Living at the intersection of two races

Being biracial means sometimes feeling like I don't fit in anywhere
By Isabella Thomas

AT A CROSSROADS Isabella Thomas struggles to define herself in a mixup of black and white.
PHOTO: THE MIRROR | **BEVERLY REGINO**

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"**T**oo white for the Black kids and too Black for the white."

I remember listening to these Earl Sweatshirt lyrics a few years back and thinking I really related to them.

As a biracial person, I have always felt out of place in life.

I grew up surrounded by one culture more than the other. My dad, a Black man, has lived in Los Angeles since he was nine years old. The majority of his family lives in Chicago so we rarely get to see them.

My mom's side of the family — who are white — are all over the map, but despite that, I find that I talk to them more than my dad's side.

In August, my family and I visited my Black family in Chicago.

I was so excited to see them. Many of them I'd either never met or don't remember.

As excited as I was, I was also incredibly nervous. Would I fit in? What would they think? I don't talk like they do. I don't eat the same foods as they do. I don't have the same hobbies. I don't shop at the same stores.

I had never really noticed how disconnected I was with my Black side until fairly recently. I used to be contempt in my own skin. Growing up surrounded by different races and cultures allowed for me to learn more about other people than myself. I started to realize everyone around me knew exactly who and what they were, while I grew up ignorant to my own identity.

During the pandemic, I had noticed that a lot of my hair was dead and I did not know why. I did hours of research on Google, TikTok and countless other hair care websites to learn about hair types and different hair products I should and should not be using. My mom did an amazing job using proper products when I was a child, but as I grew up and it became my responsibility, I didn't know where to start.

Being biracial means having a lifelong identity crisis. It means being called the n-word by white people. It means being called "whitewashed" by Black people. It means not truly knowing where I fit in. I am told that I am Black, society labels me as Black, but I don't always feel Black.

When applying for college and filling out forms, I am always told to put "Black" first and then if, given the option for a second choice, I put white. But sometimes, I feel more white. I don't even know how, I just know that I don't always feel Black. There are days when I wish I was fully Black or fully white, just so that I can have a clear label.

My dad was surrounded by a lot of white people while he was growing up and from preschool to middle school, I found myself in that same situation. The difference between us was that he and everyone else knew that at the end of the day, he was Black.

His mom died shortly after he graduated college and I never got to meet her. She was a single mom and the way he speaks of her, I always wish I had known her. The closest person besides my dad who could give me guidance is out of reach.

My dad has never gotten any DNA tests despite my attempts at persuading him to. I have come to realize that my constant badgering was because it was a chance to know who I was. I felt that a DNA test would finally be the thing to tell me who I am and who I should be and maybe then I would have a sense of security.

In 2020, while people protested and fought for justice, I sat on my phone and watched. I felt guilty for not being out and speaking up. In the past, I had felt like my voice didn't matter as much. I felt like it didn't have as much power as a voice like my dad's. I felt like no one would want to listen to someone who is only half Black.

I have come to learn that it doesn't matter. Despite my lighter shade, I have family who are one broken tail light away from being another name on a cardboard sign. I think about my 92-year-old uncle, Teddy, who was in his 30s when segregation was still around. The idea that he, or any other family member could be next, terrifies me.

Even though I am torn between two races, no matter how draining it can be, I know my family has and will always accept me.

Despite what society makes me think and what people may call me, at the end of the day, I am still Isabella Thomas, a person who doesn't need to check any boxes.

AFRICAN AMERICAN VOICES

How can schools create a more inclusive environment for Black people?

By taking the things that kids say about microaggressions or other racist comments seriously. Administrators should take them as seriously as they take having phones in the class and other insignificant rules.
OCEAN THREATS

Schools can make a more inclusive environment by teaching about African American History as well as discussing the morals that are relevant to this day, such as what it means to touch a Black person's hair.
JAIREE GRANT

A more inclusive environment can be created by schools acknowledging things that make us as a community uncomfortable and actually make an effort to get rid of the causes that make us feel that discomfort.
DJAEDA HALL

Incorporating Black history throughout the whole of US history and treating it as a vital part of history instead of briefly making it a small unit and cutting topics out would help Black students feel more important.
LAVARRA HENRY

Stop trying to coddle the white children when teaching Black history because all it does is dilute our history and lessen the severity of our issues.
SAMARA AUGUSTINE

The only time Black history is menioned in the education system is in relation to the most traumatic events. I feel that more positive enlargement about Black history would help Black students feel safer and more appreciated.
JAYA DARRINGTON