



Stories of Reminiscence

• Black Rap

• FEBRUARY 2021

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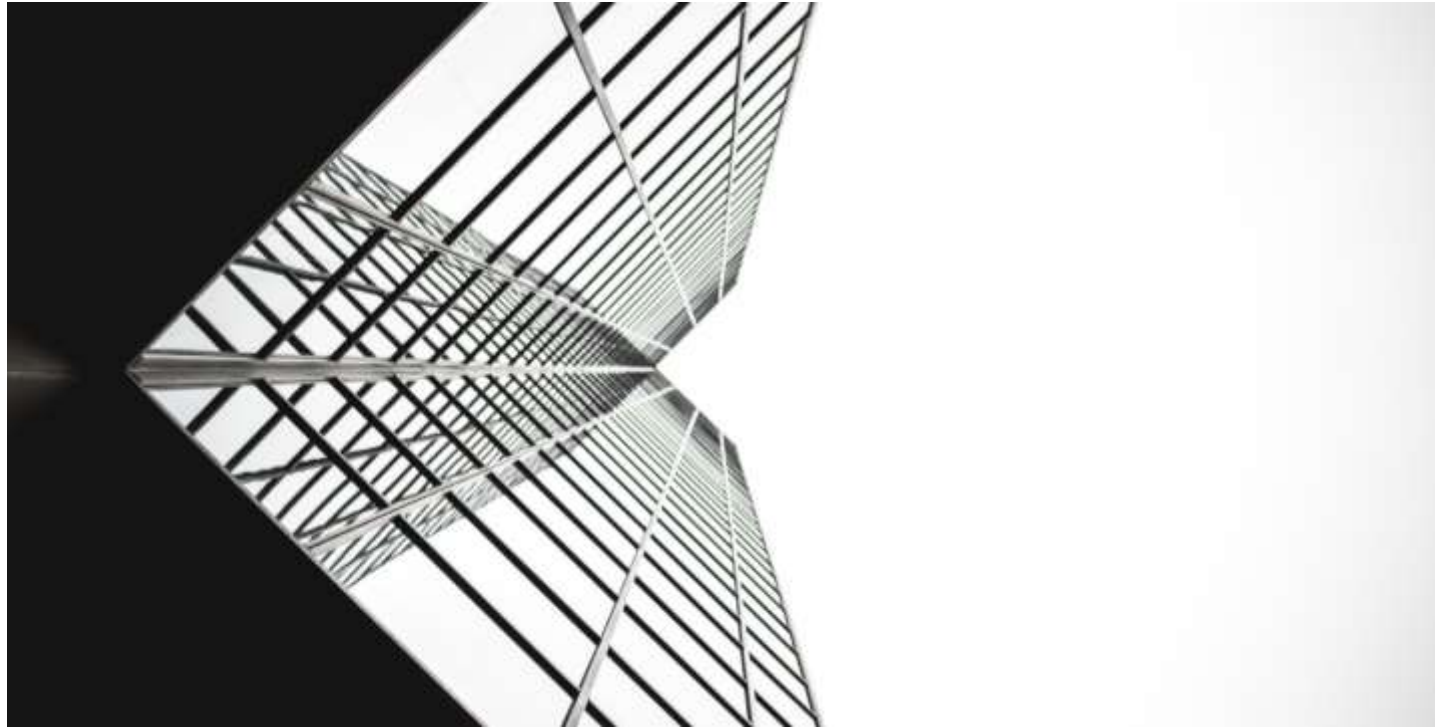
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Editor's Comments New Foundations

Kobena Amoah



The idea of restoring the publication became reality in the 2019-20 academic calendar year, under the initiative of Ellen Kazembe (Former Editor-In-Chief) and has ever since been successful. While I had not been involved in the first publication, my encounter with the chief editor at the time, Ellen Kazembe, inspired my association with the publication. It was through this association that in the

summer of 2020, Ellen contacted me to continue her line of work. I gladly accepted this responsibility and much has happened since then.

This is the first version of the publication ever since I took responsibility of it and it would be evident some modifications have been made. To some extent, these revisions have been resultant of natural processes as I became more involved with this time-consuming project. To another extent, the revisions made have been a result of the influences (direct or indirect) of Ms. Tasha Oteni (my advisor) and Ms. Malinda Polk (my high school English Teacher). To both, I owe an enormous debt of gratitude.

Beyond that, I would specifically like to thank Ms. Oteni. It was through her conversations that I became more intrigued and started working with the publication. I would also like to thank my colleague and managing editor Denzel Marufu for his work and endearing support in turning this publication to what it is now. I would also extend my gratitude to Professor Elizabeth Benacka and Professor Desmond Odugu for their tremendous support. And lastly, of course, I would like to thank Mr. Craig Marchbanks for his support.

This edition is a continuation of the

ideas and interactions I had with all these people. Whatever the changes made between this edition and the previous, the purpose remains the same: documenting the black experience at the Lake Forest College.

Readers will note the publication is divided into three sections. The sections are directed toward the components of the black community at the college – alumni, current students, and faculty members. While these sections could be read out of order, better served will you be if you read them in order. The section on the current students is the most expansive and it is to this audience we devote most of our attention.

Formative Experiences: Reflections from Alumni

In Conversation with Rosalin Walcott

Kobena Amoah

As a young girl growing up in the projects of the South Bronx, Rosalin Walcott embraced lessons from her grandfather and older sister about the importance of knowledge and community. Little did she know, she was being prepared for what would be her life's journey: one dedicated to improving the lives of others and learning. Now working in the orbits of the legal industry, her journey did not take the path of a familiar straightforwardness but rather filled with curves and bends. Key to that journey, was her formation at Lake Forest College.

This interview flows naturally as discussing her evolution through the years. More than that, it is about the journey of an inspiring black woman.

I open



In Conversation with Rosalin Walcott

Kobena Amoah



Up until July 2020, I was a paralegal in Chicago. I am currently unemployed. Mainly due to covid, but also in part to the racial injustices happening in the US. Working in the environment I was working in started to weigh on me. I reached my limit with the killing of George Floyd. I became mentally exhausted. I had been working since I was 15, so covid, kind of, gave me an out; the time to reflect really. My family lives on the East Coast, and with me alone in the Midwest, they felt it would be better for us to be together or closer. I agreed and sent in my resignation.

I have family in New York and Atlanta. New York was congested and mounting with covid cases at the time, so I made the decision to move to Atlanta with my sister. I used the last couple of months of unemployment to look back on my career, to figure out what I wanted moving forward, and connect with myself.

I got back into writing (I was an avid writer at Lake Forest) and also connected to my photography. I have a blog. I am going to showcase my photography on a website, and the plan is within the next year, to write a book or two. Meanwhile, I stay open in my employment search.

2. What would you say most motivates you to do what you do? What are you most excited or passionate about? What are the goals you most want to accomplish in your work? Not so much the goals that are in your job description, but the goals you hold personally?

Helping people motivates me. Moving a person, an organization or myself forward. I spent a lot of time with my grandfather. As a Black man in the South, in the time he grew up, his ability to learn and gain upward social mobility was taken from him, so he always pushed and told me, “Get your education and learn. No one can take away your knowledge.” He had to leave school to work to help the family survive. He realized not only his Blackness, but his lack of education made him a target.

Like my grandfather did for the generations that came after him, I want to uplift and mobilize people by building and connecting. That is what I hope to accomplish.

3. I want to understand how and why you ended up here working in this position. What led you to this job? What were you doing before you came here? What attracted you to work for _____?

When I graduated from Lake Forest, I did non-profit work for about 6 years. First, I did a non-profit that was run like a for-profit. That was a big lesson for me on reality v. feeling. It FELT like a nonprofit, like for the people. It benefited them greatly but the bottom line was money. I focused on the type of work we did and I didn't heed their profit focus. Working there was hard because I'd choose people first. For me growing up in the projects of the South Bronx, the impression upon me was everyone deserved housing, education, community, and generally a safe environment. So my transition into the legal field from non-profit made sense.

Note about the interview: This work is a reproduction of the exact conversation that took place between Kobena Amoah and Rosalin Walcott on Wednesday the 27th of January, 2021.

Part One: Life Story and Experiences

1. What's your current position? How long have you been in this position?

I actually studied litigation. (Loyola University of Chicago). Banks were being taken to task for the 2008 Banking Crisis, so my work on those matters led me to handling commercial litigation and then real estate work. This culminated into my work with what's called Low-Income Housing Tax Credits (LIHTC) Deals, where you use tax credits from the government to purchase and create all types of low-income housing. This includes Veteran housing and housing for the elderly etc. I say that because when I talk about it people assume just Section 8. All of it allowed me to create mobility for myself and others. Acquiring and sharing that knowledge is the attraction.

4. Now if we can, I'd like to go way back for a little while. Where did you grow up? What was it like to grow up in _____? What was it like to go to Lake Forest College?

Where I grew up was really cool but it wasn't the easiest. I grew up in the South Bronx, specifically the Forest projects. I lived across the street from Fat Joe. The Bronx out of all the boroughs (of course, I would be biased) was familial. If you from there, or you visited, you would know people looked out for each other.

I remember I went to the corner store and parked my bike on the side. And when I came out, someone was trying to steal it but someone else from the neighborhood was like, "If you don't put that girl's bike down." I loved it. I felt cared and looked out for.

At Lake Forest, being a black student was not easy - at least not for me. There was this shock of being in Lake Forest. I was a resident assistant and had some systematic issues there. [Confidential] Overall I had several incidents that would remind me where certain people and systems thought my place was.

I pined down how involved I was compared to my time at boarding school as a result. A mistake. Outside of those incidents I was able to forge really important relationships and bonds with staff, offices, and professors, down to my recruiter. There was some sense of belonging and being genuinely valued.

5. Did you have any key mentors or people who deeply influenced who you are, what you believe in and what you're committed to in your work and life? Tell me about them.

There were a couple of people along the way, especially advisors. At Lake Forest, one of mine was Mark White [passed away]. He was a communications teacher. So through him, I was writing a lot and did an independent study focusing on hip-hop, and how it influences Black people and Black history. In his passing, I made a survival decision to push that away, and that's how I ended up working for the non-profit. I recognized that in losing him, I went on a little different type of journey.

Another key mentor was my older sister. There's five siblings total and I'm the youngest. Because my sister was older and was the next sibling up, she really took care of me. She taught me how to read early and anything that she learned, I was learning. So, I was five years ahead. My sister and I played school; I was reading; I was doing math; we played store. That experience gave me the love of learning and the love to then share it. That really shaped my mindset.

I try to avoid it, but in this case in the last few months I've been putting together how to better deal with organizations and systems that try to tell me as black woman that "*Your abilities are fixed and that's it*" or "*This is how I've measured you and that's it.*" I've been taking stock of myself. I know I am knowledgeable and valuable; I can grow;; I can get better and therefore be a better person. I don't have to prove that to you either. She [my sister] gave me that Growth mindset which was a huge thing.

I meet people who agree and listen to these systems with Fixed Mindsets that say they are not worthy and do not have value. It's hard when everyone's telling you that. But I was lucky enough with my sister to know that isn't true. As an adult I have more clarity, that clarity I want to pass on, especially to our youth.

6. Did you have any life-changing experiences that put you on the path that led you to be doing what you're doing today? Tell me about them. Your challenges and rewards.

I have a life changing experience related to Lake Forest. As I said, I was a resident assistant and there was a disagreement with the administration. I was a resident assistant in the boarding school I attended. So, I took the work and students seriously. It was an important job. It was about the way they handled it that made me feel less of a person.

Effective Listening and Role Modeling is spoken of, when referring to Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging (DIBs). Effective Listening is seeking to understand, echoing back what you heard and calibrating BEFORE interpreting. Interpreting too soon, you're making it about yourself; protecting yourself, department, or institution. Role Modeling is the actions of each individual modeling the policies, missions and values of the whole. It is being there, asking/respecting differing opinions, sincerely advocating for others. These things done better would have made all the difference for me. I kept going up the chain till I found that. I am proud that I found where the principles and mission of the school was being role modeled, not everyone is going to follow suit.

The occurrences before reaching that point made an impression and was a challenge. I was struggling to have my voice heard, really to find the right words for the situation, and to be taken seriously. I didn't realize it, but I could feel it was going to be a theme in my life. I wanted to get it right then so badly. A foreshadowing to life in the corporate world

Anyway, I used that experience to figure out what I needed to do to become a better person, to find words in those moments – when everything was against me. I realize my perspective in thinking I was the challenge needed to be broadened. Someone not hearing your words, doesn't mean you lack them. Strengthening your core of self-esteem and confidence allows those words to flow freely. I was a strong and powerful young woman externally, internally there some places that needed some stability. I have put in the work and since then become someone that can deal with such challenges.

Part Two: Reflections and Lessons

1. What are the lessons for someone like me, or for any other black student especially those transitioning out of college?

It's hard for me to answer that because I think I was and am a particularly sensitive person. I grew up having to predict people's emotions, feelings and moods to help myself and people around me. I have perfected the talent of reading moods, types of language and subtext. Picking that up has been a huge blessing: I take big ideas and merge them with complex thoughts easily, but picking up on everything meant little energy, mis-internalizing, and struggles with people. I don't recognize these things in others, so my answer may not connect. My advice is more about continuing to figure out who you are, who you are not, and keep growing. Your sense of self, builds

self-esteem and that pours into your faith in your abilities (confidence). That's your core, strengthen your core.

I'd also say it's the dualities – that there is a lot of dualities to be Black and to accept all of that, whether it's the duality of black culture and society, understanding the difference between living and surviving, the duality of professional life and social lives, truth and perception, and your own value v. the perception(s) of self. For those transitioning, take a moment and understand that being black, sometimes, means your foot is in two places or multiple things. And in being Black, woman, man etc., they seem to be fighting each other. They don't have to. Explore them, understand them and take agency to accept them all or what makes sense to you. They don't have to fight each other and you too.

2. From your story, if there was one thing you could do differently, what would it be? Why?

I wouldn't have focused on surviving so much. I would've took a moment, to really pause and understand that I didn't have to live a certain way or be a certain way just to survive or just to get through. I was equally of value than anything and everything around me was, whether you are doing it for family, or to help pull certain people up. Add yourself in there.

Ask yourself what do you want? And keep that energy upfront. Keep enough energy for yourself. You don't wanna get too far down the road and have to pivot and figure it out because you left yourself behind doing it for everybody else.

I got lucky and didn't wander too far. But I would say, for instance, I would go straight to Village Voice from college, or some other publications and just figure it out. I was young and acting like I was 40 and had children. I do love my journey though.

3. What did you learn from the people you met along the way to become who you are now?

I learned to slow down. Again when you're thinking of survival and what you gotta do, sometimes you're not living in the moment and being present. Folks along the way, while supporting me, were able to pull me back a little bit, help me take stock and enjoy time. That's the main thing I learned from them to slow down and enjoy.

4. What do you think you taught them?

I think I taught them that everything could be fun or enjoyable. I don't care what it is, I'm gonna have fun with it. And the next one is value. So whoever is in my presence, I try to tell them I value them or what I see of value in them that makes them uniquely them.

5. What's next for you in your work? What are you looking forward to?

At least one of these books is gonna be finished this year. The one I am trying to finish by the end of the year is geared towards college students. I got the idea for it cause my niece (next generation) went to college and I was like, "What would I tell her?" You know, the things of adulthood I would want her to know. I also have a blog now that I write about my journey, stories, and poetry. I look forward to my creative works.

I'm also excited about what type of job I find next. I am staying open and I'm looking at paralegal positions. At some point, I would like to do Educational Psychology, exploring the ways, and developing cultural sensitive curriculum to teach and educate youth.

6. What gives you a sense of hope? What makes you concerned or worried?

I would say in making my decision to resign from my job and doing it, a lot of what helped me was the rising of so many Black voices. There were a lot of black women that were tweeting, posting, writing articles and talking about their actual experiences in corporate America. I was like, "I'm not alone." Not only were we talking about it, they were being unapologetically honest, and that turned into, "What are we gonna do about it?" I suddenly had the vocabulary, and when you can formulate the problem you can find resolutions.

That's made available coaching or made apparent that coaching is for US (Black people) to get to the next level. Same with therapy. There's so many support groups now geared to help people organize, mobilize and heal. Entrepreneurship is rising within the black community. We are really figuring out and finding out ways to be vocal together. So I feel pretty unified in that.

That kinda stuff gives me hope.

Formative Experiences: Reflections from Students

Are the New Activist Movements Political or Cultural?

Kelechi Taye

At about 3:15pm local time on April 29, 1992, the jury deliberating the Rodney King Incident released its verdict. It had acquitted the four accused Los Angeles Police Department officers involved in the violent beating. Within a half hour of the announced verdict, a small crowd of a little over 300 people had gathered at the LA County Courthouse to protest it. The genesis of the riots was described in an episode of ABC's Nightline titled "Anatomy of a Riot." On the program, an eyewitness is interviewed on the happenings of the day at 4:15pm, an hour after the verdict had been read.



“From my understanding,” he says, “people went to the store [the Pay-less Liquor and Deli, on Florence just west of Normandie] and just decided they weren’t going to pay for what they were getting. They were stopped at the door, and at that point [store owner] Mr. Lee’s son was hit in the head with a bottle of beer.” As reported by Lou Cannon, two other youths threw beer bottles at the store’s glass front door, shattering it. “This is for Rodney King,” one of them yelled. [1]

This would become one of the first incidents that would mark the beginning of the Los Angeles riots of 1992.

It is no secret the issue at heart was the matter of police brutality, an issue recurring in many similar instances over the past three decades. It is on this same issue that the Black Lives Matter Movement was formed in 2013 to advocate against the acquittal of George Zimmerman in the Trayvon Martin Shooting of 2012. [2] This movement and others, however, have not gone by without generating its own sets of questions particularly regarding their political and cultural orientations.

There has been developing two prevailing notions surrounding the nature of the new activist movements. The first is the belief that they are apolitical in the sense that they transcend the political sphere. The second

plays on questions of identity and politics as they relate to the pursuit of some underlying political agenda. These views contrast each other in the sense that the first focuses itself on social transformation based on cultural relations and the latter, on the alteration states of power.

As it applies to the movements of today, such as the Black Lives Matter movement, this debate creates an unfortunate dichotomy between the issues and obscures the essence of these movements. In some sense, the new activist movements rest on cultural foundations and play upon symbolic representations of cultural relations within our society. In the political sphere, all movements are political at some basic level regardless of whether these stances are explicit or implicit.

Nevertheless, the whole point of the discussion is there has been a growing contestation for the classification of the new activist movements. These classifications, as was noted earlier, are unfortunate for the very reason they ignore the transformative potential of these movements. Making distinctions based on a classification system would ultimately be fruitless. Perhaps, more useful would it be if we had discussions surrounding the purpose of these movements - producing meaningful social change.



Sensitive Souls

Denzel Marufu

I know not what is wrong, I know not what is right, therefore, I know not who I am. In my bouts of arrogance, I can barely look another being in the eye - such is my disgust at mankind. In my bouts of despair, I long for solace in that which disgusts me more than anything. My soul is in battle with my body, my mind in battle with my heart. God and Satan are permanently firing at each other equal in artillery and the battleground is within me, yet I am an alien to both sides - I am not even worthy of evil. As I utter this, I am merely a pretender since I hold disdain towards religion but perhaps, someday, my soul will sway in God's direction and he'd eventually let me enter the Golden Gates, or are they Golden Clouds instead? Who knows? I am not a well-read man but one need not trouble himself with theories and other jargon. Have you seen what books have done to man? They strip him of all his instincts, all his passions. The greatest irony in life is how man has sacrificed his natural self-interest out of some bogus sense of community in which he invariably finds himself alone. He has enslaved himself to these "civilised" people because he is ashamed of who he truly is.

Books have made us afraid to indulge, afraid to fight, afraid to fall, afraid to be human. I curse the readers as they find "comfort" in their own inability to express themselves and I scoff as they find a sense of pride in invading the thoughts of those willing to take the great leap, surrendering themselves to the ingratitude of their fellow man by scribbling down that which shakes their very being. Has the reader no shame for this invasion of privacy? I scorn the weakness of the human

body; our need for sleep, our pleasure in comfort, our need for others. But the one thing I scorn most of all is that indescribable “thing” which mortals dare try to quantify into a simple word.

How dare we try to boil it down into such unworthy symbols: curse the English! Modern man knows nothing about this endeavor, all her spirit, all her tragedy wrapped in the guise of rose petals - but let us not leave out the thorns. I, too, have bled from the cursed thorns of this Devilish Angel. That is the only thing that I consider to be human about myself; for while am a man of no notable redeemable quality, I have loved before. I was a better man then. I was a happy man - as far as happiness goes. I am now much too proud to share details about that one who terrorised yet riveted me so; the thought of doing so drives me to fits.

My room holds two people: myself and my worthless maid whom I would sell for peanuts if I could - but doing such would be “uncivilised” would it not? Her dragging feet envelop the silence of the room; the only time when I feel at ease in the solitude of my own despicable company. Her long strides made their way into my side of the room as I was greeted by her abominable crooked teeth which seemed to be one candy piece away from falling out - yet they survived. As she revealed her teeth, her nose scrunched up to form something approximating a small cricket ball - such was its size. Wrinkles circling her eyes emphasised her abnormally dark pupils and seemed to fill the entirety of her sclerae. In addition to this, her protruding chin, inquisitive brows, and mechanical movements all together gave the impression of a witch - I always found it amusing. In her defense, she was of old age and, in some way, I always assume that she looked decent in her younger years. Anyway, her mechanical

movements saw her place a letter on my desk. The note was rather worse for wear with shabby penmanship on its exterior. However, upon reading the words, it became clear why the hag smiled so. My heart drummed as I opened the letter.

“My love

A pair should never go this long without contact. I am to blame for your despair. Your letters have been made into a pile and my cowardice got the best of me. I am afraid of you. When we were together, I lost myself to you. I was intoxicated; so much so that I lost track of the days. It was like a long dream. Our distance has only exposed me to nightmares and I just want to dream again. Oh, how I remember the November evenings when... I am sorry. My tears have splashed onto the page and smeared the ink. Anymore reminiscing will render my letter illegible. Even as I try to continue writing, my heart weeps for you to return to me. I am aware that this is not possible - what would our masters think?

The impulse to write to you came after something I witnessed today. Having been sent to buy the groceries for Madam Q-----, I was made witness to a miracle. On that road where you once held me, sat a man soaked from head to toe amidst the pouring rain. It was not the first time I had seen him; hence I noticed the addition of a swamp green trench coat that he used to protect himself from the elements. The poor thing hadn't a penny to his name and I always wondered why he remained to beg in our poor little community instead of somewhere else where people might have more to spare. He had nothing to lose by doing so. Apparently, he would not even bother begging most of the time. He would simply survey the scenery throughout the day from his corner on 5th and pounce on the trash bins when a bystander had thrown something into them.

I was blessed to witness a touching site involving him once. A young girl had taken out a penny which she had just received from the shop owner as part of her transaction and immediately proceeded to give it over to the beggar, almost as if she had planned this meticulously for days on end - such is the innocence of a child. The man almost seemed embarrassed to be receiving a donation as he tried his best to formulate some sort of smile which revealed his lack of front teeth. The width of his mouth, as well as the faintness of his eyebrows, gave him an unintelligent appearance, that is until one saw his eyes. They burned with passion in their piercing gray tone which led people to give him the nickname of "fortune teller" as his gaze was so penetrating that the locals believed he could see through one's soul. This juxtaposed his otherwise dull physiognomy which was exacerbated by the typical ragged clothes and a putrid odour that one would find on a beggar.

I apologise for rambling dear but this recent incident has made me hysterical and I just had to tell you. As I saw the fortune teller sitting in the rain, I asked the cashier what he could have been waiting for outside in such conditions - after all, the shop did have an extended roof that provided a decent shelter from the rain. The cashier did not know. I was making my way out now, my eyes and mind still fixated on this man until this happened: A man pulled up the drenched driveway. The way he stopped his vehicle indicated that he seemed to be in a hurry but it was hard to tell - you know these wealthy men are; they always seem to be in a rush. Thankfully, I had a good enough view of his windscreen to see the man.

He seemed lost as he delayed his exit from the car. Given that he was wearing a shirt, it became clear that he had nothing to shield himself from the rain. It was eventually known that this man was on his way to a meeting just outside our local town but needed to stop at the grocery store urgently for Devil knows whatever reason! After witnessing his distress for just over a minute, I saw the fortune teller sprint towards the vehicle, much to the fright of the wealthy man, who amusingly jumped up in fear after the fortune teller knocked on his window. Despite the torrential rain, the fortune teller raced to take off his jacket and show it to the wealthy man incandescently. He was almost hysterical as he tried to signal to the wealthy man that he could use the coat for protection.

After minor deliberation, the wealthy man produced a surprising smile and was escorted out of his vehicle by the beggar whose smile stretched as far as was humanly possible. I did not see what occurred after that event as I had to return to my Madam however, I enquired about it from the cashier the next time I was sent to purchase groceries. It turns out that the fortune teller's new coat was handed to him by the wealthy man who had taken pity on him during wintertime. Apparently, the fortune teller was rather nomadic before this occurrence but was determined to remain in the same vicinity until he could bestow an act of kindness to this wealthy man in return.

My dear, here was a man who had every reason in the world to bury himself in the abyss but he kept his feet planted. What have you done with yourself?"



Freedom as Political Representation

Kelechi Taye

“Freeing yourself was one thing, claiming ownership of that freed self was another.”

— Toni Morrison, Beloved

On April 22, 2014, the Supreme Court of the United States in the Schuette v. Coalition to Defend Affirmative Action upheld Michigan’s Proposal 2, an amendment prohibiting the state’s public colleges and universities use of “preferential treatment” on the basis of race in its admissions process. In a plurality opinion offered by Justice Anthony Kennedy, he opines the case “is not about the constitutionality, or the merits, of race-conscious admissions policies in higher education”. He adds, “this case is not about how the debate about racial preferences should be resolved. It is about who may resolve it.” Opposing these sentiments, Justice Sotomayor adds, “this case is not about ‘who may resolve’ the debate over the use of race in higher education admissions”. She continues, “this case is about how the debate over the use of race-sensitive admissions policies may be resolved—that is, it must be resolved in constitution-ally permissible ways.” While clear both sides had valid arguments to be made on the issue, what is also clear is the underestimation of what really was at stake in that court decision. In all its nuances, the case was an embodiment of a wider conversation of whether the topic of race could be submitted as topical in political conversation and thereon to a referendum of voters. [1]

The importance of this conversation cannot be understated particularly as it evolves into a discussion of freedom and power, of which is characterized by elements of partisan interests and the centrality of representation. The earlier stated stances of the Justices might roughly be interpreted as to whether politics might be used as an instrument of accommodation in settling racial disputes. In that manner, two ideas should strike out as emerging from such considerations. First is the idea as to whether freedom should solely be considered in the political sphere. Second is the idea that freedom should go beyond political determinants.

In some ways, there is some legitimacy with the first argument that freedom inherently contains a political component. However, this political notion should not be confined to political action but also be inclusive of institutions that

enable the ordinary citizen to keep their representatives accountable. Yet, however, freedom in the modern sense goes beyond the political particularly because it extends beyond a discussion of partisan interests. Freedom is significantly much more than a consideration of group interests but also of individual's.

The essence of the decision is the Supreme Court has laid out the bare fact that freedom cannot be maintained without politics as was the argument of Justice Kennedy. However, as Justice Sotomayor dissented, freedom cannot be reduced to politics. Politicization of the question of freedom is not the ultimate solution to the problems of the black community. However, that does not mean it cannot form a part of the solution.

Freedom is power. And power, in part, is determined by our ability to exert control across the political dimension.





An Unfortunate Occurrence

Denzel Marufu

Is it not the most depressing thing imaginable that the truest sentiments can never be shared? Let us simply admire their tragic beauty in silence. The silence in question was deafening as it filled the room surrounded by four aged walls, smeared by cracks stemming from the rotting ceiling that gave off a putrid smell, often deterring visitors - but these are the kind of details that make a home special. The silence was supposed to be a stranger to this room which was often a site for a great deal of hullabaloo once the family settled down for supper at six o'clock sharp. The hullabaloo was positive, however, as the family fully utilised the short period of time they had together by engaging in discussions of all sorts ranging from the philosophical to playful insults. Being his incandescent self, the father would often begin the topic of the evening by offering a conundrum or summarising some outlandish article he had read in the local newspaper. From this, the discussions would float around this, that, and the other and culminate into a tearful display of affection between the family of four. On Monday, the family had discussed an article concerning a man who sold his soul to protect his family. On Tuesday, they began by talking about Emil Cioran's "History and Utopia" and so on and so on. By Saturday, however, it seemed that a strong tension had invaded the home and held the usual happiness hostage. What could cause such a sudden change?

There happened to be a scandal that had broken out in the area which had sent the inhabitants of this impoverished community into delirium. A murder had taken place. The man who had committed the crime gave himself to the police immediately, shouting out pleas for forgiveness from the Heavens as he was

shoved in the police van which arrived on the scene at roughly the same time as the ambulance. The reason for this was because the man had called the ambulance to aid his victim and subsequently called the police immediately after. Upon instinct, this is an abnormal reaction but an abnormal reaction to an abnormal situation is normal behaviour. Let us diverge into a short history of the killer. In all honesty, not much was known about his personal life given his nomadic way of living but rumour has it that he was once the son of a government official in the capital and was eventually estranged from his parents due to his frivolous spending habits and a knack for violating the laws. The estrangement was said to be mutual, despite him being only nineteen at the time. Out of pride, he then rejected funds from his parents and desired to “earn way more” than his wealthy parents had. Naturally, he struggled to adapt to a life riddled with obstacles that required the sort of funds that he had left behind to enter our poor community - hardly the kind of place one would live in by choice. In his youthful zest, he joined a local socialist organisation. In truth, it is clear that he joined the group simply to have somewhere to stay but, as a token of his appreciation towards the group, he gave himself up to the whims of the organisation and became possessed by their ideas. He made the natural switch to Marxism which further nourished his youthful resentment, which was originally aimed at his parents but now targeted the wealthy, then the government, then the system, and so on and so on. Anyway, this is all the information I have managed to gather and not much has been made of him since his ideological possession - until now.

The details of the murder were still foggy, as this was breaking news, but the event itself had clearly disrupted the usually cozy community. This was especially true because the victim was Gogo N----- who was idolised around the community for her willingness to help around despite her elderly age. The poor thing was succumbing to dementia which made her house the site of large gatherings for people to check up on someone who had done her bit to brightly colour the dull area. Her origins are also unclear given that birth certificates were not widely accessible in regions such as ours during colonial times but it is widely known that she had seen death through the eyes of her loved ones enough times to drive one insane. Somehow, despite having every reason to be bitter, she was just the opposite. Some of the local Professors even called her “Gogo Aly” (short for Alyosha). As I said earlier, the details of the murder are unknown but the majority claim that the killer was after Gogo Aly’s funds, of which she had amassed quite a few due to pensions, gifts, and the like.

Saturday night was the first family gathering that took place after the murder which occurred in the early hours of that morning. The eldest daughter, of twenty-one years, had barely touched her plate, such was the effect of the news. She wore something resembling a frown but it was hard to make out given how far down her head was hanging; possibly hiding her battle with the tears that had been pouring out from her eyes since she heard the news. She was particularly fond of Gogo. Her younger brother of nineteen had taken to finishing his meal much quicker than usual. Given his neurotic nature, he often countered such negative emotions with whatever duty lay in front of him; in this case, it was his food. The only parental voice in the room was that of the mother who was constantly encouraging her daughter to eat some of her food - much to the delight of her son who, as young men often do, tried his best to deviate from the awkwardness of the saddening news by poking fun at something. In this case, his sister’s loss of weight (which was his way of encouraging

her to eat as well). The father was the most distraught of them all. While he respected Gogo Aly, he was not particularly close to her which made it strange that his character had undergone such a drastic alteration after her death. The following ensued:

“But it was expected at some point. Did you know that he’s a Marxist? May God take my soul before I ever fall for that gimmick. All of them are the same: They spend too much time within themselves ruminating and seething. As narcissists, their whole world view is that of themselves, not of the world itself. Now they lie to us about their compassion yet in truth they see the world as it should be, not as it is. Ultimately they see nothing at all. It is like the blind mice leading each other into some childish utopian wonderland. They are always one corpse away from achieving this wonderland.” The son said this furiously as he aimed to succeed where his mother had failed and ease the tension by offering a topic to discuss. Educated people often retreat back into hindsight when an unforeseen event has taken place - perhaps to remind oneself that they are still more rational than they are barbaric. It is worth noting that both parents were Professors and both their children were educated from home which was not only cost-effective but also more efficient.

“Some trees have even deeper roots than it seems son. Now is not the time to point fingers...” replied the father who finally opened his mouth but not before immediately being interrupted by his daughter.

“It’s a case of self-respect! No matter how low one stoops, resorting to such a crime is indicative of low self-worth! Especially for someone who lived like a King just a couple of years ago. The nihilists strike again.” She

said this so ferociously that her mother visibly jumped in shock. After silence reigned for a couple of minutes more, the mother, who seemed pensive all night, expressed herself.

“But how can you expect such people to respect themselves without having overcome suffering? Take, for instance, what makes people respectable in the first place. Such people have risen above the ruins of their environment and have taken responsibility for their being. They have been beaten down by their circumstances until they made the decision, perhaps by some inherent sense of pride, to resist the temptation to submit and now they wear their battle scars boldly, without the need to reveal how they came about. These scars are a pillar of vulnerability from which all the fear to suffer has been erased and now they look at their obstacles with a warm embrace, like that of a friend whom you do not meet with but still connect with deeply upon your reunion. That is true friendship. You do not show off your friend for you do not want others to invade your sanctuary. In that sanctuary, you finally feel the sense of individuality that we all crave so much because no one can create the same connection, no one can create the same sense of understanding that your friendship creates. How can you expect them to have self-respect if the responsibility to take meaningful action has been taken out of their hands by prosperity and convenience? They are not worthy of the obstacles they encounter which is a source of shame for them. Their pillars are flimsy and built on sensualism since they have failed to find meaning in life. So it is difficult to blame them for lacking self-respect. Unfortunately, it is simply a sign of the times.”

Silence reigned supreme once more.

Structures of the Modern Society— Identity, Difference and Toleration

Kelechi Taye



“ In this country, we rise or fall as one nation, as one people. Let's resist the temptation to fall back on the same partisanship and pettiness and immaturity that has poisoned our politics for so long.

Let's remember that it was a man from this state who first carried the banner of the Republican Party to the White House, a party founded on the values of self-reliance and individual liberty and national unity.

Those are values that we all share...”
Barack Obama - Acceptance Speech
2008

On the night of November 4, 2008, then President-elect Obama gave his victory speech at Grant Park, Chicago. The son of a Kenyan father and a white mother, the young-charismatic yet inexperienced Obama had just achieved what would become watershed moment in the country's history. His speech, viewed by thousands across the nation and globally, tied the essence of his campaign – hope and change. However, it would be a disservice to reduce the essence of his speech as being embodied

that. Specifically, his message was about the spirit of the American people. Of course, this brings up a corresponding notion that the essence of the modern American democracy is built upon a consideration of identities.

It is no surprise a constructive virtue and principle of the modern American democracy is toleration, a view that acknowledges the pluralistic foundations of American society. Contemporary views about toleration could be divided along two principal lines – the neutralist versus the perfectionist views. The neutralist view could be summarized as one requiring government neutrality. Neutrality, by definition, is taken to mean the government not favoring particular views over others in the public sphere. The perfectionist ideal, on the other hand, evaluates differences on the basis of their compatibility with liberal principles - among them being tolerance, pluralism and diversity. In principle, differences that are at odds with liberal and individual rights are deemed to be excluded from society.

Recent developments, however, reveal the inadequacies of both approaches to underlying issues of social division. Within the perfectionist view, toleration is not as much about acceptance and recognition as it is about being able to put up with. Not only does this view fail in this regard but it also reveals a selectiveness in its incompatibility with views of illiberal cultures. The neutralist interpretation of toleration, however, does no better. While openness and inclusion characterize the neutralist trait, it turns out its view of non-discrimination is self-defeating.

In the first place, the neutralist stands holds all differences are alike and consequently adopts a difference-blind view as a solution. This is its most important flaw. It makes our differences – notably on race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and culture – disappear. The resultant conclusions are that the neutralist proposes a false-openness while the perfectionist view is explicitly exclusive.

Perhaps, to understand these flawed views of toleration, it would be important to look at the underlying connection between the neutralist and perfectionist view. They both evaluate tolerance on an individual level. Being black for that matter is treated as endorsing certain kinds of social practices and ways of life. In other words, being black is viewed as a matter of choice.

This important point leads to a discussion of redefining what we mean by pluralism. Of course, this suggests expanding from the individual level to realize the collective dimension is crucial. And if it is crucial, it would mean discussions of toleration need to be expanded for all cultures to have an equal footing. This is what modern toleration is about. Liberty, inclusion and respect, not only in the private domain but in the public circle.

Toleration need not be concerned about the maintenance of liberal values as it should be about equal treatment. It is about time we rid the notion of confusing the public visibility of black presence as a sign of inclusion. If we are to be deemed tolerated, it would depend on us being recognized at every level of society. Legitimate representation is what we should desire not symbolism.

On the Determinants of Passion

Kobena Amoah



“If you can’t figure out your purpose, figure out your passion. For your passion will lead you right into your purpose.” T.D. Jakes

The above quote from popular preacher, T.D Jakes underscores one major point: to be successful in life, you must be passionate. In some ordinary sense, there is an element of truth to the statement that passion is a precursor to success. In another sense, this statement seems like a hodgepodge of lies, least because there are

many more personal and social factors explaining success. This brings up important questions. Does passion matter, in the sense that it is a necessity for higher levels of achievement? If so, how?

In the psychological sphere, passion is thought of as a strong inclination toward an activity a person values and finds meaningful to the extent that they may be willing to devote significant amounts of time and energy toward that activity. Extended from this view is that passion necessarily characterizes one’s identity. It is a part of who you are. However, it is from this internalization process that two different views of passion surface.

The first, called obsessive passion, results from an uncontrollable urge to participate in an activity. The second, called harmonious passion, results from a willingness to engage in the same activity. From this characterization, the first view aligns passion with a rigid persistence while the second contains elements of free-will. That is, being passionate could mean - on the one hand- people are seen to be slaves to their passion or masters of it.

From the above quote, it seems an alternative sentiment arises from the necessity of passion. That is the potential

role engagement has to do with performance. Clearly, this view holds that three processes are particularly important: activity selection, activity valuation and internalization in identity. In some sense, both views of passion are compatible with these processes, although obsessive passion would naturally come with caveats. Specifically, it disrupts engagement with other activities.

Thus, it appears to be case that passion does control outcomes. This wording is important because it does not imply passion being a strong predictor of high performance. Perhaps, what is more important is what type of passion you possess. In this light, being strongly engaged in an activity will not necessarily lead to good outcomes. What is rather promising is that you have some control over what you are passionate about.

Motivating Collective Action

Kobena Amoah



At noon on Friday, January 20, 2017, it was official that America had a new president. Donald J. Trump had been inaugurated as the 45th president of the United States. In hindsight, it was obvious President Trump's tenure was marked with a background of contentious divide within the nation. Yet, the development of growing discontent could not be limited to developments immediate to the election. Discontent had always been a general theme of American politics. However, the fact is there was a change in American politics that year. It was not that more people suddenly became aggrieved. It was that more aggrieved people started to express their grievances. And so a question naturally arises, why did social movements become commonplace?

In certain respects, it would be fitting to answer the above question by looking directly at specific grievances and consequently participation as means of addressing those issues. However, that approach would be misguided least because it dismisses the psychological factors that underlie a movement. In fact, it could be more useful to answer the question specifically through the lens of framing, identity and emotion, themes that would characterize this piece.

The framing perspective builds upon movement participation as an evaluation of costs and benefits. It is a given that people

are aggrieved, and as such reduces participation to whether an individual can instigate change in their political environment at an affordable cost. This view gives a sufficient explanation for why people do not participate in collective action by arguing that people would “free-ride” if there are no costs in failing to participate. However, this view fails to explain why people do participate in collective action. In this respect, this framework reducible to concerning incentives is flawed. Collective action and participation, as was seen since 2017, was not concerned with the issue of incentives but more than that.



The issue of participation extending beyond the bounds of incentives diverges into a discussion of identity. Of course, a consideration of identity would necessitate discussions of the personal versus collective. In some sense, these two classifications need not be mutually exclusive but rather overlapping. Personal identity as its basic level, is a collection of collective identities. This implication is important because it suggests the importance of identification within a category. And it is from this identification participation arises. Put simply, if people identify with a group, they are more likely to participate in collective political action on behalf of that group.

The third motive – emotion – could be described as concerning the idea people participate in movements to express their views. In this manner, changing some societal aspect is not the only goal of collective action but also inclusive of gaining dignity. However, emotions also serve some external purposes as well. Its mutuality and reciprocity may end up reinforcing the movement itself.

Combined these three views provide interesting conclusions about participation in movements. The first – framing – provides the conclusion that incentives matter and these determine why a person concerned about some grievance need not necessarily participate in a movement.

The second – identity – provides the conclusion that identification with a group provides an attractive reason to take part in a movement. The third –emotion – provides the conclusion that having similar experiences, and the ability to tell stories and share emotions reinforces participation.

Indeed, these three influences might provide an explanation for the upsurge in collective action since 2017. As noted, people did not necessarily become more incensed. Perhaps, what did change was that framing, identity and emotion became significant.

Backdrop: Reflections from Faculty

In Conversation with Dr. Dejuran Richardson

Kobena Amoah

The tale of teacher motivation is often told as a single consistent story. Nevertheless, there are two components to it. The first concerns the teacher's own motivation. The second concerns the teacher's interactions with their students. This second part from the story of Dr. Richardson is one marked by supportiveness, a view shared by many of his students.

Whether it characterizes taking students' perspectives in the classroom or helping their initiatives outside of it, Dr. Richardson adopts a supportive-style method vital to the Black community at the college. Yet, the full story would not be told with only the student perspective.

This interview follows as a walk-through of who Dr. Richardson is through his own story.



In Conversation with Dr. Richardson

Kobena Amoah



Department of Mathematics and Computer Science. I am also a recently appointed Senior Advisor to the President. I have been the Chair of my department for about four (4) years. I have occupied the Ernest H. Volwiler Endowed Chair for about 2 years now.

2. I want to understand how and why you ended up here working in this position. What led you to this job? What were you doing before you came here? What attracted you to work for Lake Forest College?

Just before entering what was to be my final year of graduate school at Northwestern University, I applied for teaching jobs at a bunch of local colleges and universities. I was tired of being a cash-poor and energy-depleted college student and anxious to move to whatever was next. LFC offered me a position as an instructor that provided enough flexibility for me to finish writing my dissertation while I taught. That was in 1986. I finished my dissertation during that first year, was promoted to an assistant professor, and then stayed on for two more years. I then left LFC in 1989 for a lot of reasons, most of them personal. In my mind, although I had worked hard to gain the credential of being a mathematician, I felt underprepared to be a truly effective scientist or even a really good faculty member. From where I stood then, I could not see a pathway to becoming the kind of scholar and researcher that I wanted to be, so rather than risking becoming stagnant - that's the way some of my grad

school advisors had schooled me to view teaching at a liberal arts college - I decided to leave.

I left Lake Forest to occupy a postdoctoral research position in clinical biostatistics, my chosen area of expertise, at the University of Wisconsin Madison. After a year or so, I began contemplating accepting a full-time faculty position there when I was approached by the Chair of the Department of Biostatistics at the Harvard School of Public Health, who happened to come to Madison to give a colloquium talk. This occurred during the height of the HIV crisis around the world and the intense research effort to develop effective treatments; Harvard was at the forefront of this scientific effort and my research work and interests happened to fit well with theirs. The department Chair offered me a faculty position.

Before receiving the offer to go to Boston, my plan was to stay in Madison a few years and then try to come back to Chicago. But, that plan changed, and off I went to Boston. Within six months of arriving there, I knew Boston and Harvard were not a good fit for me. Yet, it took almost two years for me to craft a diplomatic and graceful exit (it is important to leave a job on "good" terms, especially when top folks in your field work there!) and for a faculty position to open at LFC. I returned to Lake Forest in the fall of 1993 and I have not looked back for a single moment.

Note about the interview: This work is a reproduction of the exact conversation that took place between Kobena Amoah and Dr. Dejuan Richardson on Friday the 27th of November, 2020.

Part One: Life Story and Experiences

1. What's your current position? How long have you been in this position?

I am the Ernest H. Volwiler Professor of Mathematics and the Chair of the

3. What would you say most motivates you to do what you do? What are you most excited or passionate about?

I am first and foremost a teacher. I have always wanted to be a teacher; even as a little kid. As a youngster in 2nd grade, I had to babysit my younger sister, who was in kindergarten at the time, until our mother arrived home from work. Coincidentally, my mother had brought home a small chalkboard, partially as a remedy for our tendency to draw on the walls. To entertain my sister while babysitting (or, to induce low-grade torture, depending on your point of view), I created a make-shift classroom in our dining room and lectured her on 2nd grade arithmetic using my textbook (that I conveniently converted into a “Teacher’s Edition” copy by writing-in the answers to all the homework exercises with my trusty magic marker). I loved every minute of it, but please don’t ask my sister how she felt about it!

I became fixated on becoming an elementary school teacher. That aspiration preoccupied me until I got to high school and realized that I had no patience (at all) dealing with younger kids. I later realized that, in reality, I was bereft of the heightened sensibilities and creativity required to be an effective elementary or secondary school teacher. I then concluded that teaching at the college level was my only option, which meant I had to go to graduate school. There was no alternative for me in my mind; I just had to figure out how to make it work given there was no money to pay for it and I questioned by ability to handle it all.

Teaching continues to be one of my passions, along with a drive to facilitate and support people becoming “better”. I get energized when I can identify ways to help someone become better than they are. College teaching is a great vehicle for doing this because of being able to affect people in so many

different ways. You can obviously motivate and impact people intellectually within the classroom, but if that was as far as it went then the job would not be so satisfying. But there’s also the one-on-one with individual students, finding out what their interests are and helping them to see to what extent their assets are aligned with that. That’s energizing. There is also the one-on-one mentoring that occurs, helping students navigate their way through the vast discovery process that is the essence of the college experience.

Beyond the ability to impact students, teaching also affords the opportunity to learn from, and share with, staff and faculty colleagues. In my position, I am responsible to colleagues and I am invested in their success. I am also fortunate enough to have mentoring relationships with scientists and faculty at other institutions, assisting them to develop their research programs and to become more effective faculty members. Being a Lake Forest College faculty member provides me with the opportunity to be involved in all those things simultaneously. That’s why I do what I do and stay where I am.

4. What are the goals you most want to accomplish in your work? Not so much the goals that are in your job description, but the goals you hold personally?

My personal goals are very much aligned with my passions. I’ll put it this way, being an effective facilitator requires you to be knowledgeable. You gotta know your way around the block; I consider it a real goal to learn as much as I can so that I have plenty to draw upon in order to be effective.

I am always in a learning mode and anytime I accept a responsibility, I first and foremost think in terms of how that experience can increase my skills base. Knowledge and experience are currency.

5. Now if we can, I'd like to go way back for a little while. Where did you grow up? What was it like to grow up in Chicago?

I grew up on the South-side of Chicago, though my parents were raised in Mississippi and relocated to Chicago as part of the "Great migration" of the 1950's. My parents were card-carrying members of the "working poor", earning enough to keep an adequate (but not at all fancy) roof over our heads and clothing for us to wear. I was raised in a neighborhood called Woodlawn that is, literally, located two blocks from the University of Chicago campus. At that time there were lots of gangs in Woodlawn; it was the stereotypical urban environment. As an example, a source of evening entertainment for my younger sister and I was proceeding to our living room, turning out all lights, opening the curtains, and peering out the window in anticipation of an evening brawl in the street that frequently erupted between rival street gangs in the neighborhood.

For reasons that were never fully shared, my mother lost her job and was unable to find another, forcing our family to depend on government public assistance, or "food stamps" as it was called, for our livelihood. I recall life being "interesting" during that time as our family's rhythm revolved around the first-of-the-month arrival of food stamps and the "aid check". My elementary school experience was similarly interesting. The affirmative action era within the U.S. was in full swing then, a time when the ethnic

integration of public schools was mandated. Many kids from the overwhelmingly Black neighborhood of Woodlawn, I among them, were forced to attend middle-school in the nearby predominantly White neighborhood of Hyde Park (though, White kids were never required to attend schools in Woodlawn). Although the two neighborhoods were adjoined, life and living within the two were worlds apart.

I remember the start of my first year of middle school, 7th grade. For me and all of my friends, this marked our first life experience with White kids and a predominantly White social environment. We very quickly noticed that everyone in the school were afraid of us, as if we all were hoodlums, savages, and thugs who had invaded their space. Many of us quickly fulfilled that expectation and began running a bit amok, as kids will do when they sense the combination of disdain and fear among those in authority over them. However, having been motivated by two formidable adults who were pivotal to my thinking at that time, I took advantage of being placed into the advanced classes in Math and English. The overwhelming majority, if not all, of the students in each of these classes were White; almost all Black kids were placed in the general or special education classes. In this very real sense, the school remained segregated even while satisfying the statutory requirements of educational integration. (There's a lot more that can be—and has been—said about all of this, highlighting both the successes and failures of such government efforts, but that requires much more space and time than is appropriate here.) Overall, I enjoyed my time growing up and my time in school, although the contrasts between my elementary school life-view and what I observed during middle school churned up

more than a bit of resentment within me. This resentment was amplified once I finished high school and began college life where I was vividly exposed to folks who were truly privileged and, yes, rich. It wasn't until I was well into college that I learned how to process, understand, and manage these feelings.

6. Did you have any key mentors or people who deeply influenced who you are, what you believe, in and what you're committed to in your work and life? Tell me about them.

There were two adults, actually. The first was the indomitable Assistant Principal of my elementary school, which I attended from kindergarten to sixth grade (before being required to complete 7th and 8th grade in the nearby community of Hyde Park). His name was Howard Felder, a truly formidable force. I guess he had to be a bigger-than-life figure in order to keep the peace and maintain even a modicum of excellence within a poorly resourced school whose kids were also poorly resourced. He was a well-educated and articulate Black man who was the second in-command among an overwhelmingly White staff (which was unusual in late 60's Chicago). He had a no-nonsense style that was absolute, and it characterized his interactions with both students and staff alike; he had a super intimidating persona, and a thunderous voice that at his will could reverberate throughout the entire building, regardless of the number of doors separating him from the main hallway. He was one who could crush the psyche of any individual, friend or foe, by activating a scary sharp wit and, as needed, an equally sharp temper, though he always seemed fully in command and in control. Although an equally phenomenal teacher in his own right, he chose to teach only one class period each academic year, either a 5th grade Math class or a 6th grade class that he called "Language Arts" that was a mixture of English grammar and vocabulary. Participation in his class was via personal invitation only, in response to a student's self-nomination. It was one of the proudest and most intimidating achievements of my elementary school life when he invited me to join his two classes. To say that I respected that man would be a bit of an understatement.

The second person was the Pastor of the church that I attended all of my life (and continue to attend to this day), Pastor Clay Evans of the Fellowship Baptist Church of Chicago. He too was a bigger than life individual. By virtue of what he taught, what he espoused, and the faith he exuded, he not only earned the respect of parishioners, but also of those far beyond the community that he served. He, too, was extremely intelligent, passionate, and he had a formidable and bigger-than-life personality. Both of these individuals have passed on, yet both of them continue to be pivotal influences in my life.

7. Did you have any life-changing experiences that put you on the path that led you to be doing what you're doing today? Tell me about them.

One pivotal event for me was choosing to go to Northwestern University for college. I believe I would not be doing what I'm doing now if I had I not been exposed to specific students, staff, faculty, and scholars who intersected with Northwestern during my years there. A second pivotal event for me was choosing to leave a job that I had always wanted; deciding to leave Lake Forest just two short years after being offered a position. I had concluded that I needed to leave in order to learn how to really be a scientist, experience academic life in a more expansive way, and to experience more of the country than "Chicago". I concluded that I was too sheltered and inexperienced and that annoyed me and prompted me to leave, only to return a bit more than four years later. So much of what I do today and who I am has been shaped by these two events that I cannot imagine the form my life would have taken otherwise.

Part Two: Reflections and Lessons

1. What are the lessons for someone like me, or for any other black student especially those transitioning in and out of college?

Especially for students of color, life continues to be hard. No matter how well off you are, skin color continues to impact our day-to-day life. This is not conjecture; it is the reality of today's existence. However, this reality should not be used as an excuse for being anything less than your best.

It's just like needing to go outside when you know it's 5 below zero.... it doesn't mean you change your mind, don't go, and stay indoors. Instead, it means you must get prepared. You put on your hat; not just any hat, you put on your serious hat. You put on the serious gloves, the serious boots, the serious coat. The challenging environment doesn't and shouldn't stop you from moving forward, it just affects how you equip yourself for the move.

In short, be fully aware of what you are up against, but let that not deter you from doing your best. Just take the time to fortify and properly equip yourself.

2. From your story, if there was one thing you could do differently, what would it be? Why?

I could have done a whole bunch of things differently. But, would I want to go back and do them differently? No, absolutely not.

I do not believe in living life with regrets. One of the ways I avoid having regrets is being intentional when I must make a choice. I strive to obtain the best available information, from confidants and broader trusted resources, that

I then weigh and make a choice. If it turns out later to be a bad decision, I have no regrets about that. I made what I considered to be the best decision based on the information that was at my disposal. To me, intentionality is the best remedy for regret.

3. What did you learn from the people you met along the way to become who you are now?

Probably one of the most significant deposits people along the way made to my well-being was their ability to instill within me doses of healthy self-worth and self-value. It is easier to "shake off" negativity and push through challenges when you believe yourself to be worthy of better.

I can still remember the advice of my freshman academic advisor when I arrived at Northwestern to register for my first college classes. When I told him that I wanted to major in mathematics and needed to take Calculus and Chemistry, he laughed derisively, with the phrase "oh you silly little delusional kid" ringing in my ear. He noted that both my SAT and ACT scores suggested not only that I could not handle calculus, but that I needed serious remediation in both math and English. There's no way you can be a math major, he concluded, so find something else!

Fortunately for me, pivotal influencers in my life had generated within me enough healthy pride and self-esteem that I rather easily ignored his pronouncements; I remember letting that stuff go in one ear and directly out the other and without any pause.

4. What's next for you in your work? What are you looking forward to?

I really don't buy into professional trajectories for myself, though they are winning tools for many. For me, consistent with my passions, professional trajectories can be limiting; they can lead to tunnel vision in which you ignore golden opportunities that come your way only because you had not considered them. As I said earlier, I prefer to maximize opportunities to learn new things and new ways. If an opportunity comes my way that can supplement my know-how, then I'll take advantage of it regardless of whether it fits some pre-defined plan I had adopted beforehand.

5. What gives you a sense of hope? What makes you concerned or worried?

What distresses me at times is that human beings have demonstrated an incredible capacity for doing the most damnable things. Even a casual review of history supports this assertion. But, here's the hopeful part: humans are not static; change is built into our DNA, our inherent sensibilities, and even our environment. Beyond an abiding belief in an omniscient and omnipresent God, I know that change is an inevitable component of every condition and circumstance. So, whatever is true today, can change on tomorrow. That's very hopeful and quite reassuring.

References

Are the New Activist Movements Political or Cultural

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Freedom as Political Representation

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About Black Rap

Our stated priority is we are oriented toward the audience of the black community at the college both past and present. Our content is built upon discussions of the successes of the black community within the context of its unpleasant realities.

We chronicle the interactive qualities that exemplify the members of the black community. We hope that our work reflects the diversity and vitality of the Black community of Lake Forest College.

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