

From PWI to HBCU : The Experience of a BIPOC Woman

By Margrit Ramirez



Why I Love HBCU's

After attending PWIs (*predominantly white institutions*) majority of my academic career, I decided to do what I have always wanted to do - attend an HBCU (*historically black college*). I had no problem with PWIs, I met a lot of wonderful people and experienced a lot of different cultures,

however, I never truly felt like I fit in and I always felt like there was something missing.

My experience at my first HBCU was amazing! It was like a breath of fresh air around so many people that looked like me, majority of these colleges are filled with predominantly black students. I was most attracted to the Greek organizations - they were just like the ones you see on TV and in the movies - I was so intrigued I even joined one. Experiencing the HBCUs homecoming, step shows, and activities on campus made my time in school fun, enjoyable and educational.

Caught in the Middle

The excitement of attending my first HBCU started to decline when I quickly realized that I would have the same feeling as before. Even though I was finally around majority of my own people/people of color I still felt like there was something missing. As a black woman, due to me being surrounded by white people majority of my life, I sometimes felt isolated because I spoke and acted differently. There are

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many facets to black women and black culture, however, I wasn't too quick to dance, twerk or crack jokes, which set me apart from most. I sensed many of my classmates thought I was trying to be white.

It was a lot to take in, being around the majority of my people but still feeling as though I didn't belong. It felt like I was just caught in the middle. Too white for the black kids, too black for the white kids. My HBCU experience helped me realize what was more to me - a new culture, a new way of life.

The North vs The South

While attending my HBCU in the south I was able to immediately experience the difference from attending PWIs in the north. I ate a lot more southern food and experienced more southern people than I ever had. I learned that southern people often find Northerners like me to be very blunt, not friendly and lack hospitality, however, to many of us Northerners we're perfectly fine and find some things wrong with a few things that southern folks do. One thing I found a little odd was waving to any and many random strangers, even if you've never seen them before in your life. A lot of things took getting used to down south, but I'm sure if southerners moved up north a lot of things would be different for them as well.

Dreaming and Wishing

I feel lucky to have experienced a PWI and an HBCU, they both taught me so much about who I am as a person. They taught me so much about embracing different cultures and how we all come from all different types of backgrounds and economic statuses. At the end of the day we're all people just trying to fit in and feel as though we belong somewhere. I believe everyone wants to be accepted.

If students that went to a PWI attended an HBCU they would have an amazing experience. I love my HBCUs, however, I feel as though some of the students

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attending do not get the same opportunities when they graduate as they would have if they attended a PWI. That isn't the case for every HBCU but I have learned that when you have friends that attend HBCUs and you have friends that attend PWI's, it's obvious to see that there are a lot more internships and opportunities with the latter.



I wish that there wasn't a difference in opportunity. I wish that HBCUs weren't so underfunded and sometimes understaffed. I wish that in the future people would give back to HBCUs and fund them properly. I wish that more people could understand just how effective HBCUs are to marginalize people of color.

Some students who attend HBCUs never truly believed they would even attend college, so some people just don't understand that some of these colleges are really the only chance of these students getting a college education. We collectively need to understand that life is about giving back, sometimes we just don't know where to give back that will make the difference. Colleges, elementary, middle schools, afterschool programs, and/or nonprofit organizations that want to make a change to underserved communities all over the world, is a great place to start.

5 quick-tips on how to make that change.

1. Give back to in school and After school programs.
2. Volunteer at your favorite youth development organization.
3. Serve on an intergenerational board.
4. Secure an internship abroad.
5. The possibilities are endless to bring about the change YOU want to see.