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Sibling Worlds

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Sibling Worlds

David Nicolas Lopez Moncayo

At the age of 12 my sister got diagnosed with vitiligo, and at that age neither she nor I understood it completely. Her name is Diana, and she is a beautiful, brown, Ecuadorian girl. I vividly remember a conversation we once had when she told me that she wished her white spots would spread throughout her body so she could be more like me. Luckily, according to my family, I was born with European features (I am “white,” tall, have light hair, and look nothing like my sister). When she told me this, I immediately knew what she meant. She wanted to be “white” because of the social stigma that being “brown” conveyed. Most of all, she wanted to be accepted and admired by her family. The clearest example of what being “white” means in Ecuador was given to me in a family reunion. I overheard a conversation that my aunts were having with my sister when she told them about her illness. They said, “Mija, usted se está haciendo blanca, fina y guapa!” This translates to, “You’re becoming white, pure, and pretty!” I understood it was a joke that they were saying, but it did reveal the underlying truth of what they really thought of the “white” race.

Race is a social construct. It became clear, for I realized that my sister’s reality would drastically change if she were “white.” I knew that Diana would not change because Diana is Diana regardless of the color of her skin, yet the people that surround her would treat her differently, and the image she has of herself would consequently change.

In his book, Ta-Nehisi Coates reveals that race is the creation of one’s mind. I know this to be a fact because of different ways that my sister and I have been treated because of our race. I am not stereotypically white. I do not carry Tolstoy as part of my heritage. I carry Velasco Ibarra, Eugenio Espejo, and Simon Bolivar (all revolutionary

thinkers), as part of my cultural heritage. All of them of *Mestizo* and Indian descent, but because of this cultural phenomenon created in society's head, I am treated as part of "la raza fina," or the pure race.

My sister and I share the same parents, yet our social experience has varied greatly because of the color of our skin. She dreams of being "white" like the perfect actresses she sees on TV. She dreams of being "white" so she can be treated with as much respect as her brother is treated. She dreams of marrying someone "white" so she can "mejorar la raza," which is a popular saying in Ecuador that translates to "better the race," and is commonly used when someone of dark skin marries someone who has European features. These are part of our own Ecuadorian "Dream," that has been undeniably influenced by the Spanish colonization and North American propaganda. Sometimes I am influenced by this illusion, and many times what your environment says you are you end up believing. Sadly, because of our physical attributes my sister and I grew very differently. We both heard the same from our environment and ended up believing it. I know that our worlds would have been extremely different if the color of our skin would not be same. In the end, neither the "Dream" nor being "white," (both are synonymous for me) is limited to a certain place, but spread with slight variations across every country and culture; they are an intrinsic part of human nature's need to feel superior.