

Americanah
By
Chimamanda
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Introduction

Chimamanda Adichie is a Nigerian author. She was raised in Nigeria. Her passion for literature influenced her work of novels, short-stories and non-fiction.

Some may recognize her from *Half of a Yellow Sun*, Orange prize winning novel. Her 2012 talk *We Should All be Feminist*, which stirred the conversations on feminism worldwide. Or, even her Flawless speech to the opening of *Beyonce's* Flawless.



Here, Chimamanda Adichie discusses what it means to be a woman in society. And what is envisioned for us as beings. Those social norms are completely disregarded, for we should all be feminist for gender equality.

Americanah

Chimamanda incorporates so much culture in her novel *Americanah*. She touches on her first love, life living in Nigeria, life as a student, coming to the states, working experiences, race, relationships, hair, politics and even the 9-11 crisis and how it's impact the people of her community.

One thing I admired about this novel is that it's not about a particular gender. The main character, Ifemelu, is a woman but still shares many masculine qualities that makes this novel friendly for all genders. This novel also discusses men and women, as well as different races which makes it suitable for different groups of people, and allows us to see different perspectives first hand.

African-American vs. American-African

Chimamanda differentiates the differences of what it means to be an African-American, and what it means to be an American-African. An African American is someone who was brought to America, forcibly as a slave, while an American African is an African who came to America more or less, willingly for a better life.

This novel *Americanah* depicts the idea that Black immigrants are forced to assimilate to the cultural norms of a Black American. Ifemelu's, Auntie Uju, distances herself from Black Americans because they're seen as inferior to the eyes of whites and Auntie Uju feels as though she isn't one of them. This attempt is failed because whites do not differentiate by cultures in the novel, they see Blacks as all the same. This is NOT acceptable because Black non-Americans don't necessarily know the struggles of Black people. It was until Ifemelu was sexually assaulted as an escort where she understood the true meaning of what it means to be "Black".

Relationships

Chimamanda disputes a time in which Ifemelu goes back to her first love, Obinze, come to find out he was a married man with children who was only having an affair with Ifemelu. Chimamanda sharing this experience proves that it isn't an issue for just women of color go through this, different women of different ethnicities and races can share this same experience. This shows Chimamanda's attributes to sisterhood. Ifemelu walking away from Obinze shows her growth, and standing in her power. The novel is mainly surrounded by Ifemelu's journey of embracing her authenticity.

Chimamanda also describes a time where Ifemelu dates Curt, Kimberly's cousin, who was in love with Ifemelu at "first laugh". Curt explains Ifemelu is the first black woman he's dated, but Ifemelu doesn't want to date a white man.

Hair

“Later, she said, ‘I have to take my braids out for my interviews and relax my hair...If you have braids, they will think you are unprofessional.’ ‘So there are no doctors with braided hair in America?’ Ifemelu asked. ‘I have told you what they told me. You are in a country that is not your own. You do what you have to do if you want to succeed.’ There it was again, the strange naivete with which Auntie Uju had covered herself like a blanket. Sometimes, while having a conversation, it would occur to Ifemelu that Auntie Uju had deliberately left behind something of herself, something essential, in a distant and forgotten place. Obinze said it was the exaggerated gratitude that came with immigrant insecurity,” (Adichie 146-147)

“Relaxing your hair is like being in prison. You're caged in. Your hair rules you. You didn't go running with Curt today because you don't want to sweat out this straightness. You're always battling to make your hair do what it wasn't meant to do,” (Adichie 44). Ifemelu slowly becomes frustrated with manipulating her hair to do “what it wasn't meant to do” in order to fit into the American appearance of having straight hair. Ifemelu wasn't herself, having permed hair only made her feel self-conscious about herself, lacking confidence. These are the struggles Ifemelu faces when trying to assimilate to the American-like appearance just to be accepted. Other Black women can argue or relate to the issue Ifemelu faced because on numerous occasions are we judged for the type of hair that we have, or the styles that we wear it stopping us from wearing it how we want to wear it.

Alexa, play “I am Not my hair” by India Arie



Women of Color in the Workplace

“She should have never gone there. She should have walked away. She wanted to shower, to scrub herself, but she could not bear the thought of touching her own body, and so she put on her nightdress, gingerly, to touch as little of herself as possible. She imagined packing her things, somehow buying a ticket, and going back to Lagos. She curled on her bed and cried, wishing she could reach into herself and yank out the memory of what had just happened,” (Adichie 190)

Ifemelu’s family and friends saw Barack Obama as a symbol of hope for America, and a representation for progress. They viewed him as a man who is one of them, came from a poor Kenyan man. They looked to him for inspiration, a symbolism of the complex and conflicting nature of what it means to be Black in America. Obama was also admired for demonstrating what it means to truly love a Black woman, and ease the pain of racism in this country.

Being at home in Nigeria was Ifemelu living in her truth, her authenticity is what she enjoyed the most.