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# Me, Snoop, and Rich Old People, or Intersectionality and its Impending Effect on Paradigm Shaping and Life Trajectory

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**Abstract:** As part of the *National Collegiate Honors Council's* (2022) collection of essays about the value of honors to its graduates (1967–2019), the author reflects on the personal and professional impacts of the honors experience.

**Keywords:** higher education—honors programs & colleges; *VIBE* (periodical); University of Alabama at Birmingham (AL)—University Honors Program

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**T**he UAB HP transformed me.

It really started with an article—two articles—in a *Vibe Magazine* I was given by the HP Director. The September 1993 issue included two people—one of whom I did not previously know existed—who would change my paradigm. As a 21-year-old from North Birmingham, I was all about Snoop Dogg, 2Pac, and hard-core hip hop, and that article about the old dude would have to wait.

I was given the magazine by two people for two very different reasons: Dail Mullins wanted me to have it because Snoop Dogg was on the cover. Snoop was a rapper and more importantly to me a Crip and one of my heroes for both reasons. Ada Long, the HP director, shared it for the article about Cornel West, who would replace Snoop in my pantheon of people I wanted to

be. The gift of that magazine says as much about my experience as an honors student as any other.

I entered the UAB Honors Program with the clear focus on changing the world through journalism, and I nearly did it. While in the UABHP, I became the section editor of the university's award-winning newspaper, the editor of the HP newsletter, and the co-editor of the university's student magazine. It was not these experiences but the lens that I developed through my HP experience to understand the experiences that make me who I am and will be.

The world when I entered UAB was a much simpler place than it was when I left. Or at least one of us was much simpler. My paradigm, perspective, and purpose were all radically shifted during my HP experience, and I am thankful that I had no idea what college was supposed to be, or I might have ruined it. My HP sojourn was a process without a clear product in which I learned that the process is at least as important as what it produces. The context of my time in honors might be helpful for clarification:

In the fall of 1992 or around that time: Four officers were acquitted (and later indicted) in the Los Angeles beating of Rodney King, and violence erupted in Los Angeles; Caspar W. Weinberger was indicted in the Iran-Contra affair; the courts cleared the Exxon Valdez skipper for an oil spill; and the US Supreme Court reaffirmed the right to abortion—all issues that would be front page on any news blog today—but my main concern then (as now) was a local murder and whether it even mattered to people on the other side of town. That leads back to the *Vibe Magazine*; in that issue I learned a concept that still haunts me: intersectionality. To my knowledge, the word never appeared in the issue, but it was written all through it. Intersectionality helped me to understand why I was nearly kicked out of an African American Literature class for the same subject I was encouraged to talk about in a British Literature class—Race—and it also helped me understand some of the conflicts I had with fellow Christians when talking about Jesus that we never had when talking about religion. It helped me to clarify what it meant to be a Crip-loving, 'Pac-quoting disciple of Christ in a Black Gangster Disciple neighborhood who gave space to LGBT spokespersons and Far-Right advocates in the city where Dr. King was jailed.

That other old dude in the *Vibe* magazine was Cornel West, and during my time in the UAB HP, I would meet Dr. West, Black Panther Bobby Seale, soon to be Massachusetts Governor Duval Patrick, Ralph Nader, and many other movers and shakers, but without the UABHP experience, they would have just been mostly rich old people using big words with little meaning.

Instead, they were like guideposts on my road to Understanding myself and the world into which I was maturing.

The U.S. was headed in the opposite direction from that for which my HP education was preparing me: I learned in a multicultural and multicontextual environment, and I now teach in a context that is divisively unilateral. Not only my HP education but the full experience—seminars, gatherings, fellowships, and colloquia—positioned me to transform a world that is pressing me to conform and choose a side. During my time since graduation—nearly 20 years—I have served in AmeriCorps, the U.S. Army, and Teach for America in that order, and each organization in its own way pushed me to conform, as organizations are wont to do; the contrast between these experiences and my undergraduate education showed me the value of the HP process of developing the ME in me. In the HP, I learned that I could be both/and rather than either/or, even when either/or was more comfortable. I now teach, lead, minister, and counsel in a nation that appears to make either/or a matter of life and death while both/and looks like hypocrisy rather than an attempt to build community. In the HP, I was transformed from the inside out, and now that is the work I attempt to do every day, one person at a time.

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