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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. His Blackness. He now has pride in his skin and the vision of a messiah to bring change for his people. There are a multitude of things that have shaped me into the Black man I am today. My Mom, my own experiences, and my influential visit to The National African American History and Cultural Museum. These factors have molded my outlook on race and culture. As I alluded to before, when I was little I never really thought about race until my Mom started telling me about it. My mom would play R&B and Hip Hop in car and bring me to barbecues so that's what I took pride in. As I got older she started to teach me about race and what it meant. All the things our people have gone through and what it means. At this point her ideas started to direct and shape my own. 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. Then in relatively recent history has she explained things such as gentrification and generational curses affecting Black communities. After seeing these all my life and now understanding them, I

would say she has been the main push factor in my “wokeification”. For this reason I am forever thankful for her for doing that.

In elementary I went to a majority white school so I didn't really get a lot of exposure to black people or blackness. Now a more recent affecting factor is my life experiences and what I have witnessed through my own eyes. Growing up, Jamar Clark was shot and killed by police three blocks from my house. A few years later Philando Castille was shot about a mile away from my next house. When it became time my mom had to start telling me how to interact with the police. I was 15. Something very scary for someone to hear at that age. In 3rd 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. And don't even get me started about how first learning about Jim Crow went down. However I look back and during our little quire concert we would sing civil rights songs, which I never knew the significance at the time but now greatly appreciate. I feel that this is a large theme in my life. As got older I also started to realize the effects of systematic racism and slavery. Seeing white privilege every day led me to eventually educating people on what it is and its does. Now we have reached my current stage, the pinnacle, Howard University. A monumental stage in my progression of my Black Awareness. I mean you don't understand how much being here means to me. When I was accepted, I was in a state of shock. To be in a Black of black excellence, the history, the alumni, the notoriety. I'm living my dream that I have developed through all these years of experience and guidance from my Mother. Colin Kaepernick for example, i've always been a huge football fan and remembered watching him play and when I saw him kneel and get punished for it made me an even bigger fan. So much so

that I purchased his special edition black jersey. It was events like this in my life that I see as very impactful in shaping me into who I am today.

One very significant event that has affected how I see the things around, 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 life changing. To see the progression of our people throughout time from, property to the president, but to think that we are all still struggling. At different points of my visit I became extremely emotional. And one of the most impactful moments of my life 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. 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. My relationship with my mother. And 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 intriguing to see all the cultural relics that people would talk about and you would see on tv. I feel like this trip was so impactful because it made it all real. All the trials, and tribulations but also all the accomplishments and achievements. Thought these valuable experiences of the teachings of my Mother, my own personal experiences and the African American Museum, I have really been taught how special I am and found a pride in my culture and my people. Proud for 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.