

Chronicles of Being a Black African

When I look at myself in the mirror, I see an amazing native African woman living in America. I count myself blessed and privileged to be born and raised in Ghana, Africa. I am always grateful for the amazing culture and identity associated with being born and raised in this small West African country of twenty-five million people. Religion, respect of the elders and paying homage to our ancestors are an essential part of my upbringing as a Ghanaian, and have helped me with my new life in America.

Religion is a fundamental part of my culture. In America, I have seen a huge adoption of African spirituality amongst blacks. The spirituality practiced by West Africans is being adopted by African Americans who are looking for a reference to Africa. There is a widespread belief in a Supreme God, unique and transcendent. Africans have a sense of the sacred and a sense of mystery; there is high reverence for sacred places, persons and objects. Belief in the afterlife is incorporated in myths and in funeral grounds. Having been raised with these belief, I am able to have a possible impact and share my experience and knowledge of traditional African beliefs. This has won me many friends and enabled me to build trustworthy relationships both at school, my community and my workplace

I learned respect for elders at a young age. In Ghana, traditionally the man leads the household, but the woman is the backbone and power source. In a Ghanaian household, although the man sets the strategy, the woman directs the plan. The role of the man is to provide financially and to contribute emotionally, spiritually, physically, and mentally to the wellbeing of his family. Men must protect the family's wellbeing and self-worth, as well as guarding them from any threats and danger; he is a leader and a teacher. As a woman, a mother and a wife,

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belonging to the cultural tribe of the Ashantis, I plan, execute and lead on the educational needs of my children. I am empowered by the many examples set by my mother and other female elders that have come before me. Looking after the homestead, household chores, such as keeping the home clean and caring for the children, the sick or the elderly are generally viewed as the responsibilities of the woman. In modern times, the gradual rise of women's rights has given me the opportunity to rise above the traditional expectations which stipulate what a woman should do. This has made it possible for me to empower my daughters to pursue higher education. As Katha Pollitt said in her essay "Why Boys Don't Play with Dolls," "it is feminism, the ideology of flexible and converging sex roles, that fits our children's future" (557).

Honoring my female ancestors is something I do every day. It is a belief that our ancestors mediate between God and man. The invisible world of spirits and ancestors is always present and the intention of these spirits can be ascertained; care is taken to ascertain the will of the spirit of whom sacrifices may be due or from whom protection may be sought. African women from my tribe are known to be warriors. My history tells me of a very famous Black African warrior named Yaa Asantewaa. She was a respected and feared woman who led the Ashanti rebellion known as the War of the Golden Stool against British Colonialism. The role Yaa Asantewaa played in the war has made her a legend in the history of Ghana and the feminist movement in Ghana. I associate myself as being the Yaa Asantewaa in my family in the sense that in spite of being an African, I am willing to stand up to men of other racial backgrounds. I can do everything they can and maybe do it better without letting my race as an African be a challenge to me.

Having lived in America for five years, I am sometimes mistaken to have the stereotypical characteristics normally associated with Black Africans and African Americans. I

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have come to notice that, assumptions are made about Africans and African Americans in America. We can be stereotyped as harmful, dishonest and sometimes too aggressive. I can relate to Brent Staples in his essay “Just Walk on By” when he said “I begun to take precautions to make myself less threatening” (220). He also stated that, “The fearsomeness mistakenly attributed to me in public places often has a perilous flavor” (219). I can connect with Staples and strongly agree with him in the sense that blacks in general are often stereotyped. They are most often seen as the bad nut among the lot. He gave an example of being mistaken for a burglar when he rushed into the office of a magazine he was writing for and also when he entered a jewelry store and “the proprietor excused herself and returned with an enormous red Doberman pinscher straining at the end of a leash” (220). Jerald Walker also states in his article, “Scattered Inconveniences,” how “women crossing the street or removing their purses from grocery carts at my approach” and “security guards following me in department stores” (252). I always have to present my best foot forward to build trust and credibility amongst people who may judge me based on the fact that I am a native African.

As stated earlier, I am and always will be proud of who I am. First of course a black person, but at the core a very proud African. Being a native African is ingrained into my everyday thinking. Our traditions, our way of life and even our perceived drawbacks enhance my beliefs. I will forever be grateful for the community support of my fellow Ghanaians whom I associate with both in church, at school, workplace and organizations within my community. I might be thousands of miles away from home, I may be living in the western part of the world or have adopted certain ideologies of the western world, born and bred my children in America, but nonetheless, the spirit of Africa still burns in me. I will always be a daughter from the AFRICAN SOIL, a proud example of the greatness of those who came before me.

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