"There are times when one would like to hang the whole human race, and finish the farce."

- Mark Twain

INT. SCHOOL CAFETERIA. DAY.

It is nearing the end of the school day in the cafeteria at John Jay High School in San Fernando, California. The school is large yet overcrowded. The population of the school is very diverse. There is a varied collection of ethnicity in the cafeteria, along with a drastic range of financial backgrounds and situations.

The cafeteria is segregated, however. The white kids sit with the white kids, the Asians, sit with the Asians. Of course, there are a few exceptions to this rule, but for the most part, everyone associates themselves with friends of similar backgrounds.

THOMAS HARPER is sitting in a large circular table with six of his other friends. Thomas is a good-looking, and popular kid. He has a lot of friends, and has never truly struggled. He is of a wealthy background, and has almost always been successful in his endeavors. They are all going over stories from the parties they all attended this past weekend, while eating their white-bread home-made, or gourmet, store bought lunches.

LIZ
No, but that party was fun. Everyone was there, you know we weren’t doing different things. And the play list was awesome, and there was dancing, I love dancing.

BRIAN
(imitating Liz) Oh my god, I love dancing

LIZ

BRIAN
What? You’ve seen my moves Liz! Don’t hate.

(CONTINUED)
LIZ
Yeah, I saw your sweet moves with Alyssa. Smooth, Brian, really smooth.

BRIAN
Whatever, at least I went for it. Wasn’t held down by the man. I don’t care what other people think of me anyway.

LIZ
Yeah, yeah that’s what you say every time.

BRIAN
Well, why should that ever change?

THOMAS
Leave him alone Liz, it’s not like he knew he was gonna get rejected. You have to admit, you can never know how somethings going to turn out unless you go for it, first.

LIZ
Oh, that’s bold, Thomas. Like how you never know you’re going to be puking until you’re hanging over the toilet, vomiting.

THOMAS
Oh please, why do you always think I’m puking? I can hold my liquor, you know?

ALEX
Thomas, you we’re definitely puking in the bathroom Saturday night, you bounced right in the middle of our game of bee-

All of a sudden a fight breaks out at one of the tables next to them.

FIGHTER # 1
What the fuck you say to me, yo?

FIGHTER # 2
You heard me, bitch. Stay in your seat motherfucker!
The fighters stand up and begin to brawl. The crowd eating lunch around them instantly rises to their feet and forms a circle around the two of them. People start to cheer and yell. None of the students try to break up the fight, as this is one of their main forms of entertainment at John Jay. Most of the students encourage them.

THOMAS
0 we got a good one here Alex, look at these goons.

The fight continues, with fast cuts. The lunch aids run to get security guards.

ALEX
Aha, o shit that kid just spit in his face.

THOMAS
Aha! Crazy shit at John Jay, what else is new. Fight! Fight!

By this time, Thomas and Alex join in the group of kids watching and screaming around the fight. Lunch aids and security guards come in to separate the two kids fighting and disperse the crowd. The bell rings for the final period of the day. Thomas says goodbye to his friend Alex, and exits the cafeteria.

INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY. AFTERNOON

Thomas rushes through the halls alone to go meet his girlfriend, Haley, for a few minutes before their final period starts. Haley is a pretty, petite Spanish girl. She is a girly girl, but is also very smart and honest. She is a very likable girl. He meets her across the hall from his final period, journalism.

THOMAS
Hey baby, what’s going on? I missed you today.

HALEY
Hey babe, nothing much, I just got my paper back from Ms. Reidy.

THOMAS
How’d you do?

HALEY
I did alright. B+.
THOMAS
Babe, that’s great. What’s the matter?

HALEY
Oh, nothing. It’s just that I lent Mandy my notes to use for writing this paper because she didn’t read the book this paper was on, and she got an A.

THOMAS
Oh the irony! (Thomas chuckles) Well you still have nothing to feel bad about, Hay.

HALEY
(sarcastically) Yeah. That’s easy for you to say Mr. Cornell. Grades are just insignificant to you now, aren’t they? (Pauses to burp inside her mouth) I also had some bad salami for lunch, I’m not feeling so hot.

THOMAS
Well you’re looking hot, baby.

The bell rings.

THOMAS
Look I gotta go to newspaper, but only one more period until our long day is over, and we can hang out. I’ll meet you by my locker, alright?

HALEY
Ok babe, have a good class, see you soon.

INT. JOURNALISM CLASSROOM. MONDAY AFTERNOON

Thomas walks into his journalism class, where he is immediately greeted by a bunch of his friends.

JANE
Hey Thomas, what’s going on? Did you hear the news?
THOMAS
What do you mean?

JANE
Samiha left for her study abroad program today. 3 months in Bangladesh with a host family. Crazy, huh?

THOMAS
Yeah that is. Wait, does that mean what I think it does?

JANE
Yup, Ms. Randell is announcing a new editor in chief today. You know what I think?

THOMAS
What?

JANE
It’s going to be you.

THOMAS
Why you say that?

JANE
Thomas you got into Cornell for journalism early, you’re articles have been stellar and everyone in our class respects you.

THOMAS
You really think so?

JANE
Oh please, stop fishing for compliments, isn’t the title enough?

All of the students get seated behind their desks as the teacher struggles to get the class’ attention to make an announcement.

MS. RANDELL
Good afternoon everyone. As you all already know, Samiha has departed for her study abroad program, and therefore has ended her role as newspaper editor in chief. Today, a new student will take on that responsibility. The position takes

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)
MS. RANDELL (cont’d)
a serious commitment to the Chronicle and communication between all of the newspaper’s contributors. They are the highest representative of the newspaper staff and the student body. They are in charge of this production, and take the responsibility of the reader response. Luckily, I think we have a student who can step into these shows, and excel with no limitation.

Haley and Thomas catch one another’s eyes

MS. RANDELL
Without further a due I would like to present to you the new editor in chief of the newspaper...

Dennis begins a drum roll with two pencils on the table

MS. RANDELL
Thomas Harper!

The classroom begins clapping, Thomas tells them to all settle down.

THOMAS
Well, thank you Ms. Randell, I don’t know what to say.

MS. RANDELL
You have shown true intuition and creativity this semester, and your attention to detail is noteworthy. Well done, Thomas!

DENNIS
Yeah, that’s a nice resume builder, bro.

The class breaks out into some laughter. Ms. Randell looks at Dennis to catch his attention and clears her throat to quite down his laughter.

MS. RANDELL
Now for the next order of business. Our next issue of the Chronicle will come out in 3 weeks, the first day of our second semester here at John Jay. Thomas, you now have the (MORE)
MS. RANDELL (cont’d)
responsibility of producing the front page article as well. So if we could begin brainstorming now class...

The students get up out of their seats and start to form little groups for brainstorming. The mood is very relaxed and everyone Thomas encounters congratulates him with a handshake or a hug. We see them begin to brainstorm.

INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY. AFTERNOON

The bell rings as we cut to Thomas and Haley walking down the hall. The schooldays is over, but Thomas can’t get the newspaper off of his mind.

HALEY
Thomas, that’s great (gives him a hug and a kiss). I can’t believe I’m dating the editor in chief of my high school newspaper. That’s sexy, babe.

THOMAS
Thanks babe. I gotta figure out what I’m going to write this front page article on, though. Everyone’s ideas sucked, and I just can’t bear to put my name over one of those dull stories.

HALEY
Oh, Thomas I’m sure you’ll figure everything out. You’ve got time to choose a story.

THOMAS
But Haley, I want this story to be special. I want to set a new precedent and image of the newspaper at John Jay. I’ve always said I could do great things for the newspaper, and now i finally have the chance to. I can’t let everyone down. I don’t want to have made any empty promises.

HALEY
I think you’re taking this a little too seriously a little too soon baby. You shouldn’t worry so much.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)
HALEY (cont’d)
You’ve only been editor in chief for about two hours now.

THOMAS
Sure Haley, that’s helpful. Thanks. Look I just don’t want to make a fool of myself, ok? You wouldn’t understand, but I have a reputation to live up to.

HALEY
Thomas, don’t be silly. Everyone in Jay knows you’re smart. You got accepted to Cornell early, and you’re captain of the debate team.

THOMAS
...and president of the french club, and that’s exactly the point. I have a lot of pressure on my back. A lot of people are watching, so forgive me for caring so much about it. Call me crazy but this is what I want to do for the rest of my life. These are my aspirations, and here’s my first taste of my future. Please don’t reduce it to nothing.

HALEY
I don’t mean to take away any of your glory Tom. I just think sometimes you forget just how fortunate you are in the heat of the moment. There’s no reason to worry what people are going to think of you. Just think of everything you have already.

THOMAS
Look, you’re not making me feel any better. I don’t need any lecture about what I have. I’ve had opportunity and I have capitalized on that opportunity to the fullest. Now I have another opportunity to prove myself, and I refuse to take it lightly.

HALEY
Well when is it enough Thomas? When will you have proved yourself?
There is a silence as the two of them stare down one another.

THOMAS
I don’t know Haley. When my name is all over the news? When I’m an accomplished journalist? When I’ve secured a good job, with good pay, and am happy with my life?

HALEY
And what if not everything goes according to plan?

THOMAS
Well that’s why I’m going to do everything in my power to help my chances in succeeding in every opportunity I’m given.

HALEY
But Thomas, it’s a high school newspaper we’re talking about here. How important can things really be?

THOMAS
We’re going in circles here. You’ll just never fucking understand!

There is a very awkward silence. Haley becomes teary eyed, as the audience can tell that Thomas feels some regret for cursing at her.

THOMAS
You’re going to pick up Christian now?

HALEY
(very serious) Yes, Thomas. Do you not want to walk with me anymore?

Haley is looking forward, avoiding eye contact with Thomas.

THOMAS
I think I’m going to go home and start working on this article. Maybe the sooner I get it done, the sooner we’ll argue less. Besides, I’m not getting any help here. Call me when you get home.
Thomas goes in to kiss Haley on the cheek. She has almost no response. She stares blankly while he gives her a peck on the cheek, says "Love ya babe" and turns his back to walk away. Haley looks upset, but turns around and walks out of the building.

EXT. JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL. DAY.

Haley waits outside a lower end middle school where she is picking up her younger brother, Christian. There are some students, security guards, and school buses being filled up, and leaving the front entrance.

When Christian comes out of the school building, he immediately looks over to where Haley usually waits for him and they make eye contact. Haley waves to him, and starts to walk towards him, but we see Christian first meeting up with a few older looking males.

Haley looks very concerned at first, and starts walking towards them. But almost immediately Christian embraces and greets the older guys, indicating he knows them from somewhere. Haley stops walking towards them, and waits in place for Christian. The guys and Christian have a quick conversation as Haley looks on concerned. The gentleman leave, and Christian walks over to Haley.

CHRISTIAN
Hey big sister (gives her a hug) whats up?

HALEY
Who were those guys, Christian?

CHRISTIAN
Oh, those are just my friends, JP and Eddie.

HALEY
How do you know them?

CHRISTIAN
Oh they live a couple of blocks away from us. I play handball with them here sometimes at the park.

HALEY
How old are they Christian?

CHRISTIAN
I dunno, never asked them.

(Continued)
HALEY
Do they go to school with you?

CHRISTIAN
No.

HALEY
So what school do they go to?

CHRISTIAN
I don’t know. They work for their dad, at an auto mechanic near our building too.

HALEY
So what are they doing hanging around the junior high school?

CHRISTIAN
I told you were just friends. Miguel is friends with them too. They just like to play handball sometimes I told you, and then we started getting to know each other, from playing together so often, that they come just to say what’s up every once in a while.

HALEY
Christian, those guys are too old for you to be hanging out with.

CHRISTIAN
Haley, you’re going out with an older guy and I don’t give you shi-

HALEY
Chris, Thomas is one year older than me, you know it’s not the same.

CHRISTIAN
Whatever. Let’s go I’m not trying to argue with my sister in front of the entire school.

HALEY
(muttering under her breath as she turns to walk away) Why the fuck do I even argue with you?
The two of them start walking home together, Christian a few paces behind Maria. He looks back at the front steps of his high school and the older kids are talking to some younger girls on the front steps.

INT. HARPER DINING ROOM TABLE. NIGHT

The whole family is sitting down at the nice, large, mahogany table for dinner. At the table is CHERYL HARPER, Thomas’ mother, and BILL HARPER, Thomas’ father, sitting at opposite heads. Thomas has two younger sisters, that are also at the table, STEPHANIE, 8, and MADISON, 11.

THOMAS
I just can’t think of what to write about.

CHERYL
Well why don’t you just talk it over with some of your classmates, and see what they all think would be interesting.

THOMAS
Honestly ma, if it were up to my classmates, they paper would be all about video games and porn.

MADISON
What’s porn?

STEPHANIE
Yah, what’s porn?

CHERYL
Oh, nothing!

Cheryl glare at Thomas, who gets a kick out of his younger sisters.

BILL
Keep eating your vegetables, honey.

CHERYL
Thomas, what about your other friends, outside of your newspaper class, and Haley?

THOMAS
Oh, they don’t really care. It’s not really important to anyone, except me. This is what I want to (MORE)

(CONTINUED)
THOMAS (cont’d)
do for the rest of my life, but its
not the case for any of them. The
newspaper isn’t special to them,
you know?

BILL
And how about the rest of the
school?

THOMAS
What do you mean?

BILL
Well, Tommy, John Jay is a big
school, with a wide variety of
demographics. You’ve got your
limited sources over there, but
what about the rest of the
students, the majority of the
student body?

THOMAS
I’m pretty sure the majority of the
school doesn’t even read the
newspaper. I wouldn’t be surprised
if half of the kids at John Jay
couldn’t even read my article.

STEPHANIE
I can read!

BILL
(To Stephanie) Yes you can, honey!
(To Thomas) Listen forget who they
are Tommy, and just realize that
they’re reading your paper too.
drop the cynicism and realize your
market. Assume the whole school is
reading the newspaper, and you’re
the editor in chief, in charge of
it all now.

THOMAS
I know, Dad. I’m just aggravated
I’m having such trouble even
thinking of a topic for my article.

BILL
Now I know you wouldn’t be worrying
so much if you didn’t think
everyone was going to be reading
it. Take some pride in your

(MORE)
BILL (cont’d)
position, and the power and impact you have. (Pause) Now you gotta be ready to put your name on something that’s gonna be distributed to over 900 students.

THOMAS
Wow, Dad, you’re really helping to ease all the pressure I feel, thanks a bunch.

BILL
I’m not trying to stress you out anymore Tommy. I’m trying to highlight your resources, though.

THOMAS
What do you mean, Dad?

STEPHANIE
I’m finished, can I go get some ice cream?

CHERYL
Yes, Madison, go take your sister to get some ice cream out of the freezer.

The two girls are dismissed from the dinner table, but Thomas, Bill and Cheryl, remain seated.

BILL
Now you’ve got 900 plus students with an opinion they want to share at your disposal. Why not try and find out what they want to read about? You know then you at least know you’re catering to your audience.

CHERYL
How is he supposed to do that? He doesn’t talk to everyone in the school, nor should he.

BILL
Well, if you really want to get ALL of the students reading you have to possess some mass appeal. What a better way to provoke interest, than learning what the majority of students want to read about. If (MORE)
BILL (cont’d)
you’re serious about this, you gotta start getting around the school then, Tommy, putting your name out there as a reporter for the school newspaper, and compile some research, like a real journalist would!

CHERYL
What do you mean go out there, Bill? It’s a journalism class. There’s a teacher and everything.

THOMAS
No, but I have the freedom to produce my article however I choose to. It’s not like Ms. Randell is sitting next to me writing this with me every step of the way. She makes announcements at the beginning and end of the period, and approves all of our articles. That’s about it. But I do know my classmates have interviewed students, and teachers and other people in writing their articles. I can do something like that.

There is a call from Madison offstage

MADISON
Mom, where are the ice cream bowls?

CHERYL
They should be right where they always are, honey.

MADISON
I can’t find them.

CHERYL
Excuse me.

Cheryl exits the dinner table and Bill and Thomas are left alone.

BILL
Yeah ask around, see what the students at John Jay really want to read about. The scandals, the taboos, the stuff that’s swept under the carpet, the matters that (MORE)
BILL (cont’d)
haven’t, yet really need to be discussed.

THOMAS
(Thomas chuckles) Sex, drugs, and parties! I don’t think that’ll be allowed, pops.

BILL
You know what I mean Tommy, conduct a little social survey if you will.

THOMAS reclines in his seat for a moment. It looks like this idea has really struck some genuine interest in him.

THOMAS
You know that’s a good idea. That’s a really good idea. I’ll go around with another newspaper classmate and ask random people what they think issues are that need to be confronted here at John Jay. Who knows what the results will be.

BILL
You could really get some good leads from that Tommy, I think it sounds like a strong plan.

THOMAS
Yeah, I think it does. Thanks, Dad.

MONTAGE. THE WEEK AT SCHOOL.

The next scene is a compilation of footage of Thomas and two other journalism students going around to a variety of different people throughout John Jay, asking them what they think is wrong with the school, and needs to be discussed.

There is a song playing in the background that fades in and out to hear certain blurbs of the conversations you see him and his classmates having with whomever they are speaking to at that moment.

Some of the comments include, "The cafeteria food here sucks." "The teachers are perverts". "There’s too much fighting"."There’s a lot of crime that goes on within school walls", and "Some people can just never get along."
EXT. AFTERNOON. WALKING HOME.

Haley and Thomas are walking home together like they normally do. They seem to be on much better terms than we last saw them, a couple of days earlier. They are on their way to pick up Christian, so they can all walk back to Haley’s house for dinner together.

HALEY
Well, I sure am glad that you finally got some leads for your newspaper article Tom, you were kind of freaking out about the whole thing.

THOMAS
Oh, baby, I’m sorry if I was being crazy. I just felt a lot of pressure, to write a good, meaningful article that really has some impact. But I think I got some interesting leads here that can lead to something good.

HALEY
Oh yeah what have you got?

THOMAS
Well, first of all, did you know that a lot of the girls claimed that the gym teacher, Ms. Butler is a pervert. There were like three separate girls, not even friends with one another, that said she just comes into the locker room excessively, and claims that its just to speed you guys up changing, but she’s really just there to stare at you.

HALEY
Oh my god! That is true. I’ve always felt that way, but I didn’t know people were actually vocal about it. That’s crazy. You probably got some really wacky stuff there from all of the characters at John Jay. What else you got?

THOMAS
Well also apparently some of the guys on the basketball team just (MORE)
THOMAS (cont’d)
got in trouble for stealing some money from the school, like from some donation box or something.

HALEY
Really? That’s scandalous. But babe, you can’t be writing about that in the newspaper right? You’re not going to bash people are you?

THOMAS
What do you think I am? Some aspiring tabloid journalist. No! I’m not going to use any of that stuff. But I think I’m on to something bigger, and much more serious than any of that stuff.

HALEY
What do you mean? About what?

THOMAS
Well, a bunch of people also talked about all of the fighting that goes on at John Jay.

HALEY
Yeah, well that’s undeniable.

THOMAS
Right.

HALEY
Yeah, people like to fight. It’s immature. I don’t get that. Like, I can’t imagine getting mad enough to hit someone over something, you know? Its just not worth the energy for me. But who knows what all these kids are ever fighting about, anyways. Maybe its just.

THOMAS
Well that’s just the thing.

HALEY
What do you mean?

THOMAS
Well when going around asking all of these questions, I got a few comments on the fights. Most (MORE)
THOMAS (cont’d)
students say that the fights are
over people over stepping their set
boundaries. People even went as far
to say that some races just don’t
get along.

HALEY
What races?

THOMAS
(Checking over his notes) Well it
seems like the African American and
Latino students have an ongoing
feud within John Jay.

HALEY
Thomas, I’m Latino.

HALEY
I know, and I meant to include you
too. Have you ever felt any of
these tensions?

HALEY
No, that’s absurd.

THOMAS
It’s actually not, it’s what a lot
of people said.

HALEY
Oh yeah, you talked to black people
who said they don’t like me,
because of who I am?

THOMAS
No I didn’t say that

HALEY
No, you just implied it.

THOMAS
Look, Haley I’m sorry. It’s more
like a bunch of people knew of the
ongoing problems between a Latino
gang and a black gang here in our
neighborhood and at John Jay.

HALEY
Look Thomas, people are going to
talk, and they’re going to tell you
whatever they feel like telling
you.

(continued)
THOMAS
Haley you can’t just tell me its a coincidence, when so many students mentioned the exact same issue.

HALEY
You can say whatever you want about the gangs in our neighborhood, Thomas. But you can’t let that become representative of an entire race or ethnicity. That’s just ignorant.

THOMAS
Well, it’s not like this tension is only felt by people inside these gangs. There are a lot of people effected by this relationship and the different situations that occur as a result of it.

HALEY
Thomas, I realize that, trust me. But you need to realize that you have a large reach and influence as head of the school newspaper. It’s going to be read by a lot of people. Just be careful of your words, and claims in whatever you write about, especially if lead turns into the subject of your article.

THOMAS
Haley, I’m not retarded, I’m not going to go around making race wars.

HALEY
(Relieved) Good.

THOMAS
They already exist.

The two of them arrive at Christian’s school to pick him up to walk home as per usual. Christian comes out and meets the three guys again who give him an envelope that he thanks them for and places in his bag. He then jogs over to Haley and Thomas. Christian is happy to see Thomas, and vice versa.

(continues)
THOMAS
Yo, Christian!

CHRISTIAN
Yo, Tommy boy, what’s been going on. We missed you for a couple of days, what happened to you?

THOMAS
Oh you know, just a bunch of work and shit. Had to crack down and do some real field work.

CHRISTIAN
Yeah I know what you mean. My math teacher gave us like twelve homeworks tonight. Shit’s out of control.

THOMAS
Listen man, if I can tell you one thing, its that school is a load of crap. Fuck homework! Fuck the teachers, and fuck the institution. It’s nothing like the real world.

HALEY
Oh, what is with all of the cursing. It’s enough already. And it’s enough of the bad boy act too, Thomas. You’re going to Cornell next year, and are paying a ton of money to do so, so maybe you should reconsider your whole fuck school attitude.

There is a pause as Haley looks at Thomas, then Christian. Thomas looks at Christian after Haley and breaks out in a chuckle.

THOMAS
Ok, whatever, Mom.

Haley slaps him in the arm, and they all start laughing together eventually. The three of them walk home joking and laughing.
INT. MOLINA DINING ROOM TABLE

The Molina mother, Estella, recites the grace in Spanish before the meal begins. Thomas copies whatever Haley and Christian do as his eyes stay open during the prayer. At the dining room table is Estella, Thomas, Haley, Christian, and their father, Arthur.

ARTHUR
That was beautiful, thank you honey. Let’s eat.

CHRISTIAN
Let’s eat!

ARTHUR
So, Christian, how was your day at school today?

CHRISTIAN
(Short) It was arite.

There is an awkward pause as Arthur waits to hear more from Christian, but gets nothing in return. He gives up, and starts cutting his chicken.

ESTELLA
And you, mi hija and Thomas?

THOMAS
School was good.

HALEY
Yeah, school was fine.

THOMAS
I don’t know if Haley told you, but I got placed as the editor in chief of the school newspaper, and get to write the front page article for the next issue.

ESTELLA
Oh, yes Haley tells us. It’s very exiting.

ARTHUR
Yes, Thomas. That’s great news. Are you planning on continuing with journalism in Cornell next year.

(CONTINUED)
THOMAS
Yup, I’m planning on being a journalism major.

ARTHUR
Well then, nothing better than this for some learning huh? This will definitely give you good experience, and a taste of management too. Are you going to try and write for the University newspaper as well?

THOMAS
Well hopefully, I’ve actually spoken with a professor in charge of the student newspaper there already. I wonder if I should let him know that I am now the editor in chief at John Jay.

HALEY
(a little bitter) I think you’ll be alright Thomas. I mean you’re already in.

There is an awkward pause as everyone takes a few seconds to eat some food.

ESTELLA
So Thomas, what are you going to write your first article on in the newspaper?

Everyone stops to wait for Thomas’ response

THOMAS
Well, I’m not exactly sure yet. I’ve been asking around the school to see what topic would be good to write about, really capture everyone’s attention. So far, I’ve got some leads on teachers, scandals

ARTHUR
Ha, well I’m sure John Jay is full of rumors.

CHRISTIAN
Yeah I heard that all of the cheerleaders at John Jay shower naked with each other and touch each other.

(CONTINUED)
Thomas starts chuckling and Estella takes a big gasp of air, as she reprimands him in Spanish.

HALEY
You have no idea what you’re talking about Christian, just keep your mouth shut.

ARTHUR
No, no, no. You see Thomas, you don’t want to write an article about any "scandals".

THOMAS
Well, I actually was thinking about writing something a bit more serious.

Haley begins to stare Thomas down.

ESTELLA
What’s that?

THOMAS
Well, as you probably know, there’s a good amount of fighting at John Jay.

ESTELLA
Oh I know, I hate, hate the fighting, it’s terrible. They need to stop.

THOMAS
I know Estella, I think so too.

ARTHUR
So, what exactly are you going to write about these fights?

THOMAS
Well they seem to most often occur between the African American students and Spanish students in our school.

ESTELLA
It’s true. The blacks don’t like us. I don’t know why?

THOMAS
Well see that’s what I’m going to propose getting to the root of, you know, why this problem exist—
HALEY
You know what, can we just not talk about this right now?

ESTELLA
No, we listens-

HALEY
No mom, I’m not talking about this right now. I’ve already heard about it, and think its all a load of bullshit!

Haley knows that she has crossed the line by cursing at the dinner table. After a few seconds she apologizes for her actions.

HALEY
I’m sorry everyone.

The meal then continues on in silence as the screen fades to black.

INT. NIGHT HALEY’S PORCH

Thomas has his bag back on his back as Haley is walking him out, as he heads home for the night.

THOMAS
Well, thank you’re mom again for me, the eggplant was really awesome.

HALEY
Yeah, for sure, I will.

THOMAS
Look Haley, I’m really sorry for even bringing that up at dinner. I didn’t really mean to, it must have just been on my mind.

HALEY
No I’m sorry too, I shouldn’t have flipped out like that.

THOMAS
You know it’s just an article, there’s nothing to get upset about. I’m not gonna lie or anything. Just highlight the issues at hand. Even you’re mom proved that there is still some sentiment-

(CONTINUED)
HALEY
Look keep my mom out of this. She’s not a student at John Jay. Besides that’s a very conservative view she speaks, and she barely said anything. Look its not worth arguing. I’ll see you tomorrow night right, at Johnnies?

THOMAS
Yeah, babe. I’ll see you then. Love you.

HALEY
Love you too.

They kiss and say goodbye.

MONTAGE. SATURDAY NIGHT. JOHNIE’S PARTY

The next scene is a montage showing Thomas’ Saturday night. The montage begins with a shower head being turned on and a party song opening. We see Thomas grooming himself in the bathroom, before the party. When he gets out we see him call Haley, and the montage continues with cross cutting between the two of them getting dressed, and perfecting their appearance for the party. Thomas then opens his front door to leave his house, and immediately is greeted at Haley’s door as he arrives at Haley’s house to pick her up and walk to the party together.

They arrive at the party holding hands, and are greeted warmly by everyone there. It is a typical high school party for them. There is a bunch of people sitting on couches drinking 40s oz. There are a couple of joints being passed around and people are dancing in a bigger room connected to this entrance space. The natural chronology and the montage become blurred. There are foggy images, bright lights, close ups, and canted camera angles until we hear Haley screaming over the music to get Thomas’ attention. He finally notices her, and she tells him she is going to the bathroom with one of her friends.

Then things start to be seen from Thomas’ point of view. There are shots of different ethnic groups hanging out segregated from one another. Furthermore when the ethnicities are seen together they are in some sort of combat. For example there is a beer pong game with two black guys versus two Spanish guys. There is rap battle going on between a Spanish a black student and there is a black student dancing aggressively with a Spanish girl on the dance floor.

(CONTINUED)
The Cops then appear in one of the shots, and the party starts to get broken up. Haley comes rushing out of the bathroom, grabs Thomas hand and they run out together as they pass certain minorities being detained and arrested by white police officers. The music ends abruptly as the screen quickly cuts to black and a few seconds later, sounds of the morning.

INT. HALEY’S APT. MORNING

Thomas wakes up to find himself sleeping in all of his clothes from the night before on a couch in Haley’s room, drool hanging from his mouth. He checks his watch and sees it is really early in the morning. Yet he feels so hungover, that he can’t go back to sleep, so he decides to leave. He kisses Haley on her forehead before walking out the door.

INT. HARPER HOUSE. MORNING

Thomas Harper walks into his house and there is a quick montage of him making a breakfast sandwich, using the bathroom, and sitting down at his computer.

THOMAS
Aright, let’s get this article started.

There is then another montage of Thomas researching, reading, writing, deleting, editing, and re-writing. His thoughts are heard by the audience along with certain fragments of the article he is writing. Interspliced with these images are images of the day passing by in several aspects such as the clock, light in the window, and stacking of water bottles.

Some of the lines that are heard in his article are, "While the traditional view expressed is that they’ve always had a problem with us..."

"But where this problem really comes from...no one seems to know."

"The fights not only affect those who are in them, but inconvenience several people around them"

"There’s no reason to fight in high school..."

"There are two gangs known as ASA and Zaros known on John Jay campus, ASA being a African American affiliated gang, and Zaros a Spanish one."
INT. JOURNALISM CLASSROOM. MONDAY AFTERNOON

All of the students are gathered around Thomas as they are printing and arranging the articles to be published in this issue of the Chronicle.

THOMAS
And I think Jane’s, article about underage drinking can go right here under the fold of the second page.

JANE
Yeah that’s cool.

THOMAS
You know, this issue is really going to be awesome. I feel like it’s so much different and more sophisticated than the crap they used to publish.

DENNIS
You mean when I was the editor in chief?

THOMAS
Uhh...

DENNIS
Nah, I’m just busting your balls Thomas. This issue looks great, and the front page sure is gonna get a copy in everyone’s hands.

THOMAS
I hope so Dennis, thanks man. Well, that about does it. These empty spaces can be filled with the advertisers we still have deals with, and this baby is finished.

DENNIS
Aright.

JANE
Sweet.

The bell rings and the class slowly files out. As Thomas Harper is talking with his friends and packing his bags to exit, the newspaper teacher calls his name from her desk.
MS. RANDELL
Thomas. Would you please stay after class for a few minutes?

THOMAS
Sure Ms. Randell.

Thomas says goodbye to his friends, and goes up to the teachers desk.

THOMAS
This paper really looks like a good one Ms. Randell, I would say the best of the year!

MS. RANDELL
Well that would be quite the way to kick off your new reign as editor-in-chief now wouldn’t it.

THOMAS
Yeah, I’m really excited about it, I just hope everyone receives it as well as the class just did.

MS. RANDELL
Oh, well I’m sure they will. There are so many great articles in there, and you’ve all worked so hard on them.

THOMAS
Tell me about it Ms. Randell. I gave up lunch for almost a week to compile all of the information to write my article.

MS. RANDELL
(uncomfortably)
Well that’s what I want to talk about Thomas.

THOMAS
What about it Ms. Randell?

MS. RANDELL
Well, it’s just a little forward, if you can understand what I am saying.

THOMAS
I don’t exactly understand Ms. Randell, all of my statements are (MORE)
THOMAS (cont’d)
based on facts and quotes from our students. It’s all the information from students here at school.

MS. RANDELL
Thomas, I understand that you worked very hard on this article, and I truly admire your journalistic approach and the effort that you put in. I’m afraid this high school’s hallways are just not the proper environment for this subject matter.

THOMAS
(Frustrated)
Why not Ms. Randell. It’s not obscene, profane, or untrue! It’s everything that the students said they want to talk about and hear. I didn’t go out saying I was going to write an article about the racial tensions at John Jay, but that’s what is of genuine interest to the students here. You saw how it was received in class Ms. Randell. Everyone was reading and talking about it, almost the whole class through, and there were no negative comments.

MS. RANDELL
I’m sorry, but this newspaper class is not a fair representation of our entire school, Thomas. This subject is not something to be taken lightly, or talked about casually.

THOMAS
I’m not minimalizing its importance or seriousness at all Ms. Randell. I’m promoting change, and bringing real issues to the surface.

MS. RANDELL
(asserting herself)
There is no further discussion here Thomas. I’m sorry, but this article will not be published in this newspaper. I have to be the authority here and make the executive decision to say no to you

(MORE)
MS. RANDELL (cont’d)
publishing that article. I have already found another article here to replace its spot on the front page.

Ms. Randell pulls out an article and some tape. She begins to paste the article down over the front page article on the draft of the newspaper to be sent for printing.

MS. RANDELL
It’s one of your past articles Thomas. About the improvements in the cafeteria food, and it fits perfectly over this one.

THOMAS
(Outraged)
Ms. Randell how can you do this? You said that article didn’t even fit in the last newspaper, and now its going to take the front page spot. You made me the editor in chief Ms. Randell, and now you’re taking away everything you trusted me with. I’m a student and I know what needs to be discussed Ms. Randell, please trust me. This article doesn’t belong here. I have to beg you to reconsider.

MS. RANDELL
I’m sorry Thomas. I should’ve advised you more as you were preparing and writing this article. We’ll figure out a better system in the future so something like this won’t happen again. But for now, this is the paper that will be printed and distributed tomorrow.

Ms. Randell hands Thomas the paper, with the new front page to pack up and mail to the printer, as the editor in chief does every two weeks at school. She thanks him, and sends him down to the office to get an envelope for mailing.

Thomas looks devastated. He seems to be thinking a lot to himself, staring at the paper. His devastation soon turns into frustration and anger, as we hear his thoughts racing through his head. Thomas goes into the office, and writes an address on a large manila envelope. He walks into the bathroom with it. There, he rips off the pasted on article, and packs up the newspaper in the envelope, leaving his
original article to be sent to the printer. He thinks it over before handing it in to be mailed, but we recognize a decisive moment as he puts the package in the mailing bin, and quickly walks out of the office.

EXT. AFTERNOON. WALKING

Thomas and Haley meet up after school and walk to pick up Christian.

HALEY
Hey, baby, how are you?

THOMAS
(Quietly) Good, good.

HALEY
What’s the matter. is something wrong?

THOMAS
Nah, baby. I’m just tired, didn’t get much sleep last night

HALEY
Really? What you do?

THOMAS
(Looks surprised) I uh, just finalized my article a little. You know, did some fine tuning.

HALEY
Oh yeah? You put some much time an effort into that article Tom.

THOMAS
(bitter) Yeah, I know.

HALEY
Well, how was it received. Did everyone love it?

THOMAS
(Pauses to consider things)

HALEY
Tom?

THOMAS
Yeah, baby, everyone loved it. It went great. My friends couldn’t (MORE)
THOMAS (cont’d)
stop talking about it. And Ms. Randell said she really appreciated my journalistic approach.

HALEY
Wow, that’s great. I’m so happy for you.

THOMAS
Thanks babe.

Haley leans over and kisses Thomas on the cheek.

HALEY
So, now that it’s finally complete. Can I read it?

THOMAS
You’ll see it Monday, just like everyone else. Besides I don’t have a copy of it on me now.

They arrive at Christian’s school and he is standing outside a car with three older Spanish males. They are scrap boxing and Haley calls his name to come over. Christian gives them all pounds goodbye and walks over to Haley and Thomas.

CHRISTIAN
Whatsup guys?

THOMAS
Not much man, whatsup with you?

HALEY
Thomas, you still hanging out with those kids?

THOMAS
Haley, you still asking annoying questions?

The scene fades out over their petty argument.

WHITE TEXT OVER BLACK SCREEN: FRIDAY
INT. SCHOOL BUILDING. MORNING.

It is early in the morning before any of the students even arrive at the school building. We hear the sounds of birds chirping in the bright sun when a delivery truck suddenly takes over the sound. It stops in front of the school building as we can see through the front doors of the school. There is a friendly knock on the front door. A security guard places his mop against the wall as he lets in a portly delivery man.

DELIBERY MAN
Hey there Howie.

HOWIE
Hey there, pal.

DELIBERY MAN
Beautiful day, huh?

HOWIE
Yeah. But something will fuck it up!

They both begin to laugh. The delivery man brings in several stacks of the newest edition of the John Jay Chronicle, and the audience can see that Thomas’ original article has been published as the front page piece.

MONTAGE. NEWSPAPER RECEPTION

There is another montage centered around John Jay students picking up their copy of the paper and reacting to it. The conversation is static on the stack of newspapers in the main lobby of the high school. We see the day pass as the stacks of newspapers continually lessen, until all of the copies are gone. The camera sporadically follows various students picking up a newspaper until we see their initial reactions. We start to see the variety of emotions and reactions that are triggered with this article.

We see some images of Thomas. He is only hearing all of the positive reactions and congratulations. He recognizes some sense of resentment from his girlfriend, but is overtaken with happiness coming from all of this praise.
EXT. SCHOOL PARKING LOT. DAY

We see a group of black males standing around a car with open doors and windows playing some gangster rap music. Most of the guys are wearing either a shirt, hat or bandanna of the same color, purple.

TREY
Yo dawg, you see this shit?

RALPHIE
Yeah, I already read that bullshit. Ignorant cracker had the fucking nerve to mention our name in his little article. What the fuck he think this is? you don’t see the fucking New York Times reporting on the bloods and crips and shit.

TREY
He tryna to say our beef is worthless. He calls our shit elementary.

RALPHIE
(reading from the newspaper article). The problem can easily cease as Latino’s hold the conservative belief that for some unknown reason the blacks do not like them. It seems like neither side really knows the real reason for all of this turmoil.

TREY
Yo I don’t know who the fuck this kid is, or why the fuck he’s writing about this shit. But we gonna have to go out and make some reminders, you feel me?

We see the ASA members stare across to the other side of the parking lot where we see members of the Zaros. They seem to be looking right back at ASA, but it is ambiguous. There is an uneasy tension with ominous undertones.

A bell rings indicating the last period of the day is starting, journalism. Thomas is met outside of his journalism class my his teacher, Ms. Randell and the assistant principal of the English department Ms. Kramer.

(CONTINUED)
THOMAS
Good afternoon Ms. Randell, Ms. Kramer.

MS. RANDELL
Thomas.

THOMAS
Yes.

MS. RANDELL
Would you please follow us?

THOMAS
May I ask what the problem seems to be?

MS. KRAMER
Well discuss it in the office please follow us

THOMAS
Bu-

MS. KRAMER
Now is not the time Thomas. Please follow us.

The two ladies turn around and lead Thomas into the principals office where he is seated across the table from the principal of the school Mr. Branch.

MR. BRANCH
Thomas.

THOMAS
Mr. Branch, what can I do for you today?

MR. BRANCH
Well first I think you can drop the attitude. You know exactly what’s been done. You deliberately disobeyed a teacher’s requests. A request that was made through heavy consideration of John Jay policy, and extensive experience in the field of journalism.

THOMAS
I think you guys have the situation mixed up a little.

(CONTINUED)
MR. BRANCH
(heated) There is no mix up.

Mr. branch takes a moment to compose himself as he realizes Thomas gets a rise out of his frustration. He decides to change up his strategy a bit.

MR. BRANCH
I assume you’ve seen today’s edition of the Chronicle. Here. Here it is to look at, if you haven’t seen it yet.

Mr. Branch hands a newspaper to Thomas with a big fat red circle around his front page article.

THOMAS
Look Mr. Branch, I can explain-

MR. BRANCH
Thomas, their is no explanation for this conduct.

THOMAS
For writing an article based on what your student’s wanted to hear?

MR. BRANCH
Thomas, were you advised by Ms. Randell not to publish this article in this edition of the Chronicle.

THOMAS
Yes, sir.

MR. BRANCH
Did you in fact intentionally go behind Ms. Randell’s back to remove a substitute article and send the paper in for printing?

There is an awkward pause for a moment

MS. RANDELL
How could you do this Thomas? I trusted you. We all thought you had so much to offer-

MR. BRANCH
Ms. Randell, please.(To Thomas) Answer the question.
THOMAS
Yes, I did sir.

MR. BRANCH
That is why you are being reprimanded Mr. Harper. You will be suspended from this high school for the remainder of the week.

THOMAS
Mr. Branch. Please, I did it for your, and my fellow students. I swear, this is what they wanted to read about. I was placed in charge of the newspaper and given the opportunity to speak my voice. Then I’m immediately shut down the first real chance I’m given. You can’t expect me to take that so easily.

MR. BRANCH
I can’t expect you to do anything except follow school procedures and listen to those who are in charge of you Thomas. It’s the same for everyone in this building. No one is special or exempt. I am expected to do the same.

THOMAS
Please Mr. Branch. You can’t do this to me, for speaking my voice, for voicing the students in this school.

MR. BRANCH
Goddammit Thomas that isn’t it. You have violated school rules and procedures. You are not the authority and you will be punished for your careless behavior.

THOMAS
Whatever, I needed a vacation from this place anyway.

MR. BRANCH
Cornell University has already taken this matter into their consideration and will get back to you in due time.

(CONTINUED)
Thomas' attitude and demeanor changes drastically. He sits up straight from his relaxed position in his chair. He looks fearful and concerned. He hesitates to ask a question.

THOMAS
Mr. Branch are you serious?

MR. BRANCH
I'm sorry Thomas, if you thought defying your higher powers wouldn't have its affects, you were severely mistaken. There are times to stand up for what you believe in, and times where you cant. That's life.

THOMAS
(full of emotion) That's bullshit.

MR. BRANCH
Thomas, I would watch your language, don't forget you're punishment can always be increased.

There is a pause as they stare down one another.

THOMAS
Mr. Branch I thought this institution stood for more than standard academic policy. I was given a chance to prove myself, and took full advantage of that opportunity. I researched extensively to find what the students really wanted to hear, and was only praised for this approach prior to my production of the article. No one had a problem with my strategy until the results it had produced scared you, made you uncomfortable, and you're going to take out all of these feelings on me. You've suspended me, threatened my future education, and contradicted all I thought you stood for. So add my profanity to the report if you want, I think it's time I leave.

Mr. Branch asks the officers stationed in his office to see Mr. Harper out and the scene fades out as Thomas is walking out of the doors.
INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY. AFTERNOON

Haley exits her class and goes to Thomas’ locker where they always meet after school. We see time pass by as she becomes worried and calls Thomas.

HALEY
(on the phone) Thomas where are you? Are you coming to your locker?

THOMAS
Yeah, I’m at home already I was sent home early.

HALEY
Sent home early? what do you mean

THOMAS
I was suspended, they called -

HALEY
You were suspended? What! let me come over. I’ll be there soon

THOMAS
(depressed) See you in a bit

INT. THOMAS’ LIVING ROOM

Thomas and Haley are sitting down on the living room sofa discussing what happened at school that day.

HALEY
I just can’t believe they would do that to you. You have a perfectly clean record, and almost perfect grades. You didn’t do this to hurt anyone.

THOMAS
Babe, I didn’t even have time to explain myself. They just threatened me, and said I’d get in more trouble if I didn’t peacefully accept whatever punishment they gave me.

HALEY
Well, hopefully this week will go by faster than normal, babe. You’ll be back in school in no time.

(CONTINUED)
THOMAS
Yeah that’s easy for you to say. What about Cornell?

HALEY
Look, they might not care about this at all. Maybe they won’t even call you.

THOMAS
Yeah Right.

HALEY
But if they do, I don’t see any reason they wouldn’t see you as a passionate, and intelligent motivated student who stands for what he believes is right, just like I do.

THOMAS
Thanks Haley. You’re the smart one you know.

HALEY
What do you mean?

THOMAS
Well none of this would have happened had I just listened to your advice.

HALEY
How?

THOMAS
If I had just listened to you in the beginning and not write about this, then none of this would have happened and I wouldn’t be in the position I am in now.

HALEY
But Thomas, forget the administration, people at school loved your article. You got almost all of the students reading, and I have truly never seen that before.

THOMAS
It was pretty cool to see everyone holding a newspaper
HALEY
Yeah, and I bet people will start
talking about this issue, and who
knows, something really can come
from this article. Who cares if it
was "illegally" published. That’ll
become insignificant once they
realize the way this article
changes things at John Jay. Then
the school will be thanking you for
all of your help in their fight
against violence.

THOMAS
Aha, Oh Haley.

HALEY
You were bold and you did what you
thought was right. It’s that
attitude that made me fall in love
with you. You’ve made me and many
other people related to these
ethnic groups realize that if we
do n’t have a real personal problem
with one another, than the fighting
should end.

THOMAS
You’re just saying that to make me
feel better.

HALEY
And is it working?

THOMAS
A little.

HALEY?
Does this help?

Haley straddles Thomas and begins kidding him. They embrace
passionately for a kiss.

THOMAS
Yeah it does.

The two of them quietly leave the leaving room and move up
to Thomas’ bedroom. Thomas and Haley start kissing, and a
song begins to play.
INT. MOLINA HOUSE. EVENING.

We transition to the Molina house, where Christian is getting ready to go out. We see him sneaking down the stairs behind his mother’s back who is in the kitchen, washing dishes. He quickly pastes a piece of paper to the refrigerator, and silently does a 180 and runs back up the stairs. A few seconds, Christian comes down the stairs, making his presence known, with heavy footsteps coming down the stairwell.

CHRISTIAN
Mom, I’m going to my friend’s house for his barbecue and birthday party now.

ESTELLA
Que?

CHRISTIAN
Mom, I told you like three times already, and you even said it was alright.

ESTELLA
No, I don’t remember what you are talking about.

CHRISTIAN
Ma, look the invitation is even on the fridge. Look, right here, it’s been here for over a week now.

ESTELLA
(confused) Oh, I see.

CHRISTIAN
So, I’ll see you later alright?

ESTELLA
Christian how you get home?

CHRISTIAN
Ma, I’ll be fine, I’m going to sleep over at Miguel’s house tonight, he’s going to the party too, alright?

ESTELLA
Ok, Christian, you be a good boy, and you be careful too.

(CONTINUED)
CHRISTIAN

Christian closes the door behind him and goes out for the night. Estella watches him out the window meet up with his good friend Miguel. It gives her a sense of relief.

As Christian meets us with his friend the scenes cuts back and forth between the house they are traveling towards and Christian and Miguel. We see an old blue Pontiac pull up in front of the house. In the car, we discover, are members of ASA.

We see one of the ASA members make a phone call. A member of the Zaros picks up on the other side. A Zaro member answers the phone. We don’t hear the conversation but we recognize its growing intensity through their body language and crescendos in the score. Furthermore, we see an ASA member in the back seat stick a gun out the top of the car window. The member of the Zaro gang on the other end of the phone call is frantically looking for his gun as well.

As the Zaro member is running to open the front door, we see Christian running towards the same door from the outside. The door opens up, and the music stops as we hear an ASA member say, "Maybe this will help you remember why we’re fighting," and fires a shot aimed at the front door.

Christian is caught in the cross fire and immediately falls to the floor. We see the ASA members pack their stuff up quickly and leave the scene, as the Zaro members and Christian’s friends run over to see if Christian is alright. The screen fades to black.

INT. THOMAS’ BEDROOM. NIGHT.

Thomas and Haley are brought back into focus while they are bare chested lying on top of one another kissing. Her phone rings.

HALEY
I should get that.

THOMAS
No, you should stay on top of me.
You’re making me feel so much better, baby.

HALEY
Aha. Thomas, it’ll be quick, hold on.
Haley jumps off of Thomas and answers her phone. Her tone is at very confused, and soon after very concerned. Her worries soon turn into tears. She tells Thomas that she has to go to the hospital to see her brother.

MONTAGE. IN CONCLUSION

The film ends with a montage over a monologue, which happens to be a journal entry, spoken by Thomas. We see several events throughout this montage. Among these events, are Christian’s funeral service, multi person fights, and a new editor in chief being named at the school newspaper.

THOMAS
When you choose to be a journalist, you expose yourself, your opinions, and your name. Whether your explicit opinions are blatantly shared, or hidden amongst the framework of the article, your writing is indicative of your person. I re-read my article I once held in such high-regard, and my own words torture me. Provocative and emotional, are some reviews we are always looking for as a writer, however when does story not come at the cost of someone, somewhere? It kills me to think my words were tossed around without the utmost consideration, as I aspire to write for a living. Words have extreme power, and I failed in underestimating their potential. I forgot my place as a student. I defied authority, and I am not proud of any of it, but I have learned. I lost my girlfriend, feel responsible for the death of her younger brother, and causing her family the most extreme amounts of pain imaginable. I’ve let myself and my entire family down. My early acceptance to Cornell university, may be revoked. I’m an embarrassment. A self-conscious, terrified, little boy, quickly realizing there’s more to the world than me. And it’s all too late to make any difference.
INT. THOMAS’ BEDROOM. NIGHT.

The montage ends back on Thomas, in his room staring at the journal article he just finished writing. He looks completely devastated. He looks at the clock it’s 4:43 A.M.

THOMAS
There’s your fucking front page story.

Fade to black.

THE END