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Code 121

Dr. Dispain

The Good One

I was born in Saint Louis Missouri, and then moved to Belleville Illinois just when I turned seven years old. I grew up in mostly white area, which being African American can be hard. Most of the time I was the only one around that looked like me or even dressed like me. School was where I first started to be concerned about how I was perceived by another race, which made me change who I was. I became one of the only black kids around that was considered “a good one”. For a long time, I was okay with that because I really wanted approval, but I started growing up and realized I didn't want to be considered one of the good ones because I carried myself properly and maturely. After I came to realize the stereotype, I had fallen into, I changed and started being myself again. This change occurred during high school when I experienced a little of what it looked like to be with people that looked like me.

As a child you are heavily influenced by your environment. My environment was very closed off growing up in the suburbs and going to private school all my life. My environment didn't have a lot of people that looked like me which made it hard to fit in at first. Like any kid that finds it hard to fit in, I changed myself to fit in with the people around me. I was made fun of a lot for how I dress, the shoes I wore, my hair, or my facial features. I couldn't change my facial features like having big lips, but I could change my hair and clothes. I stopped wearing Jordans and jeans with holes in them. I even changed my hair to look more like the part, which my parents did not agree with. They noticed I was changing who I was to fit in. It didn't take long

for me to become a product of my environment. I continued to shape myself to please the people around me and it worked, actually it worked too well. One day I was hanging out at my friend's house, whose dad always seemed off to me, but I ignored it. As my friend is busy talking to his mom his dad says, "you know I had my doubts about you, but you and your parents are one of the good ones, they actually have high paying jobs, I will allow you to start spending the night". I always wondered why he wouldn't let me spend the night, but his other friends could. It all made sense at that moment, I realized at that moment I was considered one of the well-mannered African Americans and not just Sam lee or one of Braden's friends. This statement hurt me to my core because I wasn't excited that I could finally stay over, I was hurt that I couldn't stay before because he didn't know if I was a "good one" or not yet. This kick started my curiosity of how other people's parents thought about me or teachers. This happened around 7th or 8th grade, which means I was still very young, so I still wanted to fit in. At this point in time, I'm stuck between trying to be myself and fit in at the same time. I started wearing my hair how I wanted to even when I was made fun of, which was a huge step which mattered going forward into high school.

2020 is the start of my freshman year in high school and around the time when the covid pandemic was going on. My school gives you the option to either learn from home or be in school. My parents chose for me to stay home out of concern for my safety, but I eventually started going in person. I didn't want to feel left out and learning from home is difficult. Since I was one of the only people to do online, I came in without having any friends so at lunch I sat at a table with one other kid. He didn't give me any problems at first but once he felt that he was comfortable with me he tried to call me the n word which is something that never happened to me before. I wasn't sure what to do, so I ignored it and sat with a group of all black people. That was my first experience being in school and sitting around people like me. I was hesitant to sit with them because of it too. I had grown to be more comfortable around white people. Sitting

with this new environment of people changed my thinking and I slowly started being my full self. I started not caring about whether I was perceived as one of the good ones and dressed and acted how I felt I was being myself. Unfortunately, I didn't keep this up for long. I got a girlfriend in the beginning of sophomore year who was white. Of course, her family was different than mine especially culturally. I wanted her people to think the best of me, so I changed my hair and the way I dressed again. I started to wear clothes and shoes to fit in with them. I started losing the friends I had and just like that I was one of the good ones again. Her grandpa said, "I'd much rather stay as far away from those people as possible, but I like you so keep taking care of my granddaughter". That statement opened my eyes up and I realized I was around a very racist and toxic environment. I stayed knee deep in the environment for 3 years, all the way to senior year. Things happened and I ended up not being with that girl by the end of senior year.

2024 summer and I am for the most part alone. All I was doing was working but then I ended up meeting my two best friends which were very cultured African Americans. They couldn't care any less about how they are perceived, which can be a good thing or a bad thing. This behavior rubbed off on me over time but not as extreme as them. I even started listening to the music I liked around people that didn't look like me, which was something I was always scared to do. Once again, I started dressing how I wanted, and I confidently grew out my locks. This is important because dreads or locs can be seen in a negative way by white people. I learned that how I looked didn't matter and it was what came out of my mouth and how. I always hated being told I sound like a white person. To me that is incredibly wrong in so many ways. I wanted to be told I sound like an intelligent person not a white person. African American people aren't the only people who might not have high language skills and there are plenty black people who speak intelligently. I've never heard someone say you sound black before, and it has never

been in a positive manner. Why can't talking black be the same as talking white, both races have people who can speak “properly” or “informally”.

I was one of the good African Americans my whole life. Through these long series of events over the years I began being comfortable in my own skin no matter what environment I'm in. I carried this mindset into college. It's predominately white here but it doesn't bother me I can get along with anyone while being myself.