

PERSONAL STATEMENT

Germany, ETA

“No no, but where are you *originally* from?” is a typical response whenever I say I’m from Michigan. I was born and raised in Michigan with parents who immigrated from India and Nepal. I have never visited these countries. Internally, I identified as American. In the USA, however, people would wait for me to add, “...my parents immigrated from...”

Growing up in a wealthy area among primarily white families meant I was raised by not only my family, but the white culture around me. As I grew up, I attended Indian dinners and temple ceremonies. I went to my friends’ Christmas dinners, attended prom, and tailgated on football Saturdays. I spoke English with my friends, Hindi at home. I grew up with parents against dating— particularly across different castes or religions, who insisted their children to lead “successful” and “respectable” lives, and found my disinterest in cooking perplexing. I do not, however, perceive my parents as *racist*, *oppressive*, or *patriarchal*. I understand how they developed this way of thinking.

Eventually, I began opening my parents up to *my* way of living— my own “culture” per se. Now, instead of scolding me for staying out in the sun, my mother smiles at the sight of my Birkenstock tan-lines. I shared my views on the damage caused by berating what is *natural* and *human*, like darkened skin, and a culturally-rooted conception faded. My mother no longer equates level of skin-tone with one’s social worth. Learning how to build a bridge between my American upbringing and my parents’ culturally-influenced mentality allows me to find solace within the ambiguity that makes up my identity, leading me to discover my love for the dismantlement of miscommunication and establishment of mutual understanding.

While living in Germany, I was perceived as *American*, therefore each of my actions reflected *America*. As my relationships strengthened, I felt the power each of my words held. “You’re actually quite smart, *for an Ami*,” my friend once said, “you actually think and listen and discuss!” I heard variations of this throughout my time in Germany, and realized how the USA is perceived by other nations. In these moments, my voice had, and took, the opportunity to make a lasting impact. Channelling the communication skills I developed in finding comfort with my own hybridized identity, I used my words to dig deeper into their interpretations, illustrating common misconceptions, uncovering hidden cultural-connections, and pulling out the basic reality of it all— both the USA and Germany, like all other countries, are made up of *individuals*. I’m ready to take my education, cross-cultural curiosity, and communication skills abroad and build a bridge of understanding between differing mentalities within the USA and Germany. Continuing this intercultural journey with the Fulbright ETA allows me to make this positive impact, while preparing me in my professional pursuit of cultural-research in a German context.