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They Not Like Us

Abstract

Quinae Austin is an author, first-generation college student, and mother from South Central Los Angeles. Her work is a glimpse of an inner voice and motivation that allowed her to rise beyond demeaning statistics and stereotypes faced by working mothers in urban areas. She shares insights into the inspirational qualities of musical artists that empowered her and explores their connection to motivation and personal growth.

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QUINAE AUSTIN

They Not Like Us

This may sound strange, but I never liked the idea of being a “statistic.” And the sad truth is that being from South Central, Los Angeles, you’re at risk of plenty of them. The fear of not wanting to be sucked into any of those stereotypes is what I can say has given me my drive and granted me opportunities that I would have never imagined. But first, let me take you back with me, when things weren’t as structured and clear. Withdrawing out of college in my early adult years to embrace motherhood made me think less of myself. There I was nineteen with statistic written all over my forehead; or at least that’s what I thought. Friends from high school were accomplishing their educational goals, engaged in higher learning; meanwhile, I was accomplishing enrolling my son in the best Pre-K I could find. Living your typical routine lifestyle, trying to make my lemons, lemonade. After seeing my peers graduate, working great jobs, traveling the world, and taking on life with a solid foundation, my consciousness became a voice in my head that was sometimes so loud, it gave me anxiety. “Quinae, you need to do more, you have a voice that needs to be heard. Working, and being a mother, is not your life. Remember, it was just the circumstances. And you are not your circumstances.” At this point I couldn’t ignore the voice—it seemed to be screaming—and I had no other choice but to change my perspective on what a statistic is. I realized I am not ashamed of what I’ve been through or where I came from. I am only ashamed of myself for at one time being ashamed. I had to understand that my deepest fear is not that I am inadequate. My deepest fear is that I am powerful beyond measure.

So, I became infatuated with the idea that I could be a part of that one percent in South Central, Los Angeles who was determined to figure it out: a first-generation college student. I found my inspiration through music from artists like Kendrick Lamar and Nipsey Hussle. I remember when I first heard Nipsey say, “I’m finna take it there, this time around imma make it clear, spoke some things in the universe and they appeared.” That’s when I told myself, you know the blueprint so execute. I enrolled in Cerritos College finding melodies within twelve units, forty-hour work weeks, and being sure to be present at any and every event, practice, and the plethora of activities my son was involved in. I was exhausted, to say the least, but I was inspired at the same time. I knew I was in a marathon and every lap would lead me to my victory. After many late nights, and early mornings, and days where I where I didn’t eat or barely slept, I graduated proudly among the class of 2019 graduates with my associate’s degree in Journalism. And this victory pushed my desires even more.

Earning my Associate’s was only the beginning for me, but with Covid in full effect transferring to a four-year university was becoming difficult. I honestly did not see it in my near future. So, I began doing what I love more and more, and that was writing. My thoughts were stories that I wanted to be heard by my people, so I can inspire others just like I was. Nipsey always would say, “The highest human act is to inspire.” The essence of human potential is the impact any of us can have on the challenging environments around us one statistic at a time. His words gave me all the motivation I needed to self-publish my very own

poetry book, “Welcome to my Neaborhood,” a collection of intimate poetry I had written between 2016 and 2019 while on my journey. The book details my most inner thoughts straight from the heart of a girl living in the inner city, sharing my vulnerabilities and embracing my genuine emotions. Who would have thought the college dropout turned teen mom would have accomplished such a thing? I mean, obtaining my degree was one thing, but having a sold-out, self-published book in my neighborhood? That was unbelievable to me. My city embraced me in ways I wouldn’t have imagined. And to think, I thought I was only a statistic. My accomplishments made me proud to tell my story, but even better than that it polarized why going that extra mile to complete school at a four-year university made so much sense. Kendrick Lamar said, “I must be true to my core. True to my faith. True to my city.” Hearing the logic in that statement, I wanted to embody that philosophy, so I applied to Cal State LA even after the application deadline had passed, in the hopes that my manifesting and praying would help with my admission.

Months went by, and I hadn’t heard anything, but then one day I finally got a letter stating that I was not accepted. My momentum was crushed, and I felt like all my hard work had gone unnoticed. You can say I felt a bit discouraged. But like I always do when I feel ‘less than’ or unsure of myself, I found motivation in music. I mean Kendrick Lamar did win a Pulitzer Prize, so after hearing him say, “Life will put many red lights in front of you, but sometimes we must push on the gas and trust God,” that’s just what I did. After reapplying, I was accepted and began my journey as an Eagle. Being on that campus was very reassuring and gave me a balance that I longed for. I too now had a platform, and before I knew it, I was finishing semesters and meeting new people. I enrolled in a writing course that afforded me the opportunity to study abroad for a month, where I was able to visit the United Kingdom, Italy, and Paris. I’m even considering applying to a master’s program in order to be the best statistic I can be on campus. Today, I have all the things I wished for when I didn’t understand the power in being a statistic or how I have changed in my journey to be the one percent. Nipsey always said, “Life ain’t a sprint, it’s a marathon, and just like any marathon, you have to watch your pace.”