

Gabriela Rivas-De Leon

In-Person Voting

### A Tale of Two Voters

The sounds of laughter. Barstools clicking against the pavement, its owners moving at caterpillar speed. A woman fainting from low blood pressure, the siren's blast breaking up a conversation. Men running for water.

It's the first day of early-voting in Jefferson Parish, Louisiana. Marketed as America's national party wonderland, Jefferson Parish residents, which is inside the New Orleans city line, act like their town is much smaller than its reputation suggests. Residents waved enthusiastic hellos and swapped stories while waiting in a line that has gone twice around the block 15 minutes before the polls open at 8 a.m.

Elon sophomore and Jefferson Parish native Renell Taylor mouth gaped wide at the sight of the line as he approached. A Black man himself, he had never seen so many Black people ready to vote.

"Typically, in New Orleans, or Louisiana in general, he said, "there's normally a tendency of, for Black people to not really go out and vote."

He traveled home that weekend to visit with family, deciding on a whim to vote on Friday because it was convenient. He was always planning to vote in-person because the supposed issues with the mail-in ballot system.

On his way to the polling station, Taylor prayed that the early voting birds would be scarce at 7:45 a.m. Given his preconceptions, he brought his mask and his wallet, thinking he would be in and out in quickly, giving him time to relax and shop before coming back to Elon.

When he left at 4 p.m., he had the energy only to scarf down dinner. The wait persisted for 8 hours, in a line so close you could have seen your neighbors breathe. Given the volume of people, six feet apart was not feasible. This closeness generated a whispering telephone game, spreading down the line of whose voting for who. Taylor, a registered Democrat, didn't bother to act surprised.

“Everybody who was like coming through, it was mostly black people.” he said, “You know, Black people, they just love to talk, so we were just running it down to each other, like ‘who are you voting for?’ and everybody seemed to be on the same page. “

He thought about leaving the line many times. He, a musical theatre major who dances with a mask every day of class, felt lightheaded and weak. A woman fainted in line behind him, her sugar running low and her feet tired from standing. Someone called an ambulance as Taylor and others tried to revive her. She had waited in line all day only to be whisked away at the last second, her civic duty so close she could see the building.

There were beach chairs, recliners and barstools, brought by more seasoned voters. Taylor watched as the well-bodied elderlies faded under the hot sun. He felt that all the circumstances were too dire to be on accident.

“Some people would say it was like voter suppression.” he said, “I would think it kind of is just because like the place that they had it at is not the biggest place where they normally would have election [polling places].”

There was no family reunion type affair for Alamance county voter Lily Kays. An eerie silence permeated the early voting at the Holly Hill Mall. A registered Democrat in a battleground state of N.C., casting a vote is akin to going to war.

The stakes seemed higher. The hate speech seemed louder. The trucks that drive around Elon’s campus seem more comfortable bating students. Kays knows two of the trucks from high school.

She felt the mutual discomfort radiate off the walls. The lack of dialogue forced Kays to make assumptions about her fellow voters, reducing their physical appearances to a Trump or Biden voter. She said she could feel the eyes from the bottom of the MAGA hat follow her down the line.

“I don’t like to categorize people based on physical appearance alone, but more often than not,” she said, “in my experience at protests, the women’s march and demonstrations, the people wearing the hat eventually say something hateful within 5 seconds of me being around him.”

18 years old at the last midterm election, there’s a fatigue in her voice that she said that comes with age. The magic has worn off.

A male canvasser threw a thumbs up to two men in line as his female counterpart walks in front. The woman, Kays described, was model-like with four inch-stilettos. Feeling slightly out of her place herself, Kays knows that either the women doesn’t notice or notices and stays silent anyway. It’s a display of lewdness that sticks with Kays long after the exit sign.

A vote they will remember forever.