

Salim Adofo

Power Autobiography

In the summer of 1997, after listening to the hip hop group Brand Nubian's song, 'Wake Up,' my life changed forever. The song spoke about the social ills that the African American community faces. I began to ask myself questions about how I related to these issues.

At this moment, I could feel my consciousness beginning to blossom. I began to read as much as I could on various topics concerning Black America. Art, history, politics, religion, and health were subjects that I would study. I would visit and attend museums, lectures, film festivals, art, and poetry shows. This allowed me to expand my knowledge of everything I thought I missed throughout my formal education.

Attending Thee Grambling State University in the late '90s was a game-changer for me too. Being at a Historically Black College and University (HBCU) helped to cultivate my consciousness. There is no experience like an HBCU experience; it's one thing to study and see something in the movie *School Dayz*, but it's another thing to live that experience. Black fraternities, sororities, homecoming, and huge bands were all great educational experiences on Black culture.

Being a big city boy in a small country town was a crash course in Southern Black Culture. I never thought living in a trailer would be so cool. It was eye-opening having space between my home and the next and seeing people with gardens in their backyard. Yet, being able to talk to people that lived through segregation was priceless.

Also, what I read and saw in documentaries was given life by the first-hand accounts I learned from these elders. Learning about what life was like after Emmett Till or having elders describe their lives in all Black towns are lessons that I will cherish. Most of the elders I met would always say to me: *"Get your education, they can't take that away from you."*

These experiences led me to want to learn more. The more I learned, the more I knew that I needed to learn more. As I learned more, a recurring theme was education - or lack thereof. As time went on, I realized that access to quality education was critical to a healthy society.

Through all these experiences, I learned that I want to be the advocate that my community needs. I see many Black families needing to have their concerns, their priorities, and their voices amplified.

Coming from this community and knowing first-hand the challenges we face has shaped and molded me. There is no other space I would rather be than on the front lines of making sure



our families have a seat at the table. I firmly believe that having a strong education is the foundation of that.

