



## 2021 Best College Essay Finalist

The Writing Initiative Award of \$2000

**Damani Hough**  
Central CT State University

### “To the Roses in Rocks, I Commend You”

I live on a street where the loudest sound is the lawnmowers on an early Saturday morning, cutting away at the grass - not police sirens, or gunshots. I’m an African American girl living during a time when prejudice, pandemics, and school shootings are harsh realities to which we have become numb. There are so many problems and issues going on in America and even though I’m an African American I can say I have privilege, which I understand is not a frequently made statement. I face hardships, but they are not nearly as horrific as others. I am fortunate to have grown up in a state, a town, and a neighborhood where my life is not nearly as threatened as it is for others who look like me. I’m fortunate enough to have a job so I can afford to pay for four AP classes, National Honor Society dues, and basketball league fees. I never could say the most exciting part of my school day was a fight, or when one of the students was arguing with the teacher, paying for a class like most of my peers do; really makes you take your education more seriously.

African Americans are not safe in some states where they are still targeted for frivolous reasons and are forced to give their life for their skin color. I have never had to say that I’m afraid of cops. One time I was late for a basketball game so my mom was speeding, rushing to get to the game and we got pulled over. The cop lectured her and then let her go. Because of our darker skin, that incident definitely could have gone differently and has for others. At my job at Subway, I don’t feel intimidated or fearful I’m going to lose my life when the cops who hang around the Stop & Shop across the street come in for sandwiches. They actually tip me instead of kill me.

My young single mom overcame her stereotypes to give me an ideal living situation which allowed me to expand my knowledge. In a different environment I might be a flower trying to grow in rocks rather than rich soil. My neighborhood has set examples for me that I value. Most people in this neighborhood own their house, have two parents living in the household, have a car for each parent, have big backyards, pools, trampolines, lawnmowers that roar with pride every Saturday morning in the summer or snow blowers that huff and puff away snow in the winter. My neighborhood has given me something to strive for. I work hard to be more than a stereotype, to have more opportunity than my parents, and to give my children even more.

My “black privilege” is ever so evident nowadays. The opportunity to get a job without racial judgement, to be an AVID student, and to be respected by teachers of all races is not a privilege all African Americans have. My neighborhood and environment have shielded me from most of the challenges that come with my melanin infused skin. I need to put my opportunity to good use. It's my responsibility to do what I can to make sure that others like me rise above the quick sand that threatens to keep us from succeeding. If not, I have failed the black community. I want to study journalism so that I can take the issues that plague my race head on. It is my responsibility to fight for a world where location and environment do not so heavily affect an African American’s ability to flourish, where all neighborhoods have a good example and something to strive for, where it’s not rare to be a minority and a homeowner, where we have a chance to grow in rich soil ... and thrive.