

## Making a Hard-Life Story Open a Door to College



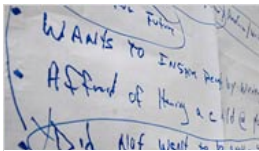
Stephen Crowley/The New York Times

Tracy Asiedu, a high school student from Prince George's County, at the Howard University workshop, with Tom Harrison of College Summit.

By SARA RIMER  
Published: July 27, 2007

WASHINGTON — Antoine Tate, 16, was sitting in a courtyard at Howard University in the heat of a July morning. He was holding a pen, and staring at the blank page on the step beneath him.

### Multimedia



Audio Slide Show

[Counting Words, Courting College](#)

### Related

Student Essays (pdf files):

- [Tracy Asiedu](#)
- [Oluwatope Egwurono](#)
- [Lakesha Fowler](#)
- [Phillip Herring](#)
- [Antoine Tate](#)

He began to write: "Do you ever wonder about where you may end up in the future? At least I know I have. I thought about the worst and best things. I have worried about living half my life in jail. I worried about having a child at a young age. I have worried about living life in poverty, but worst of all, I have thought about accidentally giving my life to God at a young age."

Antoine, who is African-American, will begin his senior year in September at his large, predominantly black and low-income high school just outside Washington. He had come to Howard for an intense four-day workshop in the complex process he will have to master if he is to fulfill his aspirations of upward mobility: applying to college.

"I have dreamed about lending my ideas to people and inspiring many people, especially the youth, through my life," Antoine wrote. "And through my writing."

"College is the key," he wrote, "as well as hope."

These first words were the germ of what would become, after hours and hours of soul-searching, coaching, writing and

[More Articles in Education »](#)

### Movies Update E-Mail

Sign up for the latest movie news and reviews, sent every Friday.

[See Sample](#) | [Privacy Policy](#)

### MOST POPULAR

E-MAILED BLOGGED SEARCHED

1. [Maureen Dowd: Should Hillary Pretend to Be a Flight Attendant?](#)
2. [Birder Admits Killing Cat, but Was It Animal Cruelty?](#)
3. [Thomas L. Friedman: Coulda, Woulda, Shoulda](#)
4. [The Secret? It's Not the Potatoes](#)
5. [Bad Behavior Does Not Doom Pupils, Studies Say](#)
6. [A Lineman in My Bed: Notes on Teeth Grinding](#)
7. [Relative Choices: Who Are You Also Known As?](#)
8. [Study Compares States' Math and Science Scores With Other Countries'](#)
9. [A Good Appetite: Side Dish or Main, Depending on Who's Eating](#)
10. [New Delhi Journal: Monkeys in the Parks, Monkeys in the Palace](#)

[Go to Complete List »](#)



**The New York Times** **TRAVEL**  
[nytimes.com/travel](http://nytimes.com/travel)



Stephen Crowley/The New York Times

William Newman attended a College Summit workshop in June and was excited about the prospect of college. Five days later he was killed.

rewriting, his college application essay.

The essay has become such an important part of applying to college that affluent students may turn to \$200-an-hour writing coaches to help them produce the 500 perfect words that they hope will separate them from the pack.

One staple of the affluent students' essays is the service trip to Latin America. "It's the first time they've seen this wrenching poverty," said Lee Coffin, the director of undergraduate admissions at [Tufts University](#). After a while, however, the trips sound the same.

"My colleagues nod and say, 'It's the typical Costa Rica essay,' " Mr. Coffin said.

But the lives of Antoine and the other 36 students at the workshop, which is run by [College Summit](#), a nonprofit organization, are defined by struggle.

The workshop is intended to help them discover — and prove to college admissions officials — that their life stories can be as powerful as high SAT scores and stellar grades.

The essay is where they get to shine.

"I will not become a stereotype/statistic because many African/Black Americans proved that we can achieve greater heights," Antoine wrote. "Richard Wright is a great, black American writer. Have you read his famous book, "Black Boy." I have, and if you have read it, you should know that he defeated the odds. Same with Martin and his dream."

"Just like these incredible men," he wrote, "I, too, want to defeat the stereotypes."

Antoine is a B student at struggling Crossland High, in Prince George's County, Md., where most of the 1,700 students are black and more than a third are living in poverty. He is a youth leader in his church, but he is not an academic star. He is not one of the handful of students from high schools like his whose numbers attract the attention of diversity-minded college admissions officials. The other seniors with him at Howard had B and C averages.

But his high school's selection of him for the College Summit program, which teams up with both high schools and colleges, substantially increases his odds. The workshops, which 1,500 low-income seniors across the country will attend this summer, are part of College Summit's effort to extend the college-going culture beyond the middle class.

The colleges that play host to the workshops and are eager for more low-income applicants get a first look at the portfolios of the students.

These are the "better-than-their-numbers students," said J. B. Schramm, the [Harvard](#) Divinity School graduate who founded College Summit 14 years ago. They have talent and academic potential not revealed by their SAT scores and grades, Mr. Schramm said. Seventy-nine percent of students who go through the workshops enroll in college, he said, while nationally fewer than 50 percent of low-income students do.

With the application process itself one of the biggest obstacles, he said, many students do not even apply to college. Their parents cannot help them navigate the process because for the most part, like Antoine's parents, they did not go to college themselves.

For Antoine, the first assignment from his writing coach was "Free write for 10 minutes; write about anything you want." The words, the first of thousands he would write and rewrite over the next few days, seemed to just flow out of him, he said.

## Where the Clintons ate in Geneva

Also in Travel:

[Where Ronald Reagan lived before he went into politics](#)  
[Where Senator Obama campaigned on Martha's Vineyard](#)  
[Where George H. W. Bush stayed in Uruguay](#)

### ADVERTISEMENTS

All the news that's fit to personalize.



### The New York Times STORE



Famed Slugger "Goose" Goslin - 1924  
[Buy Now](#)

Donate to the Neediest Cases today!

Ads by Google

what's this?

**The Top Colleges**

Your Reach? Safety School? Your Chances of Admission.  
ThickEnvelope.com

**Dental Colleges**

Request free Information from Dental Colleges In Your Area!  
www.collegebound.net

**College Money**

Find College Money. Compare Competitors and Save.  
FantasticFindings.com

**Tips**

To find reference information about the words used in this article, double-click on any word, phrase or name. A new window will open with a dictionary definition or encyclopedia entry.

**Past Coverage**

- Making a Hard-Life Story Shine And Opening a Door to College (July 27, 2007)
- ON EDUCATION; Challenges in the Lab for Black Colleges' Brightest (July 18, 2007)
- Morehouse Searches For a Leader and a Way To Keep Making Gains (March 28, 2007)
- National Briefing | New England: Massachusetts: A Professor's Hunger Strike (February 6, 2007)

**Related Searches**

- Colleges and Universities
- Blacks

**INSIDE NYTIMES.COM**



OPINION »

DINING & WINE »

WORLD »

MUSIC »

OPINION »

THEATER »



**Thanksgiving Recipes & Tips**

A selection of recipes and articles from the editors of the Dining section.

Relative Choices: Also Known as Lee Hwa Yeong



Monkeys in the Parks, Monkeys in the Palace



Youth Handles the Serving, in Large Portions

**On the Ground: Why Americans Delay Action on Climate Change**



The Lowdown on Broadway's Showdown