

Funmi

I want you to see that people who live in this type of skin color exist everywhere in the world. I want to normalize being Nigerian, being Black, every identity that I am, because they're normal to me. And they should be normal to everyone, because we're all human beings.



My parents are Nigerian, I was born in London, England, and my family came to the United States in 2002. So I have a pretty international background. I'm British, I'm Nigerian through my parents, and I'm recently a U.S. citizen.

Sometimes I wonder, am I really American? As an immigrant of color, I feel like I don't get to say I'm American. At least, that's not the idea the media promotes. Am I really British, because that's where I was born and that was my first identity? Or am I really Nigerian? I've never lived in Nigeria, though I love my culture and I can speak the language. But then when I went to Nigeria, I felt like a stranger.

I'm getting to a place in my life where I'm trying to balance all of these different identities, and trying to make sense of them all, even when sometimes they conflict with one another.

The conservative-leaning culture of being Nigerian, versus the very Western culture that I grew up in – those tend to clash. My parents don't

always understand that in addition to wanting to settle down and get married, I'm also very passionate about the world we live in, and pursuing a career.

I think the identities of being Black and a woman also clash, because a lot of the time the Black community wants you to put "Black interests" before the interests of being a woman. And vice versa – a lot of the times, as a feminist, you're expected as a Black woman to put issues that affect blackness aside.

Sometimes people also treat Black Americans and Americans from Africa or from other parts of the diaspora differently. When I was in law school, for example, I noticed that the tone of my classmates changed in our interactions once it was clear that, "Okay, so, she's not just a Black woman, she's an immigrant. Oh, so that makes her exciting and different." So it was like, "Oh, let's specialize her. She's different from *our* Black people."

And if people think I'm a Black American they assume, because of the way I speak, that my family is



Funmi's Nigerian passport and Certificate of Naturalization from the United States.



"These items represent my life experiences, which are heavily influenced by a global and international worldview. They also symbolize both my own and my family's journey to attaining and becoming the face of the so-called American Dream in a contemporary context."

rich. And I had professors in law school telling me, "Wow, you're very articulate." And that was very offensive to me, because I'm thinking, "Look, I done took the LSAT. I done wrote all these essays. I graduated at the very top of my class in college. You all saw this on my application. Why on earth wouldn't I be articulate?"

Africans and African Americans are sometimes pitted against one another. Especially in professional environments and political environments, I think assumptions and hostilities from both sides can start to fester. And it's so strange because I consider myself Black in America, too. No matter where you live on this planet, if you're a Black person in White spaces, the experiences are quite identical. I've been Black in the UK and I've been Black here, and a lot of those experiences are very similar.

There are those who say that people of color, women, who voice their displeasure, they are babies, they're sensitive. But it's actually the opposite. We deal with a lot of crap that we don't say. I think that if every woman of color, person of color, LGBT, marginalized community member, were to voice every single thing on a daily basis that they felt, the world would collapse.

Every single person deserves respect, and fairness, and humanity. And if you have any advantage, or privilege, you should use it not to further oppress anyone, but to help them out of that marginalization. That's the type of lawyer I want to be. I want to be a

person who uses the law not to further oppress, but to liberate people who are trapped in some way.

So I try to learn about people who are also marginalized and different from me, so that I don't turn around and do the very thing to them that I'm trying to work and fight against. I think we all need to do a better job at that — of not seeing just a person walking, but seeing a human being. That spectrum of emotions that you deal with and you have to fight through every day, they probably do too. So, treat people from a place of humanity.