

The sweaty hands of my teammates, which ranged in both shade and hue, were locked with mine. I was their team leader, thus it was among my principal responsibilities to affirm, and reaffirm, that our team was a single unit. Our collective palms formed an inseparable bond, and every member of the team was an essential link of our broader chain. We repeated this ritual at every key breakage of the game. On this occasion, I left the timeout and towed my sneakers close to the sideline. There was only 4.1 seconds remaining on the clock against one of our fiercest rivals, Bowdoin College. The winner would advance into the Sweet Sixteen of the NCAA Tournament. Although situated on the courts *margin*, the only prejudice I experienced was the opponents' distaste for the color of my uniform, not my skin tone. I stood on the sideline, hoping that my country could one day achieve the colorblind tolerance that reigned freely on the basketball court. As a child and adolescent, I dreamt about making the game-winning defensive stop, or having my jersey retired by my high school team. I often reflect on these romantic visions, which were made possible by my hard work and the opportunity inherent in America, with great pride; but today am fixated on a far loftier *Dream*.

My race, ethnicity, and gender were jointly and severally irrelevant on the hardwood. They did not make the box score, impact the way opposing teams guarded me, or most importantly, influence my teammates' regard of my leadership. On the basketball court, I was simply Jasmine, team-captain, Number 23. However, this utopia was confined to the four corners of the basketball court. On campus and beyond, I was an Arab American woman. The latter half of my identity, particularly after the 9/11 terrorist attacks, was said to be at odds with the former. In short time, a once harmonious coexistence of two cultures was considered oxymoronic, according to polemicists in mainstream media and academic circles.

In class, I read scholarly manifestos about a burgeoning "Clash of Civilizations," where the Arab and Muslim worlds stood diametrically opposite to Western cultures and values. I did not need to look far for evidence to counter this theory: I was simultaneously an Arab American, and more specifically, an Arab American Christian. Challenging stereotypes, however, became as frequent an opponent as the teams I faced-off against on the basketball court. Off the court, I deflected misrepresentations about

Arab American women; caricatures about Middle Eastern terrorists; and even more appalling, misnomers about student-athletes. The prevailing sociopolitical climate that stereotyped, and often vilified, Arab Americans penetrated every dimension of my life, except the basketball court. I came to Amherst College as a much celebrated recruit; having broken my high school's all-time basketball scoring record. Therefore, my teammates were unconcerned with neither my race nor nationality, but duly aware of my 19.3 points-per-game average during my senior year. Likewise, the coaching staff did not inquire into the nature of my faith, but highlighted the stirring recommendation from Amherst's Athletic Director praising my emphasis on academic achievement. Amid the political storm where race and ethnicity were converted into proxies for criminality, the basketball court proved transcendent. As a wide-eyed adolescent, the Blind Brook High gymnasium provided temporary refuge from the marginalization and racism I endured. After graduating into womanhood, I would find a similar *home-court advantage* at Amherst's LeFrak Court.

The rampant crackdown against civil liberties and human rights in the United States was superseded by another zeal that took place exclusively on the Amherst campus. Namely, the fanaticism for the Lady Jeffs Basketball Team, which was riding a sixteen-game winning streak and enjoying its finest season ever. I was only a freshman, but I started nearly every game and was among the team-leaders in every major statistical category. I played with the recklessness of a novice, but provided the sorely lacking leadership and energy that fueled the Lady Jeffs. My personal fuel, however, was pumped from a radically different reservoir. I grew disenchanted with the xenophobia and racial profiling that I endured on the very campus I represented on the hardwood. Through my capacity as member of Amnesty International, the human rights violations in Guantanamo and Abu Ghraib, and the emaciated rule of law in the Middle East, and the War in Iraq mobilized not only my activism, but also my fascination with law and policy. I channeled this energy on the basketball court, the colorblind landscape where my body and mind had free range, and led my team to uncharted territory. The sour mood on the ground in America was countered by the Lady Jeff's first championship, and advancement into the NCAA Tournament's Sweet- Sixteen. We finished the season ranked 13<sup>th</sup> in the entire country.

On campus, the stigma attached to being a student-athlete rivaled the animus my ethnicity attracted. Naturally, foul stereotypes were leveled against me and my teammates in class, but I was determined to match my academic achievement with that of my accomplishments on the hardwood. In the classroom, I majored in French and Law, Jurisprudence, and Social Thought (LJST), a comprehensive and dynamic concentration that exposed me to the inter-disciplinary scope of legal theory and praxis. LJST not only provided me with an ideal pre-law foundation, but also furnished me with the intellectual capacity to examine the ever-changing world around me. In addition, serving as the emotional leader of the Amherst women's basketball team provided me with the leadership, affinity for teamwork, and communicative skills that are vital for the legal profession. Therefore, I believe my perspective will enrich the \_\_\_\_\_ School of Law community, both in the classroom and beyond. Moreover, \_\_\_\_\_'s world-class faculty and comprehensive International Law & Human Rights curriculum provides the ideal setting to engage my interest in this area of law. In addition, the diverse student body and vibrant extracurricular opportunities prove key in furnishing me with legal skills that resonate throughout the world, and fluidly transition past transnational borders.

The view from the sideline is panoramic, furnishing me with a broad scope of what is taking place in front of me. I looked up at the clock and then toward my teammates, whose faces ranged brilliantly in black, brown, olive, and white. Yet, the only shades that mattered were the purple and white tones that colored our jerseys. Although my name on the back of my jersey proudly indicated that I was both an Arab and an American, the stout letters on our chests that read "AMHERST" affirmed *that I belonged*. The score of squeaking sneakers signaled that I was in my safe haven, a terrain where my name, faith or skin complexion was singly and collectively irrelevant. Still *sidelined*, I imagined an America that neither questioned my political affiliation nor my race, until I was rudely interrupted by the referee's whistle. I waited for the Bowdoin player to inbound the ball, hoping to preserve our narrow 1-point lead in the few seconds that remained. I looked up at the clock, and swore to myself that I would do whatever it took to take my team into the Sweet Sixteen, a dream that once seemed unfathomable to my team. The ball was played to Bowdoin's start point-guard, and I immediately switched to defend her.

**ANONYMOUS**  
Candidate, USC Law School

Each second felt like an eternity, yet I pressed and ultimately forced an off-balanced shot that clanked off of the rim. Our basketball dream had been fulfilled, but it is now time to also help my country achieve another important *Dream*. I promise to never again accept being sidelined, and today run passionately towards my legal education to ensure the same for all dehumanized and violated citizens – whom *are all part* of my team.