

Growing Up Liberian by Renia Bates, Contributing Writer



“Young ladies should not wear their nails polished. Young ladies should not whistle. Young ladies must know how to cook.” These were only a few of the requirements that were mandated to me as a child in a Liberian household. Growing up Liberian in America was really tough for me. The more my family wanted me to embrace my culture the more I tried to assimilate into American culture. Assimilating was a defense mechanism that was developed due to the negative comments that were said by the kids at school. Once they discovered my nationality, the jokes never seemed to stop.

“You’re an African booty scratcher!” “Do you look out your window and see lions?” “Do you all walk around naked?” were some of the asinine questions and comments that were proposed to me.

To avoid the ignorant questions and comments I tried to hide my identity. I concealed the part of me that made me unique and culturally rich because I could not handle the teasing. When asked where I was from I would say that I was from another state. However, no matter how much I tried to run away from who I was, one could still hear and see the Liberian heritage throughout my family. This identity crisis occurred from K-12th grade. One expects that a seventeen year old would have it all figured out but high school was still tough for me, because the questions and comments never stopped. So there I was, almost eighteen and still trying to avoid the part of me that helped mold my identity.

Fortunately in Fall 2009 I entered college! I met so many people from different countries around the world. I quickly learned in college that being foreign could make one more intriguing. My world completely changed! All of a sudden I no longer wanted to hide who I was. Instead I wanted to scream it out loud. I AM LIBERIAN!!!! I finally understood why my family had so pride about their nationality.

I hope while reading this article your questions are not directed to why I wanted to hide my nationality but instead why are some Americans so ignorant of the African culture. If they only knew that Africa is a very interesting, culturally rich, innovative, resourceful, and growing continent; their perspective would be completely different! However all is not lost. The first step needed to start that change, has to be education. People often belittle what they do not understand. As foreigners (to America), our duty should be to study our own cultures in great detail so that we can accurately defend it. Growing up Liberian (in America) was a struggle, but I am happy and blessed to have finally embraced my identity, and thankful that Liberian morals and rules have molded me into the Natural Me!



Posted September 2012

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