

Past, Present, & Future – Aleah Grimshaw, BSW

When I think of what diversity means to me, I think of the past, the present, and my future. When I think of the past, I think of those who came before me. I think of Rosa Parks, Madam C.J. Walker, and Maya Angelou. I think of Martin Luther King Jr., Malcom X, and John Lewis. These are a few of my heroes within African American History that have addressed and overcame infinite challenges regarding diversity.

I think of my late maternal grandmother and grandfather, and their efforts to travel from Jamaica to the United States, to provide a better life for our family. I remember my late grandmother waking me up to the smell of callaloo and dumpling (i.e., native dish of Jamaica). I think of the times where I played Double-Dutch in the lobby of my grandmother's apartment in Brooklyn, NY, with other children from the neighborhood. I remember the long walks that my grandmother and I would take to Flatbush Avenue in New York and always being in awe of the cultural diversity within this community. I think of my grandmother teaching me how to play cards. These card games afforded me the virtue of patience and the ability to think outside of the box. My grandmother and I used to sit and watch her favorite television shows, such as Matlock or Gun Smoke, and I would hear her laughter as we watched repeated episodes as if it was her first time watching them. When spending time with my grandmother I enjoyed being in her presence. She exuded peace and stillness, and I loved hearing the stories that she would tell me of her life when she grew up in Jamaica. When I think of diversity, I also think of the endless overnights my mother worked, and the nights she spent studying to provide a better life for myself and my two siblings. I remember missing my mother while my grandmother would babysit me, but now I understand the sacrifices that she had to make.

When I think of what diversity means to me, I think of the present. I think of myself. I think of the creative beautiful Jamaican and Trinidadian Queen that I am. I embrace both of my cultures, embody cultural humility, and radiate Black Excellence. I think of my emotional intelligence, my trauma, and how therapy has been my saving grace. I think of the years I spent not understanding my body, losing weight, and being diagnosed with Crohn's disease, all while working hard to graduate with my BSW. I am my ancestors' wildest dreams. I think of my education, and how I am an Advanced Standing Social Work student who is graduating this May, with my master's in social work. I think of my Jamaican and Trinidadian roots and loving my hair no matter if its coiled or locked. I think of my creativity, the years I spent writing and singing my own music and performing. I think of my supportive friends who come from all different walks of life, and the love that we all have for each other. Without my past experiences and the sacrifices from my grandmother, my mother, and my heroes, my present would not have been possible or would have been delayed!

When I think of what diversity means to me, I think of my future. I think of raising Black Kings and Queens in a world that does not discriminate them because of the color of their skin or the texture of their hair. I think of the world that sees my children as human beings, and not as targets. I envision my children playing in the park with children from all different cultures. I think of the empire that I am building for myself and my future children. This empire will be filled with peace, love, ease, and financial freedom. When I think of diversity, I think of a world filled with no hunger, genocide, homelessness, & poverty. I think of a world with love, peace, kindness, and cultural humility. I see a world filled with equity, where everyone has access to equitable education, employment, resources, and more. I envision a world where families are reunited with their loved ones, and a world that embraces each individual for their beauty and

treats them with dignity and respect. When I think of diversity, I think of the past. When I think of diversity, I think of the present. When I think of diversity, I envision a future where love, equity, and peace rise above all else. When I think of diversity, I think of the sacrifices made by my grandmother, my mother, and my heroes. My grandmother crawled, so my mother could walk, and now I am running into my future.