**Are You Sure I’m Black?**

I often look at my upbringing, the hurdles/obstacles I’ve had to overcome to gain my position in America, and compare it to the typical black man experience that is so heavily referenced. As I grow older I find that it isn’t so cut and dry and that, many of my privileges were not given to others. These are parts of my life I can’t control, nor would I want to change, but I feel it’s necessary to reflect in order to determine how I will proceed moving forward.

I was born in Seattle, WA from my Nigerian father and my, what would be deemed by society, African American mother. I say this because, if you look at my family linage on my mother’s side, you would see that my great-great grandfather was a Caucasian male who took a Native American bride. Although, because of my pigment, this had no lasting effect on my life, I feel it’s important to bring up because it’s still part of my genetic make-up and in a way adversely adds to my privilege.

Now when I say ‘privilege’ what I mean are; things that attributed to my success that I initially had no control over. For instance, I had a father. A strong male influence, I feel, is essential to a child’s life no matter the sex/race you are. Having that guiding light can help you navigate the dark corners and pitfalls of life. I would consider this a privilege because when I look at my peers, I see that I’m the outlier, and how having that light has helped me avoid mistakes that may have been a huge detriment to the quality of the life I wanted to obtain. Another would be my father’s nationality, Nigerian. Knowing where you have come from is an important factor and in determining where you will go. The more knowledge you have of your past, the better equipped you are to expose the weakness and capitalize on the strengths. I consider this a privilege because the ‘typical’ African-American experience is plagued with self-hated, confusion and an overall sense of helpless due to their past and culture being stripped away from them during the slavery days of America. Again, these two things, I had no control over, and these two things I couldn’t relinquish, but already I understand my differences from the popular consensus of life as a black man in America. Third, I was born in Washington state. Although it has its short comings, the struggles I’ve had to avoid as an “African-American” are exponentially different from those of a person my age in Detroit, Chicago, Atlanta, Los Angeles, Baltimore, D.C., let alone outside of this country. Being raised in a forward thinking society definitely has granted me a chance that others didn’t have. Allowed me to make mistakes other’s couldn’t and also allowed be to be viewed perhaps differently in terms of perception of education and success.

Another privilege I was able to obtain was through my education. While living with my mother, we moved a lot, due to the financial strain of having 3 kids to attend to while my father struggled to achieve higher education. From 1st to 6th grade, I was in a different school each year, making me somewhat of an introvert and stand off-ish towards my fellow students. The wall I built up, gave me a sense of objectivity, which I feel others of my age were not able to comprehend yet. These schools ranged from public education to private. This privilege also gave me perspective because now I was able to see both sides of the fence, both the destitute and the affluent. Again, I was able to notice the best and worst of each side, giving me the power to select the traits I felt would help me become who I wanted to be. But, as Spider-Man’s grandfather would say, “with great power, comes great responsibility.”

In present day, I’m aware of the fact that had things had been different, I may have fallen into cracks I was able to avoid as a youth, and some of those mistakes could have been severe if not deadly. Because of that, I don’t look down on those who weren’t able to take advantage of those opportunities as some of them may have not been issued. At the same time, I don’t look up to those who are more financially secure than I am because, I know had I been placed in their situation, with their parents, and their upbringing, our lives may have turned out the same, but I’m comfortable with who I am and who I’m becoming, so the envy of that life is non-existent. Through my projects, whether it be a blog, podcast, novel or even my community service, I always want to bring out the message, “be the best person you can be. The road to becoming the person you want to be may be more difficult for you, than for others, but, you still possess the free will to change your circumstance and if you are willing to walk, if possible, I will help guide.”

I know I can’t change a person’s past or experiences. I know I don’t want to be someone I’m not, and I can’t let these ideals distract me. I’m just going to be me, and in return, I’ll let you be you. Hopefully, my actions spark that ideal in others, because there is nothing more gratifying than self-worth and self awareness. \*cue Kendrick Lamar’s “I love myself”.