

The strain of a civil war forced my mother and me to immigrate to America. Adjusting to life in a different country was hard. Soon after we arrived, my parents divorced. Classmates mocked my strong accent and African features. Because my mother worked nights to support us, we rarely saw each other. I walked home from school to an empty, one-bedroom apartment with a single bed. I slept at night; she slept during the day. There was no one to help me with homework, pick me up from school, or attend church with me, and I had no male role model. My mother's compassion, sacrifice, and championship in our new life served as inspiring leadership that I seek to emulate throughout my life.

Witnessing the sacrifices my mother made, I did not want to disappoint her. While those around me aspired to the American dream, the poverty cycle held much back. Instead of being a victim of the inner-city crisis, I chose to be defined by my choices. My defining life choice was to excel in school. Gaining a quality education meant stability. A college degree meant that my mother's sacrifice and encouragement would not go unrecognized.

Despite our lack of wealth, my mother's compassion meant our home became a refuge for other African immigrants who needed a foundation for their new beginning. My passion for giving back began in my undergraduate studies when I served on BYU's Student Advisory Council. There I helped build bridges of understanding within our larger community for minority students. Continuing to emulate my mother's leadership through my legal studies, I have committed to mentor black undergraduate students by participating with the Black Alumni Society. While different from my mother's in execution, my compassion allows me to have a social impact now.

I hope to inspire other immigrant youth to reach their full potential. My mother was the first in our family to make the courageous decision to leave our homeland. I am the first in my family to graduate from college. My family and community have applauded me for the sacrifice of pursuing an education, and their support is instilled in my heart. Attending BYU Law has only increased my sense of responsibility and my desire to lead. I know my development here will increase my ability to enable mercy and justice to reach those who seek refuge. The social impact of my obtaining a law degree will break my family's multi-generational struggle with poverty and that of other families in my community by empowering them to see their potential as God's children.

When I look back on life, I hope that my leadership will have encouraged others to weather the storm and find greater purpose during adversity, just as my mother's inspiring leadership has done for me.