

RHODES

SCHOLARSHIP



PERSONAL STATEMENTS

I grew up surrounded by arguments. I am racially black and white; ethnically Senegalese, German-American and British; religiously descended from Christians, Jews, and Muslims. My parents – a woman from a Midwestern farm who ventured to a large university to study engineering and a man raised in the capital city of Senegal who studied economics at the same university – remained culturally and ideologically separated during their marriage. As the oldest of three children, I grew up listening with great consternation to the charged disagreements between my parents. I also paid close attention to the religious debates between my Hassidic Jewish uncle and my Muslim father, and the heated ideological arguments between my very conservative Christian grandfather and his homosexual son. From an early age, I began developing mediation methods to find harmony amongst discord.

My ability to bring diverse groups together was recognized by my middle school teachers, who appointed me to the school's peer-mediation team. In developing a talent for reconciliation at a very young age, I gained skills that helped me become Spackenkil High School's first African-American Student Government President. The humbling journey of finding my niche in society continually demanded further investigation of my mixed background. In an attempt to better understand African-American culture - since this is often how others define me - I chose to attend Spelman College. During my Spelman years, I cultivated a broader perspective that aided in understanding the diversity of my heritage. My major in International Studies allowed me to combine my interests in multiculturalism and mediation, as well as explore the fields of history, economics, and political science in a global context. International Studies also provided opportunities for travel to the war-torn Kampala, Uganda, as part of a Non-Governmental

Organization's peace-building initiative, as well as cultural immersion and language studies in French-speaking Martinique and Senegal. In Senegal, I witnessed the inequalities and obstacles women face throughout the country. I interned with a micro-finance institution that aided the small businesses of women around Dakar. I also learned about an initiative called "10,000 Girls" in an interior region of Senegal that seeks to improve the lives of girls through education and entrepreneurship. Upon returning to Spelman, I was elected President of the Student Government Association, and soon implemented an initiative to bring campus awareness and support to "10,000 Girls." The connection I created between my women's college and this organization for girls provided a mutually beneficial catalyst for development.

My senior thesis at Spelman analyzed Islamic Brotherhood Movements in Senegal, establishing each movement's historical emergence and unique sociological features. The opportunity to build on this research came after graduation, when I traveled to Egypt to participate in the U.S. State Department's Critical Language Initiative. While in Egypt, I not only studied Arabic (the prescribed curriculum), but I also observed people in their religious practices, comparing and contrasting them with what I knew about Islam in Senegal. When the State Department program ended, I embarked upon a self-guided tour from Cairo through Sinai and on to Israel. My goal was to continue to build upon my understanding of the political, social, and religious environments of the Middle East. The individuals I met along the way, who shared their personal stories with me, are microcosms of the bigger issues affecting this region. For example, while admiring colorful hand-sewn tapestries in Cairo's Bab Zuwayla market, I spoke with a Coptic mother of four, who lost her husband in a religious hate crime. Although she had

befriended the Muslim women in nearby booths, she knew that their husbands did not approve of her children playing with theirs. I was reminded of similar problems combated in the Internally Displaced Persons camps in Uganda, where women of once conflicting ethnic groups now performed beautiful songs and dances together. Viewing each new place from the vantage point of an outsider, and then conversing with the locals to learn their personal truths, I crafted a unique lens through which I interpreted regional problems. Above all, these conversations confirmed the effective role women can play as agents of change in their communities.

Shortly after returning home, I joined the “Obama for America” presidential campaign. I continued to develop my nascent mediation abilities as I defused team tensions and bridged gaps in campaign offices from Pennsylvania to Montana. By initiating the “Women for Obama” group in Missoula, I effectively increased our volunteer base and community participation. I now recognize that my ability to hear, understand, process, and reiterate different perspectives is a gift I wish to share with the world, and one I find deeply fulfilling.

By further honing my mediation skills through academic pursuits, I hope to play an integral role in the facilitation of security and peace in Middle Eastern and African countries. My specific focus will incorporate women of each conflict region into the mediation process. With a Rhodes scholarship I aspire to pursue an M.Phil. in Modern Middle Eastern Studies. By enhancing my understanding of the region and providing intensive language training, this programme will provide me with the support needed to conduct thesis research abroad after the first year. I will analyze the role women can play as bridge-builders in Islamic societies from Saudi Arabia to Senegal, looking to

progressive countries where women are highly involved in the political process for models of potential reform. Access to Oxford's extensive Middle East Centre Archive will enhance my understanding of this region's past. With this historical perspective I will be able to generate innovative approaches to mediation in the Middle East and North Africa.

"...From discord, find harmony; in the middle of difficulty lies opportunity," Albert Einstein once said. With the skills acquired through this graduate study, I will be prepared to work with others to build bridges in conflict areas of the Middle East and Africa. My diverse background, resourceful leadership, and optimistic energy are qualities that will make me a worthy contributing member of the University of Oxford community.

I certify that this essay is my own work.

Personal Statement

The worn, barren, one-room schoolhouse in the Dominican Republic was filled with barefoot children of all ages. I was nine years old when I walked into this schoolhouse in a small fishing village in Punta Cana. I was bewildered by the abject poverty, and I turned to my parents, wanting to know-why? As my brother, the only one in our family who spoke Spanish, talked with the children, I understood what a difference it makes to be able to communicate with people in their own language. Those images of the schoolchildren stayed with me, and as I have studied and matured, I realize how critical an understanding of politics is to answering my "why" question and broader questions that address poverty and inequality in human society. These realizations led me to my double major of Political Science and French at Spelman College, which has provided me with the fundamental tools that will ultimately enable me to bring leadership, creativity and sustained efforts to find solutions to these problems on an international level.

Having a sense of international awareness also came from studying French since third grade. My passion for the language and culture led to my first immersion experience for two weeks in Lyon, France in eighth grade. I continued my French studies through high school, and after my first year at Spelman, participated in a summer study program at the International University in Martinique. Again, I was struck by the poverty and the disparity of opportunities between the haves and have-nots and a legal system that did not effectively serve those in the lower economic classes. This exposure to other cultures and seeing how people in other parts of the world live has made me more appreciative of the privileges that I have been given personally and as an American citizen. More importantly, it impressed upon me my responsibility as a world citizen to aid those who, simply because of where they were born, have not been afforded the basic necessities and opportunities, which would allow them to reach their full potential.

My desire to learn about different cultures and to determine how I might be a change agent for justice was also one of the driving forces behind my decision to pursue intensive study in the field of political science and international relations. My classes in Comparative and International Politics explored different systems of government and various political leadership models and how they affect their citizens. Courses that I took in Paris on the post-colonial challenges of France and Francophone Africa and on Problems in Contemporary Africa also had a profound impact on my desire to examine ways that political institutions can help African nations overcome difficulties in establishing stable governments. In a world that gets smaller every day because of advancements in technology, the importance of being aware of and understanding international political issues is increasingly significant. Information instantly bombards us through television and especially the internet, a fact that was reinforced this July during my internship at NBC5 News when we immediately reported on the tragic London terrorist attacks.

I pursued my interest in international politics by studying during the fall of my junior year through Syracuse University in Strasbourg, France. I was selected for an

internship in the Research and Communications Department at the Council of Europe. I used my verbal and written French communication skills in daily interactions with various Council departments editing weekly information postings for website publication. In staff meetings, I also saw how crucial effective, well-organized leadership is for working together and achieving common goals.

These teamwork and leadership skills are similar to those which I have developed and utilized in class participation and numerous extra curricular activities. Coming from my high school where I played tennis and basketball for four years, and led both teams as co-captain my senior year, I learned the importance of motivating and inspiring my teammates to perform at their personal best. By emphasizing practice and hard work, I tried to facilitate communication among teammates, resolve disputes, and lead by my own example of determination and dedication. I continued my lifelong love of sports by joining Spelman's tennis team in my first year. In addition, my other activities on campus and in the Atlanta community have honed my leadership and communication skills that will allow me to build alliances on an international level.

Learning from professors in Oxford's Masters in Philosophy of International (MPhil) Relations Programme, surrounded by scholars from around the world, will create a stimulating and unique environment that will help me learn how to become an effective advocate for change. Ultimately I would like to earn my international law degree with a focus on providing legal services and expanding human rights to people in African nations in the most dire need. To effectively provide legal services for underrepresented people, I must have a comprehensive grasp of their political systems in order to understand the development and evolution of the law and how it has been applied. The first year of the Master's program will provide me with the foundation and training in the history of world politics and development of international relations necessary to achieve my goal. The options that I would like to pursue for the second year specialized course work of International Relations of the Developing World and the Function of Law in the International Community will arm me with a greater understanding of the relationship between politics and the law in the developing world. This coursework at the world-renowned Center for International Relations studies would strengthen my research and analytical skills, and give me both the cultural context and legal groundwork so essential to assisting in the African Human Rights struggle. I believe that I would bring an enthusiastic, committed, ambitious, and open mind to the Rhodes Scholarship experience, enabling me to make the most of such an extraordinary opportunity in my attempt to work to provide solutions to those vital "why" questions.

I certify that this essay is my own work.