



# Video Story Transcript

## FIT IN OR STAND OUT: AN AFRICAN-AMERICAN'S BATTLE TO FIT INTO WHITE CULTURE

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**Link to YouTube Video:**  
<https://youtu.be/m2y9txxl1ow>

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Note : The following is a transcription of a spoken story performance and may not reflect textbook perfect English. It will guide you as you listen (or read) along.

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I grew up in a small town right outside of Columbus – Delaware, Ohio. It was 95 percent white, 5 percent black and we all, or most of the black people lived on the southside of town.

Um, there was a barber. His name was, uh, Mr. Matthews and I loved Mr. Matthews. Mr. Matthews used to cut our hair, um, cheap, \$3; he used to cut our hair for \$3. All the other haircuts were 10, 12 dollars.

He had this idea that, um, he wanted to make haircuts affordable but he also wanted to give you your own style, your own personal style. And I just loved that. So, uh, as I was transitioning from seventh grade into eighth grade, from, like, band geek and brainy guy to, uh, basketball superstar, I was gonna play on the basketball team and be a star.

“Mr. Matthews, um,” I said, “Man, cut, cut Diggs in my hair and put the dollar sign in it, right! And it was kind of funny ’cause I was poor but I had a dollar sign on my hair. So, I did it and my eighth-grade basketball coach, Mr. Webb, it was amazing.

He used to, uh, just allow you to be an individual, um, which is very important. Um, as a black person on the southside, you can kind of get lumped in together. And having your own unique haircut and your own unique style allows you to break through some of those stereotypes and to be seen as an individual. And Mr. Webb would walk up, call you brother, can... give you the pound. Um, he would dev..., he developed some one on one plays, allowed me to do what I do best, to go one on one. But he also showed me the importance of

fitting into the collective, how me, one of, uh, two black people on a p... white dominated, uh, team, how I needed to fit into that collective. But I could still be an individual, and I loved Mr. Webb for that. I loved him so much for that. Um, I was hoping, as I went from eighth grade to ninth grade, that it would be the same thing in high school.

So, I devised this plan. Everybody was looking to fit in, um, fit in with whatever group they were gonna be in high school. And I was looking to stand out. So, in the living room with my mom, I devised this plan.

I said, "I'm going to put red tips on my hair."

And she said, "Why don't you just dye your whole hair red?"

I said, "Mom, why don't I dye my hair blonde?"

She said, "Why don't you dye it silver?"

I said, "Mom, I'm gonna dye my hair silver!"

So, that day, we went, we got the hair dye. We sat in the living room. She sat on the couch. I sat in between her legs and she put this hair dye in my hair. And it... I could smell the chemicals mixed in with my hair, the ammonia. It just smelled so good. I was becoming Diggs; I was becoming my own person. I just loved it. I went to school. Everybody knew me.

"Hey, who's that guy with the, uh, silver hair?"

"Oh, that's Diggs! That's Diggs."

I was my own person and I was hoping the coaches would accept me as well. So, a week... the weekend before we were starting basketball, we're going to have our first game. Um, we're in the gym. I'm standing against the wall, waitin' for my turn to go in, to run the drill. And there's a coach. One of the coaches is about four steps away from me.

He says, "Hey, Diggs, I, I like your hair. You gonna keep that for the season?"

And I was like, yes, yes! This is so awesome! The coaches are accepting me for who I am. They're gonna allow me to be an individual and fit into this collective. A black man fitting into this white culture. This is amazing.

I said, "Yes, coach. I'm gonna keep it."

His voice dropped a little bit. He took two steps towards me. The conversation became a little more intimate.

"You're gonna have that out of your hair before the season starts, right?"

No, no. I'm going to do it this year. I may do it next year. Uh, why did you just ask me that? But I figured because he asked me the same question again, he wanted a different answer. So, I just didn't say anything. He takes two more steps towards me and now we're almost face to face. His voice drops even more and the conversation became very intimate.

"You're gonna have that out of your hair before the season starts, right?"

Ohhh, okay. Maybe he doesn't accept me as an individual and maybe he just wants me to fit in. Okay, I see what the coach is doing here.

"Um, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. I, I'll have it out."

And, uh, that day... we had the weekend to dye my hair back so, I went and told my mom. She got this jet-black hair dye and, um, I sat in the living room. She sat on the couch, I sat between her legs and the chemicals, huh! She put this hair dye on my hair and I could smell this disgusting ammonia smell as the chemicals were mixed in with my hair.

And I could feel my individuality just being stripped from me and I loved playing basketball in high school. But after that, I liked playing just a little bit less. And, uh, after my sophomore year, I just... I, I felt like I was losing myself. So, I, I didn't, I didn't try out for my junior year.

Going into college, I started to find myself again. I started finding my writing voice and started figuring out who I was. Um, I knew that I wanted to help people and maybe I was just like Mr. Matthews. Um, going into law school, I realized that, um, I needed to figure out how to fit into that new collective, that new legal, uh, community. So, after I graduated, I moved out here to, um, Chicago. And I started my own law firm and I realized that the, uh, the legal community is primarily white. It was just like my old town; it's primarily white with speckles of, of black. And I needed to figure out how to be an individual but also to fit into that collective.

A few years later, my law firm started to take off. It was amazing and I had an opportunity to, uh, make my first hire. It was this black girl and she had, um, long hair and it was dyed red. And I wanted to tell her that, um, you can't have your hair dyed like that; you're gonna stand out too much. I felt like my coaches. You can't have your hair dyed like that; you're, you're not gonna fit in. You're going to stand out too much and we already stand out. And if I take you into court, we're gonna look ridiculous and no one is going to take us serious.

Then I thought about my coaches, and I thought about if I told her that, I'd be stripping her of her individuality. So, when she asked if she could work for me, I said, "Yes." And I decided I was gonna allow her to figure out how she wanted to fit in or stand out.