

## How to Be Black Enough

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Growing up black in a white town, my blackness was often questioned. Phrases such as *You are the whitest black kid I know* or *I'm more black than you*, use to eat away at my identity. How can it be that white kids are calling me too white? What does it mean to be black? Finding the answer to this question led me down the road of racial prejudice and stereotypes. From grades 5 through 7 I use to let these comments go (unaddressed?), brushing them off with a smile on my face, shrugging my shoulders and walking away. I was not always this outspoken person. For majority of my life, I was timid, afraid to speak my mind. Honestly, I think it was more of me trying to find my place in the world, and the man I wanted to be.

*Say it loud (I'm black and I'm proud)*

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- James Brown (*Say it Loud – I'm Black and I'm Proud*, 1968)

I can remember Saturday mornings, waking up to my father blasting James Brown throughout the house. He would have my siblings and I do a call and response, with him saying “Say it loud” while we would respond “I’M BLACK AND I’M PROUD”. I always thought this was just some way for my father to wake us up with some energy, but as I began to reminisce, I was in search for the reasoning. After calling my father on the phone, I was informed that his intention with this weekly serenade was to instill in his children that being black is not a curse but a blessing. He understood that the evils of the world would try to convince us that we were cursed by having this abundance of melanin, but in fact this abundance is one of the greatest blessings we can have.

“No matter what room you are in or where you go, NEVER forget who you are”

- My father

Do I really fit in? This question would constantly roam around my mind as I was surrounded by my white peers. Even though I had numerous friends, the internal conflict was slowly eating me alive. Someone’s true self comes out the more time you spend around them. Something about familiarity and time can reveal one’s heart. Ones who I use to consider my close friends were in fact the fuel to my internal conflict. Little sub comments about my blackness would often be the punchline of their jokes. It was as if they were trying to strip me of my blackness. Their idea of what it was to be black was based on prejudice and stereotypes. I knew I had to reevaluate my friendship when I was told I was not black enough because I have a father and a functioning family. Even though this blow was coming in a joking matter, I was down for the count. With this shocking development I decided to remove myself from this situation and his life. It is the ones closest that can hurt you the most. Who would have thought a lifetime friendship would end so suddenly? It is sad looking back at it, thinking about how we use to be so close, but I never once regretted my decision because if his idea of blackness is so dysfunctional, I do not want any part of that in my life.

*Black eye, black hair, black skin*

*Black queen stand majestic with the black king*

- Chronixx (*Black Is Beautiful*, 2017)

If you were to make a list of characteristics of a black person, what would be on the list? Aggressive? Dysfunctional? Strong? Athletic? Inferior? Where did these characteristics come from? The media? The media tends to fuel the stereotypes associated with black people. This

became apparent to me when I had the courage to combat the phrases I would get in school. “What makes you think that?” The responses that followed were truly mind blowing. My peers’ sense of black culture and black people were determined by what they witnessed on television and social media. Just think about it, black people are often casted as the unintelligent, loud role when it comes to movies and shows. My peers were not watching shows that portrayed black people and black families in a high light. Shows like *The Cosby Show* and *The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air* were great representations in which a black family was successful and functional. I did not match the vision of what they thought all black people were like. The worst thing someone can do is generalize. Generalization is one of the main reasons prejudice and racism is present today. In the eyes of my peers, I was supposed to act ‘hard’ and ‘gangsta’ like they would see on the crime shows or be clumsy like the black characters in movies. If I did not listen to the newest rap album, then I was not black. My biggest question to my peers was whether that made them black. It is as if everybody wants to be black until they get treated like they are black. The people I dealt with in my school loved saying that they were blacker than me but when it came down to standing with the black movement and blacks lives matter, no one was to be found. If they were so ‘black’ why did they not see Trayvon Martin’s death as a tragedy or stand up against police brutality and racial issues that plague America? They only want to be down for black culture when it is convenient but are quick to hide behind their privilege when the ongoing battle for equality hits the fan.

*What's free?*

*Free is when nobody else could tell us what to be*

*Free is when the TV ain't controllin' what we see*

- Meek Mill (*What's Free*, 2018)

The idea of being black enough stems from the white community. It's hard to tell someone how to act when you have never walked in their shoes. Little did my white peers know that my parents use to tell us that we need to be twice as good only to get half of what our white peers have.

“Too many look at us as public enemies, only some see us as humans, and yet we need to be superhuman just to survive”

- Michael B Jordan

Being black is not just the color of one's skin, but it makes up one's identity, especially in America. Being black in America comes with a target on your back. Guilty until proven innocent. With all the hardships that come with being black in America, I am blessed and highly favored to be black. Being black is a blessing, never a curse. I will not be defined by the stereotypes white people cast on me. We are greater than any expectation put on us. What does it mean to be black enough?

“It comes as a great shock to discover the country which is your birthplace and to which you owe your life and your identity has not, in its whole system of reality, evolved any place for you”

- James Baldwin

Nobody can define my blackness besides myself. I am who I say I am.

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