

Biography

James Robinson, a sophomore from Brooklyn, NY, majoring in African American Diaspora Studies, is deeply interested in African American history in urban spaces through the route of community organizing. Robinson has composed written pieces about the Black Panther Party, Black masculinity, and mental health.

Artist Statement

Coming to Vanderbilt has exposed to me to literature and the works of Black poets, thinkers and activists. Through this exposure, my understanding of my own Black identity has evolved, as has my awareness of Blackness in higher education. There were many times in class where I sat down discussing ideas of liberty, individualism, and freedom, and recognized these same concepts were intentionally excluded from Black people. The theories of equality contradicted the reality of the experiences of Black people. Education itself is not inherently limiting; rather, it is the content that is prioritized and taught that remains constrained.

This work is inspired by W.E.B. Du Bois's *The Souls of Black Folk*. In chapter two, Du Bois states, "The South believed an educated Negro to be a dangerous Negro. And the South was not wholly wrong; for education among all kinds of men always has had, and always will have, an element of danger and revolution, of dissatisfaction and discontent. Nevertheless, men strive to know." Being part of a collegiate institute is a monumental milestone that cannot be overlooked or forgotten. To attend a university in the Southern United States—where African American people were historically denied entry, basic rights, and even their humanity—is profoundly meaningful. Understanding where we come from, who we are, and the significance of our lives has been essential to the survival of Black people.

I chose to write a poem because poetry is one of the most accessible forms of expression. Black thinkers have long used poetry to articulate their hopes, dreams, and grievances, and I want to be a part of that legacy. To me, that is the most rewarding part of Blackness in higher education: legacy. To know people like you have walked on this campus, through the halls, and on that graduation stage is exhilarating and powerful. I am left wondering what education means to everyone else. Is it empowering? Chaotic? Overwhelming? I can't pinpoint what education is to me. It simply is.