

From Blue and Red to Purple: Embracing Bicultural Identity and Diversity

Tightly clutching my U.S. passport in front of the embassy building, I lined up on the left. I was a U.S. citizen waiting in line, but I was also a Japanese citizen like the people on the right. I had both a blue and a red passport. Mixed, the two colors make purple. Purple resembles both blue and red, but is neither blue nor red. This was me: neither one nor the other. Even so, I wasn't alone.

Inside the embassy, I saw a young man trembling as questions were fired his way. He nodded to show he understood, but his eyes told a different story. It reminded me of when I had just come back to Japan from Saipan nearly seven years earlier. I did not know how to speak Japanese, and I had the exact same look in my eyes when someone spoke Japanese to me. I asked if he needed some help. His eyes lit up, and he nodded enthusiastically. I managed to translate the complex questions into simple Japanese questions. I felt proud to be able to help someone struggling with the same problems I had. After I helped the man, he thanked me and commented how rare it was to encounter someone who was willing to help a stranger. I smiled and told him that we weren't strangers because we shared a unique commonality: struggling with our national languages.

With a knowing smile, he escorted me to the back of the room where we shared our stories. Since he was young, he had always felt uncomfortable when people asked him why he could not speak English. Determined to connect with his American identity, he reads books and

watches movies in English but struggles immensely to learn English. I nodded. I completely understood how he felt. I shared how I too still struggle to learn Japanese. I spend much of my time trying to decipher a set of characters that look more like art than words to me. It consumes so much of my time that I gave up drawing, something that I am deeply passionate about. His eyes shone. I had sparked something inside of him. Quietly, he revealed that he had been seriously considering renouncing his U.S. citizenship. By doing so, he believed that it would relieve him of the burden of having two identities. Additionally, that would mean he could spend more time playing soccer and reading mystery novels without feeling guilty for spending less time studying English. However, as he was forced to reflect on himself and his values for university admissions, he found it difficult for him to express the best version of himself solely through his bicultural identity. By contrast, he could not stop writing about his passion for soccer and how playing soccer has shaped him into a better person. Gradually, he started to understand that his identity was far more than just being Japanese American. He advised me that adopting this mindset may free me from the bicultural cage I crafted for myself. At the end of the conversation, he told me that this was the first time he had met and spoken to someone in such a similar situation. This made him feel less alone in his journey of self-discovery. He made me feel the same way.

Recently, I have taken up drawing again. When my pencil meets the paper, I am immediately transported back to the time when I was a seven-year-old girl trying to perfect my drawing skills. This was before the pressure of connecting with my nationalities consumed me and temporality distanced me from an equally important aspect of my identity. Having regained

the confidence to explore this part of myself, mixing blue and red has never felt more enjoyable.

In the future, I wish to maintain an open-mindedness when approaching my own identity.

Moreover, as globalization has created opportunities for us to interact with various individuals, promoting mutual understanding and cultural exchange is becoming more important than ever.

Therefore, regardless of where I am, I pledge to treat people as unique individuals, not categorize them by their nationalities. [685 words]