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Homecoming

Sandra Appiah

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For my Honors Thesis, I decided to make a documentary about a topic that has been on my heart for a very long time. There are many challenges that Immigrants always face in a society, such as a cultural and language barrier, to name a few. It is certainly normal for immigrants to encounter these challenges as it is expected that after a while, they will adapt and assimilate into the new culture. Some countries are very conducive to immigrants while others are not.

After living in Italy for almost five years, and in the United States for almost a decade now, I realized that a big difference between the two countries is their response to immigrants. Italy is not very welcoming or accepting of new people, while the United States is. This comes as no surprise as one will find people of different race, cultures, backgrounds, and walk of life in the United States. In my opinion this is what has made the United States such a great continent.

Through all my traveling however, I realized that there is a common attitude everywhere towards a specific group of people, and that is Africans. When I was in Italy, Africans were regarded as the last of all people and were not given any respect in society. There were a lot of laws that didn't favor them, resulting in my parents moving to the United States. Surprisingly the Italians' attitude towards Africans is not different from that of the American's. In fact, the way Africans are treated is worse in the United States than it was in Italy, from my experience.

I grew up ashamed of being African because of the way it was perceived and presented in the Media. Africa is presented as the continent that nothing good comes out of. When one turns on CNN, or the History Channel, and there is a presentation being made about Africa, it is usually one that presents Africa in a negative light. We only hear about the Civil wars, about the Aids epidemic, Starvation, etc. Unfortunately this has become the face of Africa.

As someone who was born in Ghana, I have beautiful memories of the place but these memories are tarnished by the way that African is perceived. When someone meets me, the first thing that probably comes into their mind is how poor I am because I am an African. This has become one of my biggest concerns in society today and so I decided that the best way to bring awareness to it is by making a documentary that shows the side of Africa that we don't normally see in the media.

My Documentary is called "Homecoming," and it's about my journey back home to Ghana and why I decided to take this trip. In this documentary I discuss some of the problems that young African Immigrants face in the United States and how the representation of Africa in the Media affects the way that Africa is viewed. I am the main subject in this documentary as I talk about some of the things that I encountered growing up in Italy and in the United States as a young African Immigrant and how I became ashamed of whom I was. Here are some of the things that I focus on in the documentary:

- How my sense of pride in my culture changed when I immigrated from Ghana to Italy because of the way Africa was perceived by my peers

- The point where I became ashamed of being African and went every length to conceal it.
- How things got worse when I moved to the United States
- The difficulty that other Africans faced when they immigrated to the United States
- How college made me see the importance of embracing my culture.
- Why being African is special
- How my trip back home to Ghana changed my life.

I conceived the idea for this documentary when I went to Ghana for study abroad during my sophomore year at Syracuse University. As a film student, I do not go anywhere without my video camera, so when I went to Ghana I wanted to make a short film about my experience in Ghana, but I did not know that it will turn into this documentary that I am working on now. I took a lot of video of my time in Ghana and did lots of interviews as well. After my trip to Ghana, I became very proud of being African that it didn't matter what the media said or how people viewed the continent. I saw that as Africans we have so much to proud of and that in many ways we are a unique people and people just don't understand that. I then decided that I will make a documentary about the things that makes being African so special.

When I returned to the United States I did a lot more research to see people's general attitude towards Africans. I interviewed other Africans as well and discovered that most of them went through the same thing that I went through growing up in Italy and in the

United States. This observation pushed me even harder to work on this project because I knew that it was a problem that needed attention and as a young African filmmaker, it is within my power to bring attention to it.

My documentary is a reflective or biographical piece. This means that the story is told from my point of view and I am the main subject. However in order to show my audience how universal the problem is, I interviewed other people and used their experiences to support my point of view. This added credibility to my piece because it wouldn't be just about me, but about us, as Africans. Most of the documentary is based on me telling my story transitioning from Ghana to Italy, Italy to the United States, and then back to Ghana. I used pictures, old video and metaphorical images as cut always as I tell my story. This will help the audience by providing a visual understanding of the things that I talk about. I wanted the documentary to be as real and natural as possible, that meant using the cinema verite style of filmmaking. With this method I actually recorded when I was doing something or "in the moment." As the main character of the documentary it was pretty important that my sense of character or personality comes through to my audience. Therefore even though sometimes the things that I was talking about were very sensitive to me, I still had to stay in character and make sure that the audience will understand what I was talking about.

Completing this documentary project was liberating. Although it was very difficult deciding to expose my life, I knew that it will be the only way to say goodbye to my past and welcome and new beginning where I do not have to be ashamed of where I come

from. The past 10 years of my life where I lived a lie has been the most shameful time in my life and I feel as though it is not enough to simply say goodbye to it and move on. I know that there are a lot of people today who are where I used to be 10 years ago. The interesting thing is that this is not a problem that only Africans face. This is a story that a lot of immigrants can attest and relate to. I don't consider this documentary "An African film" as some may say. To me it is an "Immigrant film" and it is universal because at some point most of us have been immigrants and have experienced what it feels like to be alienated from the rest of society. With this documentary, I hope to not only inspire young African Immigrants and encourage them to embrace and love who they are, but I also want to inspire everyone- Latinos, Asians, Native Americans, etc- who feel like the underdog and sometimes wish they weren't who they are.

I want to reach as many people as possible with this documentary and will develop a distribution strategy where I can get the film into as many schools, public libraries, film festivals, etc, as possible so that we can all learn to embrace who we are no matter what.