

My time at the James Baldwin Writers' Colony was easily the best classroom experience I had as an Emerson student. One of Emerson's biggest strengths, in my experience, is the classroom size. On the Boston campus, I've had classes as small as 12 students; on the LA campus, as small as 9. The Baldwin Writers' Colony took the small classroom as a space for intimate critical & creative development to a new extreme. In the program's inaugural cohort, I was one of only 5 students. Between the size and having the castle all to ourselves, the program gave us access to Jabari & JennyMae, our professor and TA, at a level of constant engagement that I hadn't before considered possible. In those few weeks, far too short, we forged relationships that persist to this day.

One of Emerson's biggest failings, in my experience, is the diversity within these classrooms. While that is changing, it is gradual. The James Baldwin Writers' Colony was the first academic experience where I was alongside only other people of color - from the professor to the students to Kasteel Well's Student Affairs Officer. It was in this space, this castle, these classrooms — even with strangers on either side of me — that I felt myself breathe freely. It's only when you breathe freely, deeply, that you can realize just how long you've been holding your breath.

I find it particularly ironic that James Baldwin, a descendant of colonized people, has his name connected to this counter-colonial experience. I derived a sadistic satisfaction from being among a group of colonially displaced people who came together and, in our own special way, colonized the streets of cities still basking in the wealth of their own colonial conquest. Baldwin wrote, in his novel *Giovanni's Room*, "perhaps home is not a place but simply an irrevocable condition." Since finding a home at the Colony and completing my time there, I've noticed that I carry that home with me. There is a difference in how I now carry myself, in what I now expect of myself, and in who I now believe I can be. And I can assuredly say that it is because the James Baldwin Writers' Colony reminded me to breathe.