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The Shaping

I wasn't always like this. I didn't always see the world like this. I didn't always move like this. When he was young, he never saw the world in color. He knew about it, but never looked through its lens as he does now. Overtime however, his vision and awareness began to develop. His Blackness. His passion. His pride in who he was. This is the matriculation overtime of my outlook on myself and race and how it has essentially become my passion. Learning about our culture and becoming more aware and knowledgeable about my culture has passioned me more and more over time. From when I was a little kid to where I am now, what I consider a monumental crossroads in this experience, Howard University. There have been a multitude of factors that have shaped me into the Black man I am today, although I see these three the most impactful; my Mom, my own experiences of monumental events, and my influential visit to The National African American History and Cultural Museum. These factors have molded my views on race and culture. As I alluded to before, when I was little I never really thought about race, until my Mom started teaching me about it. My mom would play R&B and Hip Hop in the car and bring me to barbeques when I was little so that's where I found a place to take pride in. Some of the basic, identifiable elements of our culture. As I got older, she started to teach me about race and what it meant. All the things our people have gone through and still do to this day. As I

grew older, her teachings and ideas started to direct and shape my own, and I started to form my own voice. I became more aware and prideful in who I was. She made sure that I grew up with this education because she knew how important it was. In relatively recent history has she explained things such as gentrification and generational curses affecting Black communities. After seeing these around me all my life, and now understanding them, I would say she has been the main sculptor in my black enlightenment and passion. For this and many other reasons, I am forever thankful.

In elementary, I went to a majority white school so I didn't really get a lot of exposure to Black people or Blackness. This other mold is what I see as my personal life experiences and what I have witnessed through my own eyes. My personal experiences that have shaped my passion with race really started in elementary school. In third grade, I remember coming home one day crying to my mom after learning about slavery for the first time. Just think about that, this little brown boy finding out that his people had been held captive, against their will for 250 years. Don't even get me started about how learning about Jim Crow went down. However, I look back and realize that I took the significance of these events for granted at the time, but now greatly appreciate learning about them. I feel that this is a large theme in my life. Not all these events are necessarily bad, for example, I remember the euphoria if felt in the second grade when I heard the news that Obama was elected as president. An event I can now tell my children and their children about. As got older I also started to see the more hidden and nuanced effects of systematic racism and slavery. Growing up, Jamar Clark was shot and killed by police three blocks from my house along with Philando Castille a few years later shot about a mile away from my next house. These events led to my mother having to tell me how to behave when interacting with the police because of the color of my skin. I was 15. Something very scary for

someone to hear at that age. A Lot of these events have pushed me into a more activist role. Weather that is educating white people on the subject or physically protesting. I see this as a theme. That monumental events, good and bad, like the ones I mentioned, were very impactful in shaping me into who I am today.

Another very significant event that has affected how I see the things around me, is when I first visited The National African American History and Culture Museum. As soon as I heard of its existence, I knew it was somewhere I had to go. Once I got there, it was a life changing experience. To see the progression of our people throughout time from but at the same time keep in mind that we are all still struggling today. From property to the President. At different points of my visit I became extremely emotional. And one of the most impactful moments was when I first saw the shackles. To think there was a human-being in those. That a person was bound physically, Mentally, and Spiritually. To leave their home to never return. There was an anger that welled up inside me, but at the same time an awing calmness of self-restraint. I later went to think about all the young African American boys and men who fought in the civil war. And what got me was not the fact that they were fighting for their own freedom but their mothers. It made me think of my relationship with my mother. The fact that you are fighting for the freedom of your mother... the person the birthed you... raised you... It just made me think of my mom and if I were in that situation. It was also intriguing to see all the cultural relics that people would talk about and you would see on TV such as Mobb Deep's first Mixtape and famous pieces of art. I feel like this trip was so impactful because it made it all real. All the trials, and tribulations but also the accomplishments and achievements of or people.

Through these valuable moments in my life, such as the teachings of my Mother, my own personal experiences and the African American Museum, I have really been taught how special I

am and have found a pride in my culture and my passion. Proud of what we have gone through to be where we are and hopeful for the future, what still needs to change and what we will accomplish. Having this awareness is my passion, the passion of caring for and about my people. These events throughout my life have shown me the importance of an institution like Howard, and of course eventually pushed me to come here. Howard specifically because it is the Mecca of HBCU's. A monumental stage in my progression of my Black Awareness. How much being here means to me. To be in a place of black excellence like this, the history, the alumni, the notoriety. I'm living the dream and couldn't imagine myself anywhere else. I'm passionate about what I have learned about my black culture, as well my further learning about black culture.