

## **“A Conversation about growing up Black” New York Times Op-Docs, 2015**

Rakesh: Racism means basically like

Miles: a large part of a race feels that they're superior to another race. And so, not only do they believe that, but they act on it.

Malik: Examples would be in class; sometimes I'd be the only black kid and we'd read a book like, I don't know, Huck Finn. Then there's that uncomfortable moment when the "magic word" comes up, and people would look at you like, "What's his reaction?" and things like that.

Miles: I was walking home from school with this one white girl and we had just gotten off the bus. We were almost home, and there was this group of black kids that had just gotten out of school. She was like, "Oh, let's cross the street; there's a group of black kids, I don't want to run into them." And so she told me, which I don't even know why she would do that.

Marvin: I had this sweatband just to reinforce my wrist, and I had a teacher come up to me and say, "You should take it off because it looks gang-affiliated."

Shaquille: I've been in situations where, you know, I had to cross the street because I didn't want to scare the white lady that was walking.

Marvin: I would actually get to the point where I would start to count how many times a woman would clutch her bag.

Bisa: When I was 16, I was leaving my mom's house in my pajamas—which had snowmen on them—with my brother, and we were actually stopped by the police rather aggressively.

Jumoke: I've been stopped by the cops on my way between classes because we have two separate buildings, walking from one building to the other building as my white students in the same class walk by me.

Malik: It's kind of upsetting because we live in a world where my mom has to be afraid when I walk outside from the people that are meant to protect me. I just don't like when my mother feels like that. You know, I love my mother; I want her to always be happy.

Bisa: You know, I walk tall, I keep my head up, and I try to be very articulate and polite. And so, of course, I was like, "Okay, I'm going to be fine because I act a certain way." Of course, that has absolutely nothing to do with it. The way people perceive you is not up to you.

Jumoke: My parents taught me, "Oh, you know, cops are your friends; they're here to protect you," but all I'm seeing is the opposite. So how can I not be afraid when I feel like I'm being hunted? When I feel like I'm there to fill a quota?

Shaquille: We are in a so-called free society, and as black men, we literally don't feel free. We don't know what freedom is.

Jumoke: Every time we're killed, the first thing you see on the news is "criminal record" or something like that. So from the second the bullet hits us, already we're starting to be dehumanized.

Malik: With black people like myself, we don't get as many chances as they do. So you have to be aware, and you have to watch out, and you can't mess up.

Bisa: This was an extremely emotionally taxing process for me in terms of coming to terms with the nature of racism in my own life, in this country, and in this world. And if you wait until somebody's 12, 13, or 14 to put that on them, it can be really difficult.

Malik: My dad, he's just like the honest one; he's like, "Listen son, there are things in this world you kind of have to watch out for." He doesn't want me to live in fear, but he wants me to be aware.

Maddox: I want people to know that I'm perfectly fine and I'm not going to hurt anybody or do anything bad.

Rakesh: I should be judged about who I am and what kind of person I am.

Marvin: My parents would tell me, especially my mom, "You have to endure, you have to muscle through it." And this is no different; it's part of being a person of color in America.

Bisa: There's a certain comfortability associated with that, because if I know that something is inevitable, then I know how to deal with it. Fortunately, I've had parents who have said, "This is what you do."

Marvin: Mom and Dad, I'll be fine because you did a good job raising me. You gave me all the resources, the time, and the blood, sweat, and tears to make me a good man, an honorable man, and the foundation to survive in this country.

Myles: I want you to know that I will act in an appropriate manner and do everything that you told me to do because I do love you. I know that everything you say is for a reason and not just to talk the talk. And I love you.