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Culture Shock: A Letter to My Future Self

Lying on the couch, on my back, just cryin til my chest was empty, couldn't breathe, I really just wanted to go to the hospital or sum. Momma kept askin me if I wanna go, but I couldn't respond. So I was just layin there. Somebody shoulda validated that as a panic attack. It prolly was, but I'on know. Goin to the hospital was just showin that I couldn't handle none of this myself. So ten minutes passed by, and I let go of that. They called my pastor, he came over the house and just sat me down and just prayed for me. Damn. What else could you do at that point? The fact that I went through school smart as hell, spent all my time studyin and caring so much, figurin out how to manage the time—forget spendin time wit band and softball and anything else, I was spendin time tryna figure out how to accept myself, but look: it is still almost a better option for me to stay home n work. Stay home n go to community college. Stay home n forget college, as many of us do.

I went on just gettin colder as the summer was ending. Just said I'on care. My parents made it very clear very late in the game that they couldn't give me a cent, just like how they got through school, and that was some weight on me. Gon' be there till I die, as they say. Debt. So on the drive up to school, was I super excited and ready for anything thrown at me? Nah. I was cautious n stressed at the time. Remember that, KB?

Many things took me off guard when I arrived on campus. The phrase people use for this type of thing is "culture shock," I think. Initially, it was the ringing promise of the word "diversity" or "multicultural." Never did I realize that I was going to look very different than everyone around me. Then I opened my mouth and used the language I knew. Never did I realize that I was going to speak differently than everyone around me. And for both of these things, I was not paid any special attention

to. I was just there, viewing the culture around me, apparently having to accept these things as facts. So I know I will eventually have to remind myself of this college life so far as a thinker. College life as a student of color. College life as an American.

I should have expected college to be so typical in culture, just like the movies. But I was petrified. In the past few weeks, it has been nearly impossible not to encounter someone drunk or throwing up unless I never left my room. In which case, there was a great chance that my roommate could be the drunk one, and I was so lucky and got exactly what I wished for— many rude awakenings at two in the morning. But all of these experiences could be seen from just staying within my own residence hall. I was immersed in it.

Am I trippin tho? Forreal, takin everything into consideration, it's legit to define the word "excessive" here. All this partying ain't happen just during the first week of school, but it was also the second week, n the week after that, the week after that. This just don't stop at all. And what is really happening tho? I can always feel the vibe of the campus shift when there's some party or sum to do, cuz they always tryna do some shit. But for the few of us who have a bit more to worry about and gotta take the studies a bit more seriously, it's surprising. Really, every damn weekend, what are y'all celebrating? I couldn't figure out the culture at the time, so different from mine. Remember all this, KB?

It is clear that I am surrounded by mindsets that I do not want to be around, and it terrifies me. They were all so comfortable with partying; I was barely comfortable with being here. Trying to put myself in uncomfortable situations that were *safe*, I attended many of the events that the Multicultural Student Life office put on. Samba, salsa, and Eid were just a few that I went to. Yet at a school that claims to be so open to new things, I saw exactly how much importance was put into these events when I observed—there were little to no white students at any of them, even though they take up the

majority of the school's population. That is when I realized that students are so uncomfortable, and they hate to be in these situations. Yet this is exactly the kind of mindset that is holding them back.

On move-in day, me n Raisha was already chillin in our room; she moved in for international orientation, I moved in for multicultural. I heard somebody walk by, and they just stopped and read our names on the door. "Kayla and... R-...I can't pronounce her name." And they just walked by after that, not caring to learn.

So often in Spanish class do people just gloss over words, and when the professor tell them how to say it, they don't try again to repeat it.

So often I see my Latino friends just change they name altogether, "whiten" it up so it's easier for others to pronounce. "Luis" is now "Lewis". "Lupe" was once "Guadalupe". "Cassandra" and B. "Guerrero" have another way of saying their names, the way it was given to them.

Don't nobody wanna try, in each and every one of these situations. If y'all can pronounce Thoreau and Tchaikovsky and Rousseau, y'all can pronounce Nofisat and Shirquanna and Saraihi, all names of students here. It's all a matter of who wanna immerse themselves, who wanna take advantage of their school, which claims to "push for diversity." But nah, students see interaction with other cultures as a daunting chore. Attendin these "multicultural" events is an act of charity, not a social event. These students gotta try harder. Once they heighten their awareness to these things, the culture is gonna shift, be more inclusive, and the individuals gon value somethin much greater than partyin. When I overheard a student saying that their peer mentor told them it was not mandatory to attend the *required* Welcome Week diversity speech, (so they could go pregame before the freshmen boat ride), that is when I knew. I was enraged by it all. Remember that, KB?

I found myself immensely bored. Bored, and extremely impatient with the “norm”: go to class, complain about being tired, waste time socializing or on social media, stay up late doing homework, recite that you “can’t wait for the weekend,” finish classes on Friday, party, go to sleep, do it again, finish some homework late, and repeat. Wasn’t this monotonous? I had a one track mind when it comes to these things: you do the things you have to do before you do the things you want to do. This is all I could think about because I felt no room for slip ups. I was already teetering on the edge. Yet perhaps that is exactly what closed me off from others sometimes; I was impatient.

You gon have it all figured out in the future, KB? Because your love at that time was right; Louie was always helpin you in times like this. If you keep detesting everything, you gonna find yourself on the couch again, tryin to figure things out, lyin on your back just crying cuz you can’t stop finding fault, and you gon sit there resetting your head until you remember that out here, you really just alone.