

My Street Cred



I have a PhD in being a black woman. Harvard can't teach this shit! I was born with it. Life was my university and society served as my professors. Ever since fifth grade, when my mother transferred me to a predominantly white school, I have experienced what it means to be “the only one.” As the only black girl in the entire fifth grade, my sister and I were two out of about five black students total. Throughout my childhood and adolescence, I have been a student in predominantly black schools and more diverse schools as well. The one lesson I learned is that lack of diversity and exposure to different experiences breeds ignorance. The unfortunate part of that reality is that I thought it would get better with age, but that has not been the case.

As a Public Relations major from the University of Florida, a predominantly white school, I witnessed the election of the school's first black student body president. However, I also witnessed the discrimination targeted at a Hispanic presidential candidate when someone wrote “No Spics for President” on UF's Hispanic Student Union building. Even though it wasn't directed towards me as a black woman, it still hit home and it has stuck with me ever since.

I began working for Federated Department stores (Macy's and Burdines corporate) as an undergraduate intern, and I worked fulltime for Macy's New York corporate for three years. I currently work for Chevron's Downstream operations and have been doing so since 2008. Once again, success as a black woman in America goes hand-in-hand with having to deal with the complexities of being “the only one.” I started my career in the white, male dominated oil industry at Chevron's Miami/Ft. Lauderdale office, where my colleagues pointed out that I was the first black woman to hold my position. I encountered the usual skepticism of whether someone who looks like me was qualified to perform— a doubt that I was able to overcome through strong results, but with twice as much effort as it would have taken me if I were a white man or white woman. When I was promoted and transferred to Chevron's headquarters in northern California, I had high hopes that my situation would improve. It did not.

I earned an MBA at UC Berkeley's Haas School of Business in 2016.

I have been active with my companies' inclusion efforts. After a Macy's Diversity manager recognized my level of dedication, I was appointed leader of the black employee resource group, CoBex, within just two months of joining the group. In less than a year, membership/participation increased from a meeting of just five employees to an auditorium of over 300 people — including Executive VPs, Divisional Managers, New York Politicians, and guest speaker Nandi Mandela (President Nelson Mandela's granddaughter). I've been following how executives are trying to prioritize diversity. It's mostly a business decision for them, but it's a personal goal for me. I've embraced this long-term objective of impacting change within corporations, and I have always embraced the commitment to improve and give back to the community, both in and out of the workplace. In my spare time, I love to dance and was a former dancer (ballet, tap, jazz, hip-hop, West African). As a CoBex member, I also served as a judge for the NAACP ACT-SO Competitions (Afro-Academic, Cultural, Technological and Scientific Olympics). This organization provides a national forum through which African-American youth can demonstrate academic, artistic and scientific prowess and expertise. I cherished these experiences and continue to pursue progressive achievement in social reform.

As an author, I hope to write more books under the *Listen, Bitch* brand, including one about my experiences as a black woman attending a top-tier graduate program where I was the only woman in my class who looked black. In all things I pursue, I aim to influence change.