

Jasmine: People perceive me as a “light-skinned Black girl.” For a long time, I thought I was “Native American,” so when people categorized me as a light-skinned Black person, I felt offended. It was like they weren’t addressing all of me.

Later, I found out that I am actually *not* Native American. On my grandfather’s birth certificate, it says that he’s Native American, but he took a DNA test, and he’s actually 0.2 percent Native American. Turns out, a distant relative of ours was wanted by the police, so he forged his birth certificate to say that he’s Native—that way he could hide on reservations from law enforcement.*

So, yeah, I am *not* Native American at all—that still feels weird to say. It was really hard to take in because I had tried so hard as a child and as a teenager to figure out how to be more connected to the Native American side of me. I had bulldozed past all the Whitewashing of Native history and clung to that part of my heritage, so it became a core part of my identity. I had immersed myself in my Native culture—or what I *thought* was my culture—and I was just starting to feel proud. Then, all of a sudden, I woke up one day and was told that what I thought I was my whole life is a lie. Like, guess what, Jasmine, you’re just Black.

* In 1978, the Supreme Court case *Oliphant v. Suquamish* stripped tribes of the right to arrest and prosecute non-Indians who commit crimes on Indian land.

It really showed me that race is a concept that’s completely in our heads. It doesn’t exist. Sometimes I feel like, because I am so connected to Native culture, does that make me Native still? Regardless of my DNA? I don’t think so. Because what I once imagined as a beautiful, strong Native American ancestor was, in reality, a White guy who was this con artist. So, I don’t know, I really don’t know...

Karli: Growing up, my grandad always said that *his* grandad was a “wild man,” so everyone assumed that he was Native American. They’d joke, “Oh, Karli, put Native American on your college applications. You have that 0.1 percent Navajo that everyone wants.” It made me feel like White people in America see these different backgrounds, we see that people have heritages, and really cool cultures, and we feel like we’re missing out.

I did not end up putting Native American on college applications. That suggestion annoyed me so much. It annoyed me because it goes back to the idea of affirmative action,** and that I don’t

** Affirmative action is “designed to address the historical inequities that have devastated communities for generations.” As of 2018, White students are four times more likely than Black students to be enrolled in top-scoring schools.

need or deserve affirmative action. I mean, at school, I don’t count as representation of indigenous people. I would be taking that spot away from someone else. I know for a lot of White people the idea of affirmative action is like something being taken away from *us*, but it’s not.

Not long ago, Jasmine and I were both trying to get this scholarship for an Outward Bound trip. Only one person from our school could get it, but we were fine with that. I went in for the interview, my mom took me, and apparently while I was in the interview, they were talking to her and the other parents about how they really want to encourage more minorities into the program. That’s something I agree with, because I feel like outdoorsy things

are very stereotypically White, and non-White people should join as many traditionally White spaces as they possibly can. In the end, Jasmine got it. I didn’t. My mom said things like, “Don’t worry, Karli, it was just because she’s Black, it’s just because she’s mixed.” I hated hearing that because this is my best friend, and I know my mom loves Jasmine as well, but hearing all these excuses made me feel so uncomfortable. To me, the excuses are really just a way for White people to make themselves feel better, to have someone else to blame if they don’t get something. I mean, I already have access to things like hiking, so it makes sense to me that, because Jasmine doesn’t, she gets offered that opportunity.