**Life as a Black Girl: Attending a PWI Forced Me to Embrace My Blackness and Femininity**

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I never had to learn the ugly side of being a black girl until I went to college. Until I had to leave my “chocolate city” to move into a new space filled with wealthy white kids from prep schools, I never had to feel that angry side, that overly self-conscious side of being a black girl: that side that feels weird about my roommate seeing me wearing a doo-rag, that side that feels misunderstood and stupid when it becomes difficult for me to not use certain slang in seminar, and that side that needed to protest the night the grand jury decided to not indict Darren Wilson (if not for change, then for my own psychological well-being).

This definitely isn’t the struggle of every black girl who starts college at a PWI, but it sure was mine, and at 18 years old, while already enduring the struggles of transitioning into an adult and living on my own in a new city, this issue unexpectedly spiraled into my life with no warning. I was terrified.

I think what bothered me the most was a feeling of dreadful discomfort that followed me everywhere around campus. The thought that the institution I attended was originally designed to not include people like myself haunted me, and it only proved to be true as the weeks went on.

From the tall steel gates that separated my school from the historically black neighborhood of Harlem, to the blatantly unapologetic stares from students, to the books that we read in Freshman Lit by old dead white men, I felt like I didn’t belong. There’s something about being surrounded by people 24/7 who unconsciously see me as inferior to them that irks a nerve I never knew I had.

Surprisingly, something beautiful came out of this. Never have I had to face my blackness and my femininity because I had always been so emerged within it. During my freshman year, not only did I get the chance to face it; I got the chance to own it and make it mine. Growing up, I always felt like the idea of being a black woman had already been defined for me, and I simply had to shape myself to that mold.

My freshman year, however, made me realize that the rest of the world could care less about a mold; they see what they want to see before I even open my mouth, and who I am on the inside will not change that, thereby making me feel free to be whoever I want to be.

I gave up thinking that things could be “too white” or “too black” for myself, and as a result, I felt freer to be the black woman that I want to be. Maybe I didn’t want to fit a mold that said I had to have the right amount of attitude and relax my hair by high school. Lately, I’ve been learning and exploring myself with no boundaries, always keeping in mind the love for my hometown and my people that are forever a part of me.

I’m now more secure in my skin than I’ve ever been.This month marks a full year since I entered my freshman year of college. I’ll be returning in about a week with a different outlook than what I had when I first started college.

I’ve faced the reality that having a double-conscious is a real thing as a black woman. I am going to feel differently around white people than I do around black people, and the same goes for a lot of black students attending PWIs.

That struggle of self-awareness, along with so many other struggles, makes the ugly side of being a black girl so much more beautiful than anything in the world. It’s a struggle that’s like a secret; no one else will understand it unless they’ve lived it.

I feel privileged to not have “privilege” because it gives me the capacity to have an understanding of the world that not everyone has and to truly be carefree once overcoming the struggle of being overly self-conscious of the way that the world perceives me. To me, being a black girl is like being magic; our beauty is not always understood, but it’s fascinating nonetheless. I encourage every black woman in college this semester to find that magic within yourselves and to shine in every way you know how. Peace and blessings.