

I am enrolled at the newly consolidated University of KwaZulu-Natal in Pietermaritzburg, which is a merger of two historically racially segregated universities to reflect South Africa's outlook for a better democracy and improved social relations among its citizens. Pietermaritzburg lies in eastern South Africa in the

such as access to books, financial aid and support services are still developing in South Africa, leaving students to handle most of these issues on their own.

It wasn't until I got here that I learned just how much America affects the world with our government actions, music and television, which portray social norms, fashion and violence. This year South Africa celebrates 10 years of democracy. Celebrations around the country depict how the people of South Africa have high hopes for their new democratic government as opposed to the oppressive policies under the apartheid government. I have taken for granted the liberties that democracy in America has placed in my life. Water and electricity are basic necessities we have access to in America, but in South Africa they are luxuries thousands of people do not have.


Hip-hop is a major influence on the youth of South Africa. Like young Americans, they idolize rappers and singers broadcasted on television. The negative side of gangsta rap and lifestyles are imitated by the youth in the form of gangs with American names, unnecessary tension between race groups and the demoralization of women in song lyrics. But along with this negative influence, hip-hop culture has also had an encouraging effect by showing young Africans that people of color can be successful too and offering them the hope they can one day be in a similar position.

The stress reliever for most South Africans is the hourly tea break. Even during class lectures, we have a tea and coffee break. That is hot tea, even when the average temperature outside is in the 80s or 90s. When I first arrived, every meeting, every class break, every function came with tea breaks, and I wondered what was so special about tea. As I learned more about the British influence on South Africa, it became clear that it had more than just a political influence on the culture of South Africa. As my courses have progressed, I find myself, too, drinking tea—five to 10 cups a day.

Everything here is green and tropical. We have zebras just down the road and monkeys that come on campus daily. Imagine attending school in one of those beautiful images you see on Public Broadcasting Service. That is my university in a valley surrounded by lush mountains, some buildings and small African huts and an incredibly clear, blue sky.

As I travel across South Africa on the Garden Route, I see Africa's sky at its best. It is as if an ancestral painter is sitting somewhere up high above the earth, constantly working on his brush stroke across the African sky. One moment he paints the clouds with the movement of the winds; five minutes later, the painting has evolved into another amazing work of art that is breathtaking and wondrous. The sky in Africa reflects my educational experience here—it is constantly changing just as I am constantly learning.

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foothills of the Drakensberg Range, which is in the province of KwaZulu-Natal. The campus is very big and my classes are far apart. I've made good friends with some of the U.S. girls, and I've met some very nice African people. I'm learning so much about the history and people of South Africa from just talking with students.

The people in Africa are nice, but some are disappointed when they speak to me in their language

and I can't understand them. Most residents know at least three of the 11 official languages. In Pietermaritzburg, Zulu is predominantly spoken. Everyone assumes that everyone else knows it. I'm taking a Zulu class and communication has become easier for me since I learned to say, "I speak very little Zulu."

Of the 11 national languages many are characterized by elevating the tone of your voice, so for Americans, it seems as if everyone is shouting, especially if they are talking at 6 a.m. The sun rises at 5:30 every morning which causes everyone to get up and begin the day at least an hour before Americans.

Being immersed in the South African governing and education systems has given me a greater appreciation of what we have in America, particularly the academic system we have at The Citadel. Things guaranteed to us,