WEST FOURTH

Dear College Writing Workshop Students,

Welcome to New York University!

In this edition of West Fourth, you will find six exemplary essays from last summer’s Precollege students—an insightful collection that navigates complex discussions related to race, gender, sexuality, nationality, trauma, activism, and social media. We encourage you to read the fine work of your predecessors for inspiration, paying close attention to the creativity, research, analysis, and eloquence of these open minds.

You will notice that these investigations explore an incredibly diverse body of evidence: the essays of James Baldwin, Olivia Laing, Maxine Hong Kingston, and Zadie Smith; a Broadway revival of Tony Kushner’s landmark play Angels in America; an episode of Charlie Brooker’s Netflix series Black Mirror; Ryan Coogler’s Oscar-winning film Black Panther; and Beyoncé’s visual album Lemonade. Each essay attempts to break away from simplistic, dualistic thinking; by turning to research, our students recognize a multiplicity of valid perspectives and begin to embrace a more nuanced stance in their writing—one in which some of the claims they read are subject to scrutiny. Rather than beginning with a fixed thesis, they ask compelling questions inspired by the written and visual texts they have studied. These writers strike a balance between humility (feeling overwhelmed by everything that “the experts” have already claimed about a given topic) and confidence (assuming they have all the answers).

Here you will encounter work that is smart, exciting, and full of curiosity. While opportunities for improvement still remain in these final drafts, each writer is actively engaging us with the pleasure of discovery.

I would like to thank all those who made this year’s publication possible: Dara Regaignon, Denice Martone, Dean Gene Andrew Jarrett, Christine Jensch, Kristin Balicki, Shannon Riley, Noelle Marchetta, Jennifer Spirer, our team of faculty editors (Bruce Bromley, Beth Machlan, Michael Tyrell, and Joshua Weber), Richard Larson, Christopher Cappelluti, Jono Mischkot, Joanna
Mendoza, Charis Caputo, and William Morgan, the founding editor of *West Fourth*.

We hope to see your writing published here next year. To echo the closing words of *Angels in America* (the subject of Grace Meise’s final essay in this anthology): “The Great Work Begins.”

Best of luck in your writing courses,

Zach Udko
Coordinator, College Writing Workshops