Lessons Started in the Congo Lead to World View of Social Justice

Remy Ntshaykolo got used to finding strangers in his house. "My dad would see someone begging for food on the street and bring them home," recalls Remy. "He'd say, 'Here's your brother or here's your sister. Why don't we give them some food?'" It was a powerful lesson in empathy, one that Remy never forgot as he grew older and traveled the world.

Those travels would eventually take him to 16 countries in addition to his native Democratic Republic of the Congo and provide the experience of living on four continents.

It's given Remy a global perspective not only on the state of empathy around the world, but on racial tolerance, acceptance, and social justice. He shared his thoughts on the Powered By The People podcast. Here's a bit of what he had to say. Tune in to the podcast to hear more.

Developing a World View

My parents had jobs that allowed them to work in different places. I started traveling when we went to live in the Ivory Coast when I was 9 years old. Later on, my siblings had the opportunity to be diplomats in different countries. Being the youngest in my family, I was chosen to go with them.

That's where I acquired an interest in discovering new countries and new cultures. When I was older, I wanted to expand my understanding of the world, so I decided to go to China, Belgium, and the U.S. to pursue my education.

Experiencing a Culture Versus Living It

To me, experiencing a culture is what we typically do when we visit a country as a tourist. You get exposed to museums. You taste the food and see some countryside. That, then, is the idea of the country that you live with.

But living a culture is about immersion. You learn the customs and the language and try to put yourself in their shoes. That, to me, makes a big difference because when you live in a culture you develop empathy for the people. You try to understand the differences between their culture and your own and what you can bring from it into your own lifestyle.
The Many Faces of Social Injustice

There are countries where social injustice isn’t addressed in the law of the land. There are unspoken rules that there are places you cannot go because you are not from there or are of a different color or ethnicity. In other countries things are well stated that based on your color or where you come from you are not allowed to do certain things.

In the Congo, social injustice is still centered around distribution of wealth, opportunity, and privileges. But it is also based on your ethnicity – the tribe you come from – whereas in places like America it’s not about your ethnicity but more about the color of your skin.

Concerns for his sons

I have two sons who are young adults. Now that they are starting their professional lives, I feel anxious that I cannot protect them when they are confronted by social injustice.

I do not want them to go through the struggle I have endured. But I am also reluctant to have what in the African American culture we call “the talk” with my sons, which is basically to let them know if you’re going out and a policeman stops you, don’t resist.

Behave this way to avoid being shot. These are things I would not say to my kids if I were living in the Congo or Europe. But here in the U.S., black and brown people must worry about things like that.

I am hopeful for tomorrow, however, because the new generation has a mindset that is a bit different. They tend to see each other as individuals. They don't care so much about the color of skin or a person’s origin. But at the same time, we live in a multi-generation society where old feelings persist, so I still have a fear that will always be with me.