

## The importance of 'Start' (tentative title) and my End of Summer Report

My name is Naima Davenport. I am a rising Junior studying English with a concentration of creative writing from Dallas, Texas. My FURSCA project began concerning the two authors; Kiese Laymon and Ibram X Kendi. My goal with reading them was to observe them and become inspired by their words in order to write my body of work. The closer the start date for FURSCA became, this quickly changed. I became more focused on emulating Kiese Laymon's voice, a choice that in retrospect was not authentic to myself. The whole purpose of my writing was to be as truthful and honest to and about myself for my sake as well as the people around me as I could. Originally, I was supposed to write a book that was more of a how-to or a guide inspired by Ibram X Kendi's work. Some of my main goals were to shed light on a more eccentric approach to antiracism. I didn't want to just explain to people how racism is wrong. I wanted to deepen and help readers have a better understanding of racism and to create an educational resource using my personal experiences. I didn't want anyone including myself to refrain from accountability and to do so it felt like I needed to take a more subtle approach to confronting some of these problems I'd faced.

As I began my research, my book morphed into more of a living, breathing experience about racism, misogynoir and Black girlhood. Because of this new direction, I began exploring different options. I decided I wanted to tell people my own stories of racist experiences and my feelings during and after those events. I started by making a list of experiences that seemed the most powerful and then slowly built around them. I wrote poems using styles like phantoms and wrote passages that I planned to turn into full length chapters for the book. I also wrote in styles I had never used before in order to experiment with rhythm and pacing like short text-based chapters.

At the beginning of the Summer I started off with five books; Heavy, How To Slowly Kill Yourself and Others in America and Long Division by Kiese Laymon. The other two were How To Be An Antiracist and the accompanying field guide by Ibram X Kendi. These books served as the backbone to my body of work and soon evolved into more. Each week I said I'd read one book and spend the remaining three weeks solely on writing time. In hindsight, that was very ambitious and didn't work that well. It took me almost two weeks to read each book with Heavy taking almost three. The content was hard to get through and extremely emotionally taxing. I

struggled to place myself and relate to the main character which made it harder for me to read. After help from my advisor I was able to get through the book and work on catching up on other books. I also read bell hooks' Black Looks and Ntozake Shange's For Colored girls who have Considered Suicide/ When the Rainbow is Enuf. Two incredibly powerful books that heavily influenced what I had to say both by their length and by the topics they chose to explore deeply like being subjects of fetishization and experiencing the shock of non-black people only wanting to hear about Black strife.

After I began finishing all the books from Kiese Laymon I began to write my book. At first all I had were a couple short stories written about a very recent racist encounter where I was subjected to being subjected to racist slurs numerous times. From there I started to track the more emotional side to an experience like this. What was I feeling in those moments and did that impact my responses or lack thereof? Could I have enabled people to feel they could say things like that to me? After that I started formatting and moving things around to connect with other themes I'd begun expanding on. I started deciding what was worth talking about in length and what should be left up for interpretation.

My project is important because my experiences are not singular. Many of my Black peers have been subjected to the same discreet and overt racism in our day to day lives. We just keep quiet about them for fear of not being believed, backlash or other deeply personal reasons. Especially at Albion College where we like to think we are above racism and know what's morally, politically and socially correct.

'Start' has drastically changed my life by offering me a chance to confront things I let roll over me and give me the chance to reflect and look back on times in my life where I felt powerless and stuck. Kiese Laymon was one of the first Black authors I read who really made me want to get up and do something about my problems. It is my hope that my book will inspire others to confront the things they know are true and never turn a blind eye for the sake of keeping the peace or being seen in a different light. I hope others can learn from my mistakes and learn that they too can be enabled and be enablers to systems like white supremacy, colorism, homophobia and harmful stereotyping.

This Fall, I plan to write my thesis furthering my book and hopefully by April 2026 I will have 150 pages written. Around that same time, I will be presenting my research at Elkin Isaac with digital links to my work. By my

Senior year it is my goal to begin looking for publishers and be a published author before I graduate. By writing this body of work it's my hope that we can all come together to confront these issues and start working on changing our language and our predispositioned notions of each other. Maybe then we can start thinking about how to be more inclusive and radically driven.