**Ying Jiang and Péarle Nwaezeigwe**

Classmates Ying Jiang and Péarle Nwaezeigwe talks about their experiences in the LL.M. (Master of Laws) program for international students at Berkeley Law.

Ying is from China and Pearle—whom we hear from first—is from Nigeria.

**Pearle:** I have interests in human rights law. So I was a bit hesitant because I wasn't sure if the West Coast was what I needed to practice human rights. So when I came here, I was really surprised to see that they had a lot of work in social justice and human rights and we have so many programs like the human rights centers.

**Ying:** I think that the major reason for my choice is Berkeley Law School is so open-minded. All the people know that it's a home of freedom of speech. So I came to US, I really want to experience the open-minded environment and diversified environment of the US. So I think that Berkeley is the best place for me as a starting point to learn the reality of the law here.

**Pearle:** Is law school different from the law school back home in China?

**Ying:** In my home country, a law firm is not the woman dominant. And also sometimes they would think that the woman should be just at home and they'll take care of the family.

**Pearle:** My law school back home in Nigeria was like so different from here. The professor'd just tell you, “This is the law. Don't argue with me.” But here, you could always have an argument with your professor. No, this is not it. But you couldn't try that back home and finishing law school, my family just had this whole okay she's done with law school. She get married and I'm like no I'm not going to get married.

And I can still remember like my grandmother's face when I told her I was going to Berkeley. She wasn't pleased. She was like, you could always do this when you're married and I'm like, I have this opportunity now. And I don't want to settle down. So, yes, there is that pressure back home. Once you're done with school, you're not totally accomplished until you have a husband or you have a child. And that's not where my mind is right now. It was very male-dominated, there were more male students and I always just had to prove myself because they see women as fragile or not up to any good. So I always had to prove them wrong at every turn. So yeah, I guess coming to Berkeley, I did that. So watch me.

**Ying:** That's awesome. You definitely prove they are wrong.

**Pearle:** Yeah, exactly.

**Ying:** The thing I feel very amazing here is that each class we have a lot of interactive discussion and the student classmates from the different countries, we have different angles to look at to the same legal issues. Before I came to the US, if someone says “Oh I disagree with you.” I always say oh maybe he wants to challenge me. I would feel negative emotions about this. But when I came to Berkeley, it’s quite normal. The typical American thing, the classroom, that we’ll share different perspectives. I learn a lot. I really value that different opinion from other classmates. It really inspired me. I have more confidence and I voice out my own opinion in the classroom. So I just push myself. I think this is a really open-minded environment and also some students from the Asia, they probably were a little bit shy because English is not our first language. So if I make some mistake, maybe someone will laugh at me or have a negative judgment against us. But it's totally not true. We need more confidence because we are representing our home country. We’re proud of our nationality. So just be yourself here. I think this is the lesson I learned here.

**Pearle:** Back home in Africa, there are certain things women can't do. You would be looked at differently. So I feel like coming here it was easier to express myself like I could be anyone, I can wear anything I want to wear. Berkeley kind of gives you that room to grow. There’s nothing limiting you. I feel like the only thing limiting you is actually yourself in this kind of situation basically because you can’t say oh it’s cuz I’m a woman. The doors are literally open for you.

**Ying:** And also I would think that after we graduate, we are looking for that job in US. I hope that our law school could strengthen the network with law firms and organizations to offer more resources to our alum students.

**Pearle:** I actually agree with that. Berkeley Law could do better with the LLM program, considering how many people they admit every year and how diverse it is. And I feel like there are people from other countries who have that expertise that law firms could be looking for. So yes, there is a lot of work to be done. More outreach, for example, in African countries to ensure that these people who have come all the way can have something to rely on after graduation. There's still more they need to do admission-wise because there are very few black American students here. There are few Africans in the LLM class, we’re just like four. And I feel like they could do more outreach to, you know, areas where it's black dominated, basically.

And then also coming here, we've had to do our research. We've had to learn how to use Google Maps, for example, or how to pronounce certain things. But I feel like a lot of Americans haven't done their research when it comes to like approaching or having discussions with international students. You know, they group Asians—they think Chinese, Japanese, you know, they're all the same or like Pakistan is in the Middle East or Africa is one big country. Do you mean all 51 countries in Africa? It just drives me crazy. And I feel like it can be very dehumanizing sometimes, especially if you're very sensitive to these things, you're losing your identity to just being called African. That also comes with the stereotypes. Everybody thinks everybody is poor or we all live in huts or something. So you want to prove to them, yes, I'm from a very big continent. But please, could you acknowledge the fact that I'm Nigerian and I don't ask me about your relative in Kenya.

**Ying:** Yeah.

**Pearle:** We do our research coming here. So I feel like they should be able to do the same thing. So what advice would you give any Asian students to Berkeley Law?

**Ying:** Oh, yeah. Never be shy and also be yourself and express your own voice. Take a risk, make a decision—a brave decision. Come to other countries and explore new things. This is really helpful in terms of your career or your life. How about you?

**Pearle:** Well, I feel like my advice to any Nigerian girl is to first of all, remember that you are black and you're beautiful because I feel like I've had to struggle with that coming here. Like the media will just tell you that we're not enough or we're not worthy. So my advice is that you are worthy and you deserve a seat at the table. You've actually earned a seat at the table, to be honest. Anybody who doesn't want to listen to you can walk out that door. The reason why we're here is to break that glass ceiling. And you are setting a trend. You are opening doors for people. I feel like I can go back to my country and set a precedent. And so to every other girl who looks like me or who is Nigerian should believe in themselves. And that black is beauty and black is proud.

**Ying:** That's great. Amazing.