MISSION STATEMENT
Wayne County Community College District’s mission is to empower individuals, businesses and communities to achieve their goals through excellent and accessible services, culturally diverse experiences, and globally competitive higher education and career advancement programs.

VISION STATEMENT
Wayne County Community College District will be recognized as an institution that has achieved national and international recognition for enduring excellence as a comprehensive multi-campus community college district. WCCCD will focus on continuous self evaluation and improvement, preparation of a highly skilled workforce in support of the Wayne County economy, student academic and career success, and leadership in strengthening the open door philosophy of educational opportunity.

VALUES STATEMENT
• Excellence in teaching and learning
• Diverse, international and intercultural education
  • Student and community service
  • Integrity

ACCREDITATION
The Wayne County Community College District is accredited by the Higher Learning Commission
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## MESSAGE FROM WCCCD

1

## MESSAGE FROM THE EDITOR

2

## CONTRIBUTORS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tasnim Ara</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lilian Ayogu</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marlene “Lexe” Bailey</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Etheldra G. Bowen</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dennard Calmese</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corey Christopher</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mazharul Islam</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Winston Lightfoot</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Omoanjuaola (Yanju) Ogunfiditimi</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oladapo Ojofeitimi</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samantha Topolewski</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LaDonna Walker-Little</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## REFLECTIVE ESSAYS

7

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Three Lessons After 13</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>by Omoanjuaola “Yanju” Ogunfiditimi</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It Takes a Lot to Get the Shot</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>by Etheldra G. Bowen</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning in America</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>by Oladapo Ojofeitimi</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Cultural Influence</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>by Tasnim Ara</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenges that Lead to Freedom and Empowerment</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>by Lilian Ayogu</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figuring It Out</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>by Mazharul Islam</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proof is in the Photo</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>by Marlene “Lexe” Bailey</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## REFLECTIVE STORY

17

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1964</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>by LaDonna Walker-Little</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## REFLECTIVE POETRY

19

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Being Nice and Friendly</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>by Tasnim Ara</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eyes</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>by Etheldra G. Bowen</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Winter is Cold</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>by LaDonna Walker-Little</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My Daughters</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>by Lilian Ayogu</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## REFLECTIVE ARTWORK

21

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>D-Lights</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>by Corey Christopher</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ridged</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>by Corey Christopher</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Day in the Life</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>by Corey Christopher</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discovering My Style</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>by Samantha Topolewski</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ablaze</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>by Winston Lightfoot</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Artist</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>by Winston Lightfoot</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflecting on Life</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>by Winston Lightfoot</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pyrotechnics at Its Best</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>by Etheldra G. Bowen</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Riverside Park Lighthouse</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>by LaDonna Walker-Little</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Winter Canal on Belle Isle</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>by LaDonna Walker-Little</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welcome to the D</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>by Marlene “Lexe” Bailey</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Welcome to Reflections, the inaugural student literary magazine of the Wayne County Community College District.

We are excited to launch this magazine. In working with this project, our students discovered and explored the treasures of writing and the visual art of photography. As the old expression goes, “A picture is worth a thousand words.”

In today’s fast-paced world of social media, writing more than 140 characters is an undervalued skill. The ability to express yourself and communicate with others through the written word not only will help you professionally, it will enhance your creativity and discipline.

There’s something magical about writing. It allows one to reflect on life, release emotions or tell a story. It provides a freedom of expression that can influence others in ways we never dreamed possible.

For many of the students who contributed to this publication, writing and using photography to capture what inspired them to pursue their dreams was a new experience. We are extremely proud of them and excited to share their talents with you.

I hope Reflections encourages everyone to start writing. Write a poem, an essay or a short story. Maybe start a journal. Whatever you decide to write, it will open up a new world for you.

Best wishes,

Unbreen Amir
Assistant to the Chancellor for Administrative Communication
Wayne County Community College District
As Others Reflect,

Every once in a while I will get into deep thought as I reflect on my career and life. I look at the decisions I have made and the paths I have taken trying to understand present moments in my life. I think it is imperative that we all do that every so often in life. Too often, people wake up and wonder how they got where they are today.

The writers and photographers in this inaugural issue of the Wayne County Community College District’s Reflections student literary magazine have done just that — reflected on life — on careers and talents.

Each offers insight into what they have learned along the way and how reflecting enabled them to grow as a person and move forward reaching toward a goal.

Whether they were overcoming health issues like cancer or cultural shocks as newcomers to America, each student became more self-aware through their writings and photography and they shared that awareness on these pages.

I was honored to work with this team of talented students alongside my colleagues Dennis Niemiec as well as Unbreen Amir and her team.

This entire issue is dedicated to reflecting on life, on self and on passion through the creativity of writing and photography.

Not only did each contributor learn something along the way, they shared lessons to be learned by those who will read this publication. Through their work, you may learn to reflect on your own.

With gratitude,

Vanessa Denha Garmo
Reflections Editor
Tasnim Ara
My name is Tasnim Ara. I was born in Bangladesh. I moved to California at the age of six. Then, I moved to Michigan when I was 16 years old. I am pursuing a degree in Computer Information Systems at WCCCD. I am also a part-time staff member for WCCCD’s International Programs Department. After graduating with my associate’s degree, I plan to transfer to Eastern Michigan University to get a degree in Information Management Technology. I hope to achieve all the goals I have set for myself.

Lilian Ayogu
My name is Lilian Ayogu and I am a nursing student at WCCCD. I grew up in Nigeria and as a young girl faced many challenges. I am in school because I am following my dream. I am happy to share my story in this publication as I reflect on my life.

Marlene “Lexe” Bailey
I am studying Digital Photography at WCCCD. I am a former machinist and am an active member of the Third Eye Camera Club and Midwest Street Photography. I am interning to learn wedding portraiture and event photography.
Etheldra G. Bowen

Taking pictures has been a hobby since I can remember. Retirement, in 2011, gave me the opportunity to focus on becoming a serious photographer. Learning to shoot for myself and not for what I hoped others would see was a turning point that brought a greater sense of freedom, clearer perspective and better quality to my work.

Dennard Calmese

I am not creative. I am not a photographer. I am not a writer, but I love words. I am a critical thinker and analyze everything including my bowling game. That’s right. I am a bowler. I like cars. I worked on cars for years. I am studying Computer Information Systems. When I graduate, I want to work for the Michigan State Police. It took me three hours to write the poem that I submitted for this publication. I participated in this project for the Reflections magazine to challenge myself. And, I have been challenged.

Corey Christopher

I am a business major and photography student in my freshman year at WCCCD. I am extremely motivated by love, family and faith. I returned to college after a 20-year-haitus with a photographic eye, focused on greatness. I aim to be a future graduate of the University of Michigan class of 2022. I have always had a love for photography and was driven to this program to share my talent. I come from an entrepreneurial family and have a business mind. My aspirations are to transform my passion for photography into a business.
Mazharul Islam
My name is Mazharul Islam. I was born in Bangladesh and came to Michigan in 2014. Currently, I am studying Computer Information Systems and completing my internship at WCCCD. My future goal is to work for WCCCD at a professional level to help students.

Winston Lightfoot
I was born in Detroit, Michigan. I am a Digital Photography major. This is my second year at WCCCD. I am an only child. I love elephants and would love to travel and take pictures of them one day. I would love to take pictures of animals in nature, mostly because I love the colors and different species that can be found. I love music and play piano but I can’t read sheet music. Art and music have always been a part of my life.

Omoyanjuola (Yanju) Ogunfiditimi
I am a 17-year-old senior at Northville High School who already has an Associate’s Degree from Wayne County Community College District in General Studies. I am part of a dual enrollment program. I participated in this project for the literary magazine because I like to share my story and see others happy with smiles on their faces. I want to become a veterinarian because I have an overwhelming love for animals. I want to help them by learning how to operate on them and care for them. My advice to others is that I believe that we should look to learn from the challenges life throws at us.
Oladapo Ojofeitimi
I am from Nigeria, West Africa. I am studying Computer Information Systems and Business Administration at WCCCD. I also work in WCCCD’s International Programs Department. I plan to pursue a Master’s Degree in Computer Science at the University of Michigan.

Samantha Topolewski
My name is Samantha Topolewski. I’m from a small town called Pinconning in northern Michigan. I moved to Ypsilanti after high school to pursue a college education. I will be graduating from WCCCD in the summer of 2018 with an Associate in General Studies Degree. I originally wanted to become a veterinarian, but found my passion lies in photography. I find enjoyment in creating something I’ve pictured in my head and then brought to life. I hope to spend my life doing what I love and make some money while doing it.

LaDonna Walker-Little
I consider myself a lifelong learner, a serial entrepreneur, an artist and a maker. I am also a Detroiter, a wife, daughter, sister, aunt, relative and friend. My dad took photos as a hobby. I have always liked photography but never saw it as a career or job. I took this photography class because I am taking over the video ministry at my church. It was suggested that I take a photography class to help with the ministry and now I am more focused on photos than videos.
May 2013, I was running in a track meet. I’m the fastest 12-year-old on the team about to beat the school record. Suddenly, I tripped over my own two feet and the crown of my head met base with the hot concrete. I lay on the ground in pain with a bruised knee, sprained thumb, and a pounding headache. At that moment, my journey began. It would change my life in ways I never imagined. Three lessons I learned after the age of 13 shaped the person I am today.

I was rushed to urgent care where doctors told me I might have a minor concussion. They gave me a cast for my sprained thumb and told me to take some medicine and rest. I felt miserable. My headaches became more frequent and stronger by the day. They followed strange on and off patterns but I didn’t mention any of this to my parents. Not a single word. Summer was just about to start and the last thing I wanted was for my parents to make me stay inside all day or take me to the hospital so I decided not to tell them thinking I’d feel better on my own eventually. That secret only lasted a month. By July, the pain was so bad that I was forced to tell my parents. After doing so, they took me to the hospital as predicted. The doctor said I probably just had a migraine but this time he suggested I get an MRI just in case.

July 17, 2013, 9:00 a.m., I get a text from my mom saying, “Pack your bags, I’m taking you to the hospital, they are probably going to admit you.” At this point I’m in so much pain I could barely move. My head felt like a cinder block. Reluctantly, I was able to get myself up and head outside to where my parents swooped around the cul de sac and we raced to the ER. The car ride was dead silent, not a word was spoken. I had no idea what was going on but I was in too much pain to care. All I wanted was to get better and back to my summer.

When we arrived at the hospital, I was put into a surgery prep room. My mom mentioned to the nurse something about the doctor finding a tumor in my head and it needed to get removed immediately. That word stuck out to me —“tumor.” I had heard it before in science class but all I really knew was that it was some kind of mass. This actually put me at ease because I figured they would just take the mass out and I could get on with my summer. I had no idea what awaited me.

The nurse preparing me for surgery said she would have to shave part of my head where my surgery incision would be made. I completely freaked out. Shaving my hair was the last of all things that I wanted to do that summer. As a girl who just turned 13, hair was everything to me. I had never cut my hair before and was not happy with the idea. Reluctantly, I let her shave it under the impression that it would grow back and then I could enjoy my summer.

Surgery took eight hours. I don’t remember much but I do know that I stayed in the hospital about two weeks.

Back home, I had to stay in the basement where everything was clean. There was a kitchen, bedroom and bathroom down there so that I would not have to climb the stairs.

My best friend came to visit me. This is when I learned my first lesson after 13. What is a true friend? My best friend Emma was the first friend to come visit me at home and that meant everything to me. We were in my basement just talking about life when she said, “Yanju, do you know that your tumor is malignant?” I said, “What does malignant mean?” She responded, “It means cancerous, do you know that you have cancer?” At the time, I didn’t know but I always suspected so. It just seemed weird to me that no one actually told me what was wrong but she did and that’s what makes her a good friend. Best friends tell you the truth even when it hurts.

I learned the difference between “true friend” and “friend” throughout my journey because I was blessed with love and support from friends and family.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 8
From family it’s expected, but from friends it really meant something to me. Support varied from “Stay strong, we love you!” comments on Instagram to people actually coming to visit me in the hospital. I even remember when the entire eighth grade wore yellow on “Yellow for Yanju Day” in support of childhood cancer awareness.

All of that was truly amazing, but I learned quickly that there are different types of friendship. Friends are people that do what any other human being with good morals would do. They smile and wave as I walk by in the halls; occasionally shouting out “stay strong” as I walk by. True friends take off their shoes and step into your own and walk with you every step of the way. For example, my best friend Emma didn’t just come see me in the hospital, she followed me home, kept me company, made me laugh, sat with me at lunch and made me eat even when I didn’t feel like it. She meant it when she said, “If you need anything let me know.” Those were sacred words. It’s important to hold on to true friends like Emma.

As the summer was coming to an end, it was time for me to start radiation treatment. I remember my dad mentioning that I would start to lose my hair when I started chemotherapy in December. I assumed everything would still be normal throughout the next six weeks of radiation. Boy, was I mistaken. At the radiologist’s office, the doctor told me that one of the common side effects of radiation is losing your hair. The minute I heard that I bursted into tears. My hair symbolized cancer in a way. Losing my hair meant losing my life. It was almost as if cancer was taking me apart piece by piece, starting with my hair. I completely lost it in the doctor’s office. With the support of my mom, I was able to pull myself together. It was time to buckle down because school was starting soon. It was time to begin the 8th grade.

School was easy for me. As I mentioned, my friends and teachers were extremely supportive and did everything they could to make my battle with cancer easier. For example, my teachers only graded me on work that I could complete. My friends supported me by hosting the aforementioned “Yellow for Yanju Day.”

For the most part if was a breeze, but, as seen in all schools, there were also some bullies. You’d think people wouldn’t pick on a kid with cancer but I still had a few names thrown at me. People called me ugly and told me that I look like a bat because I had no hair. One person even told me that I should be dying in a hospital instead of going to school. A lot of these comments brought me down. Then my mom gave me some advice. She said that whenever I’m in a slump like that, the devil is happy, and that’s not okay so I need to bring up my attitude. So whenever someone made me feel bad I would continue to tell myself, “You’re beautiful, you can do this, it’s all about that attitude.” I would repeat that to myself every day. That’s when I learned lesson number two – what it means to have faith.

I learned a new word along my journey through cancer. The word “testimony;” evidence statement of a witness. I was always a Christian, never a big church goer, but when diagnosed with a rare stage three brain cancer I didn’t have a choice but to put all of my faith into God. My journey centered on how bad could it get without me losing faith. It was a test. How many headaches could I have without giving up, how many times could I throw up without giving in to the devil, how many sleepless nights could I have and still pray to God? My answers to these questions defined what faith means to me. I knew that if I was going to win this battle I needed a positive attitude and faith. I knew that if I continued to have faith in God, I would make it out just fine.

After six weeks of radiation and six months of chemotherapy, I was pronounced cancer free. There aren’t enough words in the dictionary to express how I felt. It felt like I could do anything now that I’ve beaten cancer. As I opened up a new chapter in life, I opened up myself. I was a new person after beating cancer. I had a new outlook on life. I valued things like family, friends, and my hair. I became less shy and open to try new things because I realized how short life can be. I was more thankful for what I had instead of complaining about what I didn’t have. I became the Yanju that everyone loves today.

In fact, I learned the most important lesson of them all before I turned 17. I learned who I am. My battle with cancer has changed who I am inside and out. The Yanju before cancer wouldn’t even hang out with me now. It took one good year to finally figure out who I am, but now I’m living my life like it’s golden.
My city, Detroit, looks great at night, and I wanted to capture a nice shot of it all dressed up in the night lights. I tried several approaches from different spots downtown, but being in the midst of the buildings provided a very limited view no matter which way I turned. I needed a wider perspective. While walking around looking for a better location, I glanced across the Detroit River. It suddenly occurred to me that shooting from Windsor, Ontario, Canada would be the perfect angle for a great landscape shot of my city. So, the next day, I made a hotel reservation for an overnight stay in Canada, packed my gear and made my way downtown and through the tunnel to Canada.

Once checked in, I didn’t waste any time. I grabbed my equipment and headed for the waterfront. Before the fall of darkness, the setting sun provided a beautiful view of the city, bathed in the warm light of the sunset, softly cloaked in a few remaining clouds. Then, night took over, and beautifully lit, the view was awesome! Caught up in the glow of the city, I stepped into that place where photographers go – the photo zone. I tested different camera settings and took pictures from every angle – the left, the right, atop a stairway, zoom in or go wide. It was exhilarating! I was having so much fun that I barely noticed the change in the weather. The rain that day left a chill in the air that had grown much colder. It was time to get in out of the elements.

When I turned from the river and began walking towards the stairway to the street, a shimmer of light in a puddle of water caught my eye. To get a better look, I walked around the puddle, took a few steps back, and bent down to see where the light was coming from. In awe, I looked up across the river then back down into the puddle. There, in a puddle of water – in another country - was a perfectly beautiful reflection of the Detroit riverfront.

I love taking pictures that show reflections, and I wasn’t going to miss this one. As soon as I started shooting, I realized that this wasn’t going to be as easy as I had imagined. The puddle was small, the angle was awkward, and my camera, lens and tripod positioning was not working at all. Too low, too high, too close, too far! Not only was it frustrating, but it was nearing midnight and getting much colder. So, after quite a few failed attempts, I reluctantly gathered my gear and headed back to the hotel.

Once back in the warmth of my room, the reflection-loving photographer in me could not - would not - rest. I wanted that shot, and there had to be a way to make it work. Think! I knew what I needed - something flat, about two inches thick, and long enough to support the length of my camera and lens - but I had no idea what would work. I was about to give up when the light bulb in my brain got brighter! I opened the desk drawer and pulled out the Bible. Yes, the “Good Book”? I remounted the lens onto my camera, put the book on the table, placed the camera on the Book – this just might work! To protect it from the elements, I wrapped the Book in plastic, bundled up, grabbed my camera and headed back out into the night to get my shot.

When I got to the puddle, I lay down flat, spread-eagle on the ground, set the Book in a strategic spot, found the perfect angle to capture the scene I wanted, selected camera settings, focused, and with a remote cable release in hand, I started clicking away. When I checked the camera’s display, the results made me smile. I had captured the scene just as I saw it, and it was beautiful!

Satisfied with my efforts, I headed back in. Sitting in my hotel room, very pleased with my photo, I was reminded of just how much it sometimes takes to “get the shot.” Sometimes it takes conviction, determination, extra effort, and maybe even some calisthenics, to deliver the best results. That day, I called on all of those elements to achieve my goal. There I was - a seasoned senior citizen, stretched out on the cold ground in the middle of the night, in another country - getting that shot!
There is much I have learned as a foreign student in America, much more than what my instructors taught me.

I am an information technology professional with specialization and certifications in IT security. I am studying the emerging trends and technology in a rapidly changing field.

In order to understand the life lessons I would like to share, you must understand the differences between my home country of Nigeria, West Africa and the United States.

There is the obvious – the cultural differences. You won’t know it by reading this essay but once you talk to me, you will figure out that I have a different accent. Most people do not know where I am from exactly. They pick Africa but they think Africa is one big country. In reality, there are about 54 countries in Africa. Here is a geography lesson – Africa is a continent.

When someone tells me, I have an accent, I say “Wow! Yes and you have an accent too.” The truth is that everyone has an accent; it depends on who is doing the evaluating. I usually ask people to repeat a word – Yoruba—that I say in my native language. Of course, they never pronounce it properly, an indication that they have an accent as well.

I have had to spell out words to people who sometimes misunderstand me. My accent sometimes is misunderstood. I never misunderstand the people I am talking with; I hear every one of their words clearly. However, I cannot recall a misunderstood accent when the discussion is about “money.” Surprisingly, all ears involved in the conversation decipher the contents of my message if the subject of the discussion is about money they can benefit from. Money must be a universal language. What a miracle!

When I visited London, England, I never experienced the accent scenario. There were free flows of effective verbal communication. Our lingua franca in Nigeria is British English, as there are more than 450 languages in the country. The spellings and pronunciations of some words are different from here in America.

Another obvious cultural difference is food. Traditional Nigerian food is much different and much more expensive here because it is imported. Funny enough, it took time for me to get used to eating at Subway. I am accustomed to eating spicy foods back home and so it was a totally different taste experience with Subway. Another issue was selecting the different toppings. I would simply tell the server to give me whatever he/she always eats. This request seemed odd to the server but I did not care about the final product. “All tastes good, regardless” was how I consoled myself. I should note that I enjoy eating at Subway now. It is served at many events on the WCCCD campuses and my taste buds have adapted accordingly and surprisingly.

Another cultural difference: How we communicate. For example, a classmate was sick and I wanted to inquire about her health but when I literally translated it from my language, I said, “How is your body?” I had no idea my choice of words had a different meaning to her until she repeated my question with some sort of surprise on her face. I asked why she looked so puzzled and she replied with a smile that I should have asked about her well-being instead. That was a learning curve.
Nigeria is still a developing country but it is not what some people in America imagine it to be. People don’t walk around in a jungle with lions roaming around. No, I didn’t live in a tree. Nigeria is the most populous black nation in the world with many of the same infrastructures and amenities that exist in the United States. Sometimes I tease my classmates that we ride on elephants for transportation. They seem amazed until I tell them I’m joking.

Not only have I had to learn about the American lifestyle but I have had the opportunity to teach others about life in my country and showcase the rich cultures that exist in the African continent. At the end of a knowledge-sharing session, my audience would leave more informed and wanting to know more about Africa. Some expressed their desire to visit Nigeria someday.

...I have had the opportunity to teach others about life in my country and showcase the rich cultures that exist in the African continent.

In addition to the basic lifestyle differences, student life is also very different in the two countries. In Nigeria, education is structured and rigorous at the same time. Here in America, it is more convenient because one can select their class times and campus; in Nigeria, they are chosen for you. However, in America, if you are not careful you can fall behind quickly because tons of homework is given. That is not always the case in Nigeria.

Here at WCCCD, there is access to tools and devices that I did not have access back home. There are practical and hands-on applications here in America that really don’t exist in my homeland.

For example, if you are studying a computer course, each student is provided a lab computer for acquiring real-life knowledge. In Nigeria, the student only receives a theory based experience in most public colleges.

At WCCCD, the classrooms and labs are conducive for learning with a smaller number of students in a classroom than in Nigeria. The college also seeks feedback from students which leads to improvements. That has been a big plus in helping me to contribute and adapt to my new surroundings.

However, I have faced many challenges such as transportation and networking. There is not a solid mass transit system in the Detroit Metropolitan region. That is a big challenge for a foreign student. You just have to own a car to be really comfortable.

There are opportunities to socialize and network with other students through the International Student Organization. You have to make an effort to meet people and share ideas. Some students keep to themselves and do not talk to others. This can be a big hinderance. We need to meet new people and share ideas.

When you talk to others, you learn more about the life here and prospects such as scholarship opportunities that are widespread compared to those in Nigeria. If you buckle up and focus on your goals in America, you can succeed. Abide by the rules and regulations, respect one another, be studious and you will adapt well.

Finally, I am always open to collaborations with people from all walks of life. My goal is to contribute positively and progressively to the development of this great country and humanity at large. Learning in America is in no small measure a reinforcement of this vision. What a wonderful experience! God bless America!
The Cultural Influence

by Tasnim Ara

My life drastically changed when I moved from California to Michigan.

When I was in California, I never had the chance to stay with people who were the same race or religion as me. I did not get exposed to a lot of cultural things because there wasn’t anyone from my homeland where I used to live. It was just our family.

I am a Bengali girl from Bangladesh. Bengali culture is very simple. There are traditional outfits such as a sari and salwar kameez. There aren’t many holidays or major events but the two big ones are Ramadan and two yearly Eid days, which are Eid ul Fitr and Eid ul Adha.

When we celebrate Eid we usually go to our relatives’ and friends’ houses to eat and greet them for the occasion. Where I was living we only had one house to go to, my uncle’s.

Since childhood, I never had all the experiences people get in terms of culture. There are cultural holidays featuring festivals held for people to gather and celebrate. I only heard about those festivals but never had the chance to experience them. I only learned what my parents had taught me, but I never got to experience any of it in real life. There are many Bengali holidays which I only heard of but never experienced.

When I moved to Michigan, I got the chance to meet people who share the same background as me. When I first moved, I was uncomfortable with everything. There was one girl who had moved to Michigan the same time I did and we started school together. She was experiencing the same situation. We always stayed together and were there for each other. We never got along with anyone else for about two years.

When I first moved to Michigan from California I was very uncomfortable because I never knew what to expect. I was not comfortable talking to anyone although most people I was around came from the same place and shared the same home country. It took me about a year to get used to everything. Now it feels very much like home.

There are many people who come from the same place I did who I can always relate with. I feel like my parents made one of the best decisions when they decided to move here. If I ever had a choice of choosing either to stay here or move back, I would never choose to go back. I became used to this place in just about six years. It taught me that it is important to have people you can relate to around you.

My mom and dad always tried to teach me as much as they could. Although they taught me everything, the only thing I wish I had was the experience of all these big festivities and events. I missed out on celebrating so many holidays that are celebrated back home.

Once I got to Michigan, I had made one friend who also moved to Michigan. We went through everything together in middle school because we were both new to this environment. Today, I am in a place which I love. Today, I can say that the life I have now I would not trade for anything.
Challenges that Lead to Freedom and Empowerment

by Lilian Ayogu

Growing up as a young girl was a challenge but the very best aspect of my story is the “never say never” attitude that has made me never give up on myself.

I’m Lilian Ayogu, a nursing student at Wayne County Community College District in Downtown Detroit. I was born into a family of eight with three sisters and two brothers in Nigeria and it’s been awesome growing up together as one great family.

In my early college days, I was faced with challenges that almost deprived me of continuing my education because it was believed by some that training a girl child is a waste of money. But as fate would have it, my parents did not give in to peoples’ counsel. I successfully graduated from college and a few months later I was asked to learn a trade since that would be my career along with being a wife and mother. I didn’t have a choice but to go and learn a trade. But while I was still waiting for my parents to decide what kind of trade to learn, my uncle came in with a friend who later introduced himself as my future husband. In less than a few months, I became a wife at age 19 and had my first child at age 20. I continued with my career in child production, don’t laugh alone…I graduated with a Ph.D. in child production with five stars, three girls and two boys with whom I am well pleased.

The journey for a greener pasture started in the year 2015, after I lost my first child in February 2014. My child was 19 years old and a university undergrad. It was like a dream that was never clear to me as to what to do, where to go and the big question – WHY ME? It was an unexplainable scenario that made me lose my mind and totally black out. I was in the hospital bed for months and afterwards I was recovering from the shock and loss of a dearly beloved son. But like I have always told myself, I can only get better and eventually my doctor confirmed my fitness to continue my education. My family said I should stop and see how I can help my family with petty business but I refused to heed that advice. I had suffered domestic violence and neglect from family and friends but that didn’t stop my vision of becoming a better me. I went back to finish my degree and in 2015 I graduated with a degree in Business Administration. That gave me the strength to move on and make the world a better place. I had many bitter experiences when I lost my child but I chose to let go to continue with my dreams of building my legacy for the unborn girl child. According to Martin Luther King, “I have a dream.”

Indeed, I have a dream that my generation will be great if only they can believe in themselves. My determination for life became more interesting when I realized according to the Bible,” I can do all things through Christ who strengthened me, Philippians 4:13.” This very quote made my faith so deep that every step I took turned out to be the best and that driving force brought me to the United States of America, a land flowing with milk and honey, God’s own state. I arrived in America with the vision to complete my education with a master’s degree in Business Management. But that became a dashed dream because I could not afford the tuition fee. That made me rethink and redirect my decision to study nursing as my second degree.

As an international student, I was happy to make the Dean’s List in 2017…

My journey to WCCCD was not my decision but God’s mandate. I gained admission to study nursing as my second degree in 2017. I was so happy because the tuition fee was affordable and the college was flexible, academically standard, environmentally friendly and conducive for learning. The professors are all great men and women of integrity. The students and the staff are also unique in their own ways. They are all great people, very helpful and welcoming as they make everyone feel at home with no discrimination or holding back. This opportunity launched me into a future of learning and working hard.

As an international student, I was happy to make the Dean’s List in 2017, which has brought me so much joy. I’m happy to see the flag flying with beautiful colors and wish to soar higher by the grace of God. These great privileges given to me have built me to be strong and dream bigger, for it’s written, “with God all things are possible” Matthew 19:26. I am happy to have faith in God, and also understand that achievement requires vision, hard work, determination, dedication and most importantly, belief in yourself. Age is not and will never be a barrier to fulfilling destiny. Don’t give up on yourself, for God has not given up on you. God bless you all.
In one word I would describe my life as “foreign.” I grew up in Bangladesh and moved to the United States in 2014. America was foreign to me and I foreign to the people in America.

When you are foreign in a foreign land there is so much to figure out.

When I first came to the USA, I did not know what to expect. My life totally changed once I stepped on American soil. I felt alone even though I had my family with me, but I had to leave all my friends behind.

Everything felt so different. I did not know what kind of turns my life was about to take. I was older than 18, which is why I could not enroll in high school. I really wanted to study but because of my age I couldn’t start from high school. I needed someone to guide and advise me on what I should or shouldn’t do. I believed whatever I was told and enrolled in English as a Second Language (ESL) classes. After I completed my ESL classes, I began to take GED classes and learn as much as I could to further my studies. After I took my GED classes, I decided I wanted to enroll in college.

I had no one to confide in. I didn’t know if I should start helping my family financially or if I should pursue my education. I had family members who needed help and at the time only my father was working.

I eventually got a job. I faced many challenges on my way to college because I was working full-time and it was difficult to manage the timings. I did not know how to apply or go through the process needed to start college. I did not know anyone who could have helped me out when it came to going through the whole process. No one in my family was in college so whatever I did I had to do it on my own.

I had to figure it out. I was completely lost and I couldn’t find any help. I decided to attend college and just look around and try to ask questions and go through with it. It took me four tries to actually get to the admissions process. When I first started, I still did not know anyone and I had no help. I had to do everything on my own. It took me a while to get used to that new environment where everything is so different and I felt like it’s just me fighting through all of this hurdles that came up.

Now when I think about what I had to go through, I feel proud of myself. I really did figure things out. Because of the things I had to face and what I had to go through, I know what I know today. Other people who do not have to struggle to get places, may not learn. When someone goes through problems and struggles, the experience stays with him for a lifetime. Whatever I have done in my life, I did it on my own. I did not have anyone to talk me through the process. This is why I never take anything for granted.

People do not learn when everything is handed to them. You only learn when you fight through every process and do it on your own. It is a life lesson that I learned through my experience which, I will never forget.

Now whenever I want to do or know something I get out of my comfort zone and I try to go and figure it out by myself. I never tell anyone to do anything for me because I am responsible for myself; at the end of the day and I need to do what needs to be done by myself. You only learn when you go through problems. When someone is always there for you, to do it for you, you never learn anything no matter what the issue is.

I will be graduating in 2018 and all my hard work will be paid off. Everything I had to go through was all worth it.

Life in Bangladesh was easier because I had my family who supported me. I was in college and I had people guide me through—showing me what I should and should not do. But here in America, it’s different. Every challenge I faced, I faced it alone. I had no one to help me. It taught me that hard work does pay off and that I just had to figure it out.
I take classes at Wayne County Community College District because it affords me the opportunity to learn and study my passion—photography.

Ever since high school, I wanted to learn photography. My school offered photography through its partnership with a vocational-technological school; however, I missed the deadline for enrollment. Students had to enroll in the 10th grade but I did not find out that photography was offered until I was in the 11th grade. Once I graduated high school, I checked to see if photography was offered at WCCCD but the only photography offered at that time was forensic. Fast forward to 2017, I checked the WCCCD website again and saw photography as a course offering, "This is my season to finally learn photography!" I said. My first classes started in the Fall of 2017.

In my first class, I learned how to use the digital camera I had just bought. I wanted to know what all of those letters and pictures on that top dial meant. All of the buttons on the back, what were they and how are you supposed to use them? But my ultimate goal was to learn how to shoot in manual mode to take my own sharp, crisp images! I did not want to just have the camera do all the work in auto mode.

I continue to take photography classes expecting to learn everything there is to know about digital photography. I also want to study and learn the history behind photography. Who were the greats? What area of photography did they specialize in? How did they capture the picture? Even though we are in the technological age of digital photography, I would love to learn how to take photos with a camera using film and how to develop the film in a dark room.

“Ever since high school, I wanted to learn photography.”

While driving I noticed the old Packard Plant standing in ruins.

As I came across the bridge and veered to the right, the first thing I saw was the buildings of downtown Detroit.

As I looked around in the 32-degree, frigid temperature of February, I saw the bare trees and iced over pond behind it and thought this would make a pretty picture.
My first class using my digital camera was Photographic Lighting with Mr. Andre Smith, class instructor. He gave us the assignment to go to Belle Isle and take a few images (Landscape). I took the scenic route.

I have learned many things since taking my first photos. My very first attempt to shoot in manual resulted in an overly exposed image. I'm laughing just thinking back on that day! The LCD screen was white, nothing there! I asked myself, "What are you doing wrong?" I snapped a few more shots to no avail. I got back into my truck and flipped through my class book, The Beginner's Photography Guide. I reviewed the chapter on exposure, which helped me recall what my instructor called "blown out photos!" So I made an adjustment to my ISO, got out and took a shot. Now, I could see a bit of the building across the river. I read a bit more and made corrections to my aperture and shutter speed. I took a few more shots and I could see more of the image on the screen that I was looking at with my natural eye. By the next shot I had all the correct settings and was able to take a picture that came out right on my first click.
It was 1964 and school was out for the summer. It was the summer of my ninth birth-year and it was epic! The country was still in mourning after the assassination of President Kennedy. Of course, there were a lot of other things which happened, but only a couple of things really left an impression on me... One, the introduction of the Beatles! Understandably, I was just nine and their music wasn’t like anything I had ever heard before! The second, was being able to hang out with my older teenage cousins, Betty and Ann.

Nearby, only a short distance from where I lived, there was a local public library. My cousins (Betty and Ann) had finally given me the okay to travel with them to the neighborhood library to read books. My mom, finally indulging her bookish, nerdy, oldest child, had allowed me to go with them to the library. I was so excited! For you to fully understand my excitement, I’m going to give you a synopsis of the Detroit neighborhood where I grew up. It was known as the North End and considered to be an artist community prior to people titling such areas as “artist communities.” Our neighborhood consisted of a complex mixture of artists, business people, common workers, the poor, the middle class as well as those considered to be wealthy, all living together within one community.

But let’s get back to my epic adventure as a nine-year-old! My cousins lived a couple of blocks north on a street called Philadelphia. I lived with my family on Riopelle Street near Clay in the shadow of a factory known as the Russell Industrial Center. The library we would be going to was called the Utley Branch, located on Woodward Avenue between Alger and King Streets. Because we were somewhat adventurous kids, we liked to take many different routes to the library. However, despite our adventurous nature, we always found it necessary to journey down Clay Street past the local confectionary store, Karpinski’s restaurant, Joe’s Market, a host of grocery stores, the hair salon, a few bars, and of course the plethora of churches. The North End was known for its many churches. We’d continue our travel until we reached Oakland Avenue, where we would turn to the right and walk past the hardware store. Directly across the street and in front of Charlie the Pencil Man’s Patent Medicine store or Gastman’s Liquor Store, there would usually be at least three or four fellows singing an a cappella song. I would later learn that some of the guys were Motown singers. The rest of course were just a collection of singer wannabes hoping to be discovered and possibly land a music contract. On occasion, my cousins and I would hang around and listen to them momentarily, and sometimes if we knew the song we would join in before we continued to the library! Although there were several streets we could travel en route to the library, one of our favorite streets was Chandler. On that street, you could find many grand homes, all well maintained and beautifully landscaped. One of our favorite games was picking out the home that would one day be ours.

Finally, we would arrive at Woodward Avenue, which is the most significant street in the North End community, as well as in Detroit. I know this because Woodward avenue is labeled Michigan Highway One (1). Everyone knew where Woodward Avenue was. If you were going to do any major clothes shopping you went south on Woodward Avenue towards Downtown. We had drugstores and 5 and 10 stores in the North End but if you needed something special the large stores were on Woodward Avenue. The neighborhood high school is on Woodward Avenue. The main community center is on Woodward Avenue and all of the biggest churches are on Woodward Avenue. But most importantly, the Utley Branch Library is on Woodward Avenue. It was spectacular in its impressiveness and it sat on an entire city block! Having reached our destination I would happily run off to read my books while my cousins would meet up with their supposed “boyfriends.” After a reasonable period, we would start our journey home. The trip home

CONTINUED ON PAGE 18
was always down Alger Street towards Oakland Avenue. This was our route primarily because we always made a stop at Mason’s Funeral Home. If you are unfamiliar with the quirkiness of teenage girls, you might wonder why would anyone make a regular stop at a funeral home? Primarily, for me and my cousins, it was to see if Mr. Mason had any “fresh bodies.” During our visit on this particular hot summer day, I had remained at my usual spot in the reception area of the funeral home, having long since had my fill of fresh bodies! For some reason I had elected to stay near the front door. My cousins, with their gruesome selves, had quickly disappeared into the dark bowels of the funeral home. Mr. Mason, whom I had never spoken to, decided to come out of his office, or wherever funeral directors hung out, and greeted me with a very melodious “Can I help you little girl?” I remember looking upwards at a person who I thought had to be at least seven feet tall! He appeared to be extremely thin and had a gray cast to his skin. The next thing I recalled, I was knocking on the screen door of my home and screaming for my mother to let me in the house. I always thought that I had run about three or four miles at a record breaking speed but it turns out it was only about three quarters of a mile. Needless to say, that was my last trip to the library with my cousins, who had a difficult time explaining how I had arrived home without them. I believe their library/funeral home visits were curtailed also.

Growing up as a part of the North End community instilled in me a love of community! I learned firsthand what it feels like to be connected in a community rich in history and I learned how to appreciate all its treasures. Being raised up in a musically inclined, artistic family, I respected and appreciated art in all its various genres. I loved music and would often reflect on my adventures as a child eagerly listening to the street singers and musicians who performed. It wasn’t until many years later that I learned how rich my encounters with some street performers were. I later learned that Smokey Robinson, Diana Ross, Aretha Franklin, Levi Stubbs, Renaldo (Obie) Benson, Lawrence Payton, and Bettye LaVette as well as many other noted musicians all lived in the North End. Although many years have passed, I still wonder if one of the street performers I enjoyed listening to could have been one of them, a famous Motown artist?
**Being Nice and Friendly**  
*by Tasnim Ara*

I am nice and friendly  
I wonder if the world will become a better place  
I hear little kids crying  
I see the little kids’ eyes calling for help  
I want to help the ones in need  
I am nice and friendly

I pretend I am already in heaven  
I feel sad by seeing the ones in need  
I touch the little boy’s soft cheeks  
I worry that he will not have a bright future  
I cry out for help  
I am nice and friendly

I understand there are people in need  
I say please make the world a better place  
I dream the world is perfect  
I try to understand everyone’s feelings  
I hope everyone is safe  
I am nice and friendly

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**Eyes**  
*by Dennard Calmese*

Marvelous indeed, how they grace us in their own presence;  
Artistic: the mindset of he who created them in his image;  
Realistic are the dreams I believe as I catch the smallest glimpse;  
I must protect them; they are my salvation;  
A thought arises; why am I so bewildered?  
How might I describe them, you ask?  
Perception unbiased; “perfection” does them no justice;  
Abstract are my thoughts; leading back to the brush guilty of painting them; right?  
The cusp of beauty;  
Time: the only destruction they face is age, yet made sweeter by each second that passes by;  
Echoes of comfort; soundwaves of sight bouncing off my retinas;  
Refusing to be introverted;  
Succumbed to my feeling worthlessness and worthiness in the same breath;  
Open are the eyelids as they sweep toward me; still I sit; here comes my glimpse;  
Now, I shall stare into them; as they hold me in their embrace.
Let me write that for you again
Winter is cooooold
It don't matter if you live in
Detroit, Chicago, New York, or Birmingham
WINTER IS COLD
That's one of the reasons that I like winter
That and the fact that winter is impartial
No matter who you are If you go outside
Chances are, you'll get cold too
Yeah, WINTER IS COLD
When it's been -10°F have you ever
Just stood around, and looked
Looked at the people buzzing around
The cars steaming along, the slush freezing up
Yeah, that's right WINTER IS COLD
You know, there are other things that are
cold too
One of them is people
Yep, people are so cold, one look could
freeze you to death
Yeah, that's right WINTER IS COLD, But
WINTER IS IMPARTIAL

“...
**D-Lights**

_by Corey Christopher_

In the evening or twilight hours, you can see the world differently. Here you don’t see a clear picture of the city. This is a reflection on just simple beauty. You don’t even have to know what exactly is going on at this moment. It lends itself to tell its own story. Maybe it was a night out or a day at work for someone. It’s about seeing beauty at the end of a day.

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**Ridged**

_by Corey Christopher_

How many of you form an opinion without taking a closer look at the subject or issue? Does a tree trunk look the same 100 feet away as it does 50 feet away or right up close? No, it doesn’t. There are details and nuances you can’t see unless you get up close. Sometimes in life we have to take a closer look at things before we make decisions or assumptions. This is a reflection on how we look at things in life.
At any given moment in my day, I see images worth capturing in a photo. Often with my camera in tow, I snap away. What makes life so enticing, are the images we will see and maybe don’t expect. Each picture tells a part of my day – part of my story. I share some of them as I reflect on the moments of any given day in my life.

1. It was about 5:50 on a Monday morning and I wake up to the beauty of art.

2. At 7:03 on a Tuesday morning, I catch the sunrise as I start my daily grind.

3. This was 7:30 on a Monday morning as I put the keys into the ignition my vantage point is focused on what motivates my soul.

4. It is 8:04 on a Wednesday morning while driving on Highway I-75 in Detroit, I glance at the Russell Bazaar.
5. It is 3:30 in the afternoon and coming up to my intersection, I dodge the inevitable surface that those of us called “Detroit Natives” avoid every single day – a pothole.

6. It’s the gridlock of the afternoon commute that traps me at 4:07 on a Monday.

7. It’s tough time to be awake - 3:17 in the morning on Thursday in the middle of a 10-hour work shift, I drive the frozen tundra of the Parts and Redistribution Center at Ford.

8. It’s 8:45 on a Friday night and it was my last load of my night, with the time clock sight.

9. This is at 4:01 on a Thursday afternoon - spread your fingers and pop your wrist, budding stages of basketball greatness.

10. It is 8:07 in the evening on a Sunday in the work week - end of a week. I love to embrace the sunset.
Discovering My Style

by Samantha Topolewski

This photograph represents a lot for me. It shows how far I have come in studio photography, it used to make me so nervous. It was new to me and I didn’t fully understand lighting or what I wanted out of a photo. Looking at this example I’ve learned not only how to work in a studio, but I’ve discovered my style and preferences as well. I prefer to use only one or two lights, and I enjoy leaving lots of shadows in my work. Looking back to when I shot this photo, I remember how excited I was to do this specific lighting style. I love split lighting, it leaves a sort of mystery in one half of the photo, and it just seemed to come so easy to me. I’m not as confident in my work as I would like to be, but in that moment I was completely sure of myself, I knew exactly what I wanted and how to get it. I strive to feel that way in every aspect of my photography.
This is a picture of the house directly next to mine. I chose to "reflect" on this photo because this is the house where my best friend and his family lived. They had moved a very long time ago, but to watch the blaze and see memories of time spent there burn with it was heartbreaking. It was even more heartbreaking to get messages from him and his sisters asking if that was their house, and to have to tell them yes hurt so much more.

**Ablaze**  
*by Winston Lightfoot*

This was taken at Dally in the Ally 2017. I love this photo because while this is a sensitive topic, it was beautiful to see people of all different racial and ethnic backgrounds showing and displaying their art in all forms. From painting to music, people came together as not only people, but as artists.

**Artist**  
*by Winston Lightfoot*
This was the spring of 2017 just two months before I left to work at a summer camp in Wisconsin where I was hired to take photos. At the time I was taking a continuing education course at WCCCD. We went to Heritage Park in Taylor, Michigan. This photo allows me to reflect on how much has happened since this picture was taken. It was quiet. Gazebos lend themselves to meditation and reflection. You could hear birds chirp, and from a distance, see a petting farm. But for the most part, the image invited a time to reflect. That is what I did. I reflected on my life, from the job, to classes, forming new relationships, experiencing new things. It is strange to realize how much can change in a short period of time.
I had no idea that my efforts would produce an award-winning photograph of the 2012 Detroit International Fireworks display. I decided to shoot them from Canada because that would give me an unobstructed view of the blasts from all three barges. Finding the perfect spot, I stood on a friend’s chair and, with a little assistance, climbed onto a narrow ledge squeezing into a corner that was so narrow, I had to straddle my tripod. But, it was worth it! Out of 1,300 entries, my photo won the second place award in the 2012 Detroit News “Celebrate Michigan” photo contest.
I was driving around Detroit. I love to look at this park which is at the neck of Lake St. Clair in Michigan. It was another cold day in Michigan. Our winters can be bitter. This photo shows the winter season, but not necessarily how cold it was on this day. Across you can see Belle Isle and Canada which is just opposite the Detroit River.
Winter Canal on Belle Isle

by LaDonna Walker-Little

Even though Winter can sometimes appear cruel and never ending the trees budding when the pond is still covered with ice let’s us know that Spring and a fresh beginning is just around the corner.
Welcome to the D

by Marlene “Lexe” Bailey

Hart Plaza is truly a Detroit Landmark. There has been so much revitalization in the city and it’s all part of welcoming people to our city and showing off what we have to offer. I wanted to take this photo as a reminder of all the people who have come together to make Detroit the promising city of tomorrow.
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