Robinson with his family

WE ATE DOG FOOD

BY ALICE MCDANIEL '09

WRITTEN FOR KEVIN MULLEN'S
ODYSSEY ALUMNI COMPOSITION CLASS



... You can only write about what you feel and know really. I know that my mom was not a high school graduate, but no one else would have known that unless she told you herself. She was a very well-versed, super-intelligent, beautiful, spiritual, and loving woman.

My dad, on the other hand, could hardly read or write. He has lived most of his life with those limitations. He is a very funny, kind-hearted, spiritual, and good-looking man.

While in the care of my dad, my four other siblings and I ate dog food. That is what we were told some years later, and our mom confirmed that story. You are probably wondering how that happened. Well, I will tell you what we have been told.

My dad went to the grocery store. He was in the canned goods section, or so he thought. He looked at the picture on the can of some corn beef hash. "Ha, ha!" he said and grabbed it.

When my mom arrived home from work, she asked him if we had eaten yet. His reply was "Yes." My mom asked him, "What did you feed the children?" He said, "some hash." For those of you who have never eaten it and never want to, hash, according to Webster's Dictionary, comes from the French *hacher*, to chop, and means "to chop up meat and vegetables for cooking; usually a baked mixture, a muddled mess." She asked him again, "What did you say you fed them?" My dad replied again, "Hash. The cans are in the trash can."

My mom went to the trash can. As she lifted each of the cans out, she screamed at my dad, "You fool! You gave my children dog food, with your 'no reading' ass!" It goes without saying that he was not asked to go shopping for groceries again.

***We ate dog food,
but we were rich.***

My parents didn't have the opportunity to complete their education due to obstacles. My dad was from the small town of Stamps, Arkansas. By the age of four, his mom was now a single parent. His father had left them. As the oldest of her two sons, he was now the man of the house. He went to school on a regular basis only up to the third grade. He had to work in the fields, either having to stay home or be pulled from his class at school whenever it was time for crops to be harvested.

Mother was from a large family of eleven and also from Arkansas. She got to go to school every day until she met my dad. With her parents' permission, they got married a year later.

They moved to Milwaukee, Wisconsin several years later along with their two daughters. During their marriage they had some economic struggles. It was not for lack of ambition and determination and drive. Both of them would work—Dad as a laborer and Mom as a waitress or maid. I remember she would wear a black and white uniform when she rode the bus to the eastside of the city where the rich people lived. . . .

Both of my parents instilled in their children that we should do our best at whatever we chose to do in life. “‘Can’t’ is not a word,” my mother would say. We could not use it at all as an excuse or reason not to go for things in life, like getting an education. . . .

Education is the key to freedom, to advancing your world. Wealth is not only of material and financial means; it is also knowledge.

We ate dog food, but we were rich.

ODYSSEY POEM

BY ANTHONY JEFFERSON '17

Odyssey is the pencil of life with which we can erase past regrets and rewrite our future.

Every “word” formed solidifies our resolve, those periods at the end a proud stamp of success.

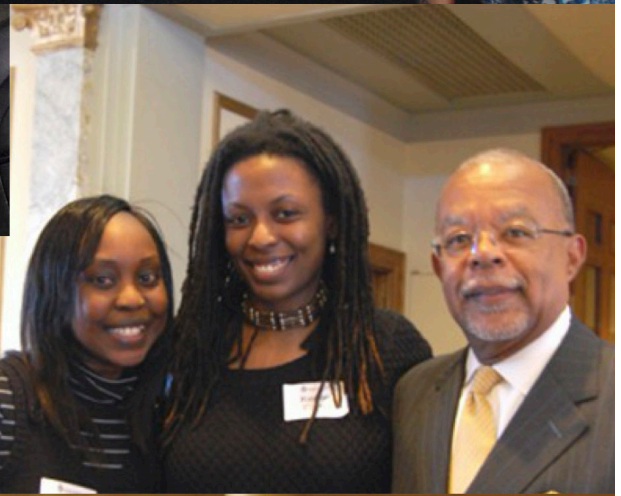
Sentence by sentence, we forge a new tale.



SPECIAL ODYSSEY MOMENTS



Odyssey Project receives award at UW Chancellor Becky Blank's house; Teresa Tellez-Giron '04 receives 2014 YWCA Woman of Distinction Award; Stanley Sallay '07 and Tosumba Welch '13 meet *Just Mercy* author Bryan Stevenson; Corey Saffold '06 elected to UW Board of Regents; Class of 2014 students featured on Capital City Hues cover.



TV personality Tavis Smiley and scholar Cornel West taking Odyssey students out to dinner during their Poverty Tour; Tosumba Welch '13 winning Best Actor award from the Bartell Theatre; scholar Henry Louis Gates with Kegan Carter '04 and Josephine Lorya '08; Yolanda King (daughter of the late Martin Luther King, Jr.) with Emily Auerbach, Juanita Wilson '07, Pamela Holmes '04, and Denise Maddox '04; author Jelissa Edwards '16 on cover of BRAVA Magazine.