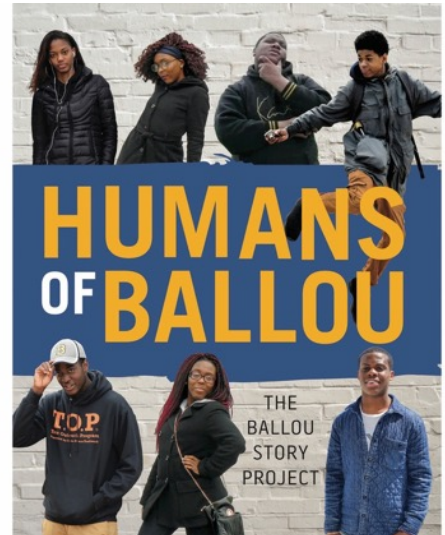


Humans of Ballou

The Ballou Story Project, vol. 3
ISBN 9781945434006

The students of Ballou High School know a different Washington, DC than do the tourists who visit our nation's capital each year. Some travel guides call the neighborhoods East of the River "areas to avoid." But the statistics about crime or poverty in these communities paint a picture that is profoundly incomplete. These are the stories not on the tour. As one student put it, "[Come] to my side of town and see what's monuments to me." With style and humor and ambition and charm, Ballou students and educators tell their own stories on their own terms, through intimate conversation and photography.



***HUMANS OF BALLOU* DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**

- 1) While each *Humans of Ballou* essay focuses on one author or an interviewee, the nation's capital serves as a consistent backdrop throughout the book. What role does Washington, DC play in *Humans of Ballou*?
- 2) Why do you think *Humans of Ballou* includes both personal narratives written by the authors as well as interviews of their teachers, administrators, and mentors?
- 3) What is the relationship between portrait and personal narrative in this collection? Choose one photo-essay pairing and explain how their photograph impacts your reading of their story.
- 4) Which essay resonated with you the most? Why?
- 5) Some of the personal narratives within the book describe extremely difficult and painful experiences as well as great pride and hope. How does sharing personal stories through writing help shape or reshape predominate narratives of a place?
- 6) In the 2016-2017 school year, every member of the graduating class at Ballou applied to college and got accepted to at least one institute of higher learning. This news made headlines several times in the following year. Read these news stories and discuss the positions and arguments made within.

“[Ballou High Graduate Faces an Enviably Decision](http://washingtoninformer.com/ballou-high-graduate-faces-an-enviable-decision/)” by Alexa Imani Spencer, *Washington Informer* | <http://washingtoninformer.com/ballou-high-graduate-faces-an-enviable-decision/>

“[What Really Happened At Ballou, The D.C. High School Where Every Senior Got Into College](https://wamu.org/story/17/11/28/really-happened-ballou-d-c-high-school-every-senior-got-college/)” by Kate McGee, *WAMU NPR Radio* | <https://wamu.org/story/17/11/28/really-happened-ballou-d-c-high-school-every-senior-got-college/>

“[Ask the right questions about Ballou’s absentee scandal, and you’ll learn something](https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/ask-the-right-questions-about-ballous-absentee-scandal-and-youll-learn-something/2017/12/08/6bf9b8d6-d948-11e7-b859-fb0995360725_story.html?utm_term=.a16f4433586b)” by Litzi Valdivia-Cazzol and Mark Hecker, *The Washington Post Opinions Online* | https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/ask-the-right-questions-about-ballous-absentee-scandal-and-youll-learn-something/2017/12/08/6bf9b8d6-d948-11e7-b859-fb0995360725_story.html?utm_term=.a16f4433586b

HUMANS OF BALLOU WRITING PROMPTS:

- Think about the city or neighborhood you grew up in or are currently living in. What is something within your community that you are proud about and others may not know? Write a personal account describing how your community is unique and how it has helped shape who you are today.
BONUS: Take a photo that compliments your personal narrative and combine your photography with your writing.
- Interview someone within your community, a parent, grandparent, sibling, business owner, spiritual leader, teacher, or other mentor, and ask them the same question. What is something they are proud about within your community, and how has it helped shape who they are today?
BONUS: Take a photo that compliments your interviewee’s story and combine your photography with a transcription of their narrative.
- *Humans of Ballou* borrows its names from the well-known *Humans of New York* series. Do some research on the various *Humans of ...* projects and compile a list of 10 of your favorite questions being asked. Now, try to answer as many of them as you can!
- Daveona Rose in her essay writes, “...although life can be painful because of the thorns, it’s also beautiful because of the blossom.” Write a poem or short personal essay that uses this metaphor to describe a time in your life when you had to confront a challenge and strived to still see the beauty.
- Shahid Daniels opens *Humans of Ballou* speaking to the role photography plays in his life. He says it’s his “outlet” and that “photography is like therapy.” Write about some creative outlet or activity in your life and why it helps you.



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