



Elite Education Student Service

Essay #4 New York University A range of academic interests, personal perspectives, and life experiences adds much to the educational mix.

Given your personal background, describe an experience that illustrates what you would bring to the diversity in the college community or an encounter that demonstrated the importance of diversity to you. I feel sick. I'm nervous and my stomach's turning. The room is lined with neat rows of desks, each one occupied by another kid my age. We're all about to take the SATs. The proctor has instructed us to fill out section four: "race." I cannot be placed neatly into a single racial category, although I'm sure that people walking down the street don't hesitate to label me "caucasian." Never in my life has a stranger not been surprised when I told them I was half black. Having light skin, eyes, and hair, but being black and white often leaves me misperceived. Do I wish that my skin were darker so that when I tell people I'm black they won't laugh at me? No, I accept and value who I am. To me, being black is more than having brown skin; it's having ancestors who were enslaved, a grandfather who managed one of the nation's oldest black newspapers, the Chicago Daily Defender, and a family who is as proud of their heritage as I am. I prove that one cannot always discern another's race by his or her appearance. I often find myself frustrated when explaining my racial background, because I am almost always proving my "blackness" and left neglecting my Irish-American side. People have told me that "one drop of black blood determines your race," but I opt not to follow this rule. In this country a century ago, most mixed-race children were products of rape or other relationships of power imbalance, but I am not. I am a child in the twenty-first century who is a product of a loving relationship. I choose the label biracial and identify with my black and Irish sides equally. I am proud to say that my paternal great-grandparents immigrated to this country from Ireland and that I have found their names on the wall at Ellis Island, but people are rarely interested in that. They can't get over the idea that this girl, who according to their definition looks white, is not. Last year, at my



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school's "Sexual Awareness Day," a guest lecturer spoke about the stereotypical portrayal of different types of people on MTV's *The Real World*. He pointed out that the white, blond-haired girls are always depicted as completely ditsy and asked me how it felt to fit that description. I wasn't surprised that he assumed I was white, but I did correct his mistake. I told him that I thought the show's portrayal of white girls with blond hair was unfair. I went on to say that we should also be careful not to make assumptions about people based on their physical appearance. "For example," I told him, "I'm not white." It was 12 College Admission Essays That Worked 11 interesting that the lecturer, whose goal was to teach students not to judge or make assumptions about people based on their sexual orientation, had himself made a racial assumption about me. I often find myself wishing that racial labels didn't exist so that people wouldn't rely on race alone to understand a person's thoughts, actions, habits, and personality. One's race does not reveal the content of their character. When someone finds out that I am biracial, do I become a different person in his or her eyes? Am I suddenly "deeper," because I'm not just the "plain white girl" they assumed I was? Am I more complex? Can they suddenly relate to me more (or less)? No, my race alone doesn't reveal who I am. If one's race cannot be determined simply by looking at a person, then how can it be possible to look at a person and determine her inner qualities? Through census forms, racial questionnaires on the SATs, and other devices, our society tries to draw conclusions about people based on appearance. It is a quick and easy way to categorize people without taking the time to get to know them, but it simply cannot be done.