

## Prompt:

**(Common App) Some students have a background, identity, interest, or talent so meaningful they believe their application would be incomplete without it. If this sounds like you, please share your story.**

## Essay:

July 9, 1776. The Declaration of Independence is now law — soldiers rage in the veil of night, searching a New York City park. Whispers carve the ranks, making room for the command to follow. The target has been identified: King George III, ruler of Great Britain, riding in the night. Soon found, the king is trapped. Ropes leap from gloved hands, entangle the steed, and are pulled taut — the king is dethroned, and the statue is no more. A horse falls, and splits the Atlantic.

That’s where I grew up — not atop the now-vacant pedestal but in a town named for the surrounding park. Bowling Green, Kentucky, a slave-driven agricultural powerhouse that kickstarted state-wide commercial expansion. This is where my story begins.

The Projects: a neighborhood birthed from a city-wide initiative to provide low-income families with housing — my local haunt. Two of my closest friends can be found here, Armin and Daquan. They’re a colorful pair, the heavysset Albanian immigrant and the bubbly card-game fanatic with mottled brown skin, but they’re not so bad. We could brave middle school, at the least.

While I come to The Projects by choice, others don’t — still, we ride the same yellow bus. Outside bus windows, the city’s concrete hands erupt from the hills to form 20-foot square foundations, fingers as walls, palming citizens like delinquent insects. We don’t much talk about our circumstance; it hangs like moss on the tongue, easily crumbled, and flings resentment like spittle. Yet, there is always room for hope. It’s easy to notice if you look — the dirt-caked plastic chair on the back porch, the kitchen window hanging ajar. They’re a reminder of things to come. Things long overdue. The bus arrives.

“Mama Armin!” I shout, knocking three times.

No response. Armin nods, and I open the door. The mood is murderous, and the floor ahead of me ruptures; a linoleum spear clears my lower jaw, exiting the opposite cheekbone, pinning me, forcing me to stand watch. I see Mama Armin, and she sees me. The TV sounds off, “New Bowling Green city policy will require citizens to graduate from assisted housing within five year —.” Mama Armin senses danger and protects her cubs. Her cheeks rise, hinting a smile, but her eyes darken in hue. A wave will suffice, for now. We don’t much talk about it. We haven’t needed to. The spike is withdrawn, and I step forward.

It all stemmed from good intentions, I’m sure; no one envisioned this urban wasteland. Nobody thought The Projects would become a term that referred not only to the neighborhood, but also its populace — or that the city would switch stance more than a gutter-bound drunkard. But, it happened. It was time to talk about it.

And, we tried. After countless failed amendments and overturned propositions, the situation was worse for it. In the city’s eyes, The Projects were a lost cause, and they absolved themselves of the situation. Like the lead statue the city was named for, The Projects were melted down and repurposed into ammunition against their own agenda. The horse was forgotten in the city’s hatred for the rider, and the human lives affected were of no concern to them. Misfortune was left forgotten in the excitement of new enterprise, and The Projects were left to their own devices.

I’ve been back to The Projects, years later — the rift has mostly healed. A lone grocer lines an otherwise empty strip mall, and the community library has added a shelf. The sting is faint, the venom running its final course. Only time will tell if these effects are lasting, but I find myself in awe at the resilience of my friends and family in The Projects. Even in loss, they’ve found reason to celebrate.

Make no mistake, though — this is no happy ending. It’s not always avoidable, this conflict, and there will be no easy solution. To promote a life that justifies its suffering is a difficult task, but it’s only through compromise that we can move forward. For this reason, my resolve is bound in sacrifice; my purpose is sown in the beating hearts of those who turn to me for help, and in the quest to reach those who turn away.

I’m not claiming I have the answers, but, when I think of my time in The Projects, I find a good place to start.