Navigating the Financial Planning World as a Person of Color

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Executive Summary

Despite the financial services industry's ongoing efforts at improving racial diversity, only 3.5% of CFP professionals are black or Latino… a revealing statistics for not only the underrepresentation of people of color in the industry but that simply trying to expand awareness of financial planning and invite more diversity into the industry is not enough to move the needle.

In this guest post, Eugenié George, a prospective new financial advisor studying for her CFP certification to enter the industry, shares her own perspective on the real-world challenges in entering financial planning as a person of color. Starting with the understanding that, due to a history of financially-related racial discrimination in the US over the past 200 years, many communities of color do not have the same accumulated wealth and positive connection to the financial services industry in the first place. And it's hard to enter financial planning – and have support from family, friends, and your community to enter financial planning – when the community's history with the financial services industry is so negative in the first place.

In addition, Eugenié shares her own path and journey into the financial services industry, how she has built a "network map" of people to reach out to and connect with to mentor and find opportunities, how to identify your own "superpower" skills that will help you get your foot in the door for a job opportunity, how to navigate the financial challenges of taking one step back to take two steps forward into the industry, and how to manage the fact that, as a person of color, you will inevitably "stand out" in an industry that is still more-than-90% white.

Fortunately, though, a growing understanding of the historical context and challenges of communities of color with the financial services industry provides a foundation for today's existing advisors to become "allies" and help to build more effective pathways and support for people of color to become CFP professionals of color in the future.

Between the CFP Board and the financial planning community, there is a growing awareness of a need for, and even a craving for, diversity and inclusion education. As a person of color, it has been a difficult transitioning into the financial planning community, but it's been proven to be the best decision that I've made. In this blog post, I wanted to share my experiences and how I've learned how to craft my own niche and come to terms with the existing inequality in financial planning.

Before we take a deep dive into diversity/inclusion, I want to point out that the CFP community is filled with entrepreneurs, quants, and poets, all wrapped into one community. This hodgepodge group of folks have dramatically shifted my perspectives of what it means to be a "financially free" human being. I've been completely impressed at the joviality of the financial planning community. Between the tweets, phone conversations, and meetups, I've turned from a shy voyeur to a full-blown cheerleader. With the help of many people, I appreciate how this community has taken someone who was a complete novice of financial planning, into a full-fledged supporter of the CFP certification, and it is now my mission to make financial planning accessible to Women of Color.

In this article I want to address three big ideas:

- Historical Context of Underserved Communities in Financial Planning
- What to do with Allyship to support People of Color
- What to do as a Person of Color

In "What to do as a Person of Color," I've mapped out the steps that I took to build a brand, and pave the way for the next couple of years in the financial planning industry, including:

1. Transitioning to the industry in unorthodox ways
2. Making a Network Map
3. Identifying Your Superpower
4. Understanding that Being a Person of Color makes you a Role Model
5. How I can I fit in the Narrative of Financial Planning
6. What to do with Money?
7. What to do with your Identity (Your Name/Hair/Etc.)
8. Crafting Your Niche

Historical Context Of Underserved Communities In Financial Planning

Diversity is a heavily debated topic in the world today. And between political and consumer demand, the conversation of wealth and who obtains it is always a heated conversation.

When someone is a person of color, the conversation of "who do I want to serve?" is constantly in the back of their mind. The CFP Board has estimated that women only make up 23% percent of CFP professionals, and less than 10% of the 83,000 CFP® professionals are black, Latino, Asian, or Native American descent. It's a very small number, considering in the America Population is 41.5% People of Color according to the US Census.

We know the numbers of the lack of representation, but the problem is so much more. Personally, I was tired of seeing the same statistics over and over again, and I wanted to know more about it, so during my time as an MBA student, I decided to write a book on it.

During my yearlong quest to find out what exactly is the disconnect between communities of color and the financial planning industry, I knew I had a rare opportunity because I would talk to folks as a student interested in financial problems and not as a financial advisor.

From talking to communities of color and financial planners, there is a clear disconnect between who is really delivering financial planning services, and who are product salespeople, and how to tell which is which. When talking to communities of color, I found that many people don't have the financial education to decide who is actually an advisor in favor of helping them with their money. For example, when I researched Native American populations and interviewed CFP professionals that were either Native Americans, or helped the Native American population, it was evident that folks put a lot of trust in "financial advisors" who were actually salespeople and not fiduciaries and lost a lot of money on scams. For many people, that is their first *and last* touch of "financial planning."

However, the limitations of people of color accessing financial advice and financial services run deeper. There are actually a number of laws or acts that have discriminated against people of color in the past from the financial services industry. For the brevity of this article, I'll explain a few forms of financial discrimination that have occurred, but if one is interested in learning more, *The Color of Wealth* and *The Color of Law* are two great books that go into more details.

African American

After the Civil War, President Lincoln wanted to create financial literacy for African Americans transition into freedom. The Freedman Bureau Act was the establishment to start a black bank for African Americans. But the push for African American upward mobility in the aftermath of the slavery era turned out to be a disaster in disguise. It has been stated that the Freedman Bank was one of the worst economic implementations that occurred in the United States.

The Freedman Bank became one of the fastest growing banks in the United States, and it was targeted to only African Americans. At its peak, the bank had 37 offices in different cities, such as Philadelphia and D.C. and had around $57 million dollars saved by African Americans across 17 different states.

However, the Freedman Bank only allowed African Americans to save, never to invest in as equity owners of the bank's stock. In addition, it turns out that the Freedman Bank used its limited assets to loan funds to non-African Americans, and according to the Freedman Legacy Project, was making a number of especially risky investments across industries in the process. In 1873, Seneca Sandstone Company received approval for an unsecured loan by a bank board member Henry D. Cooke. The owner of the Sandstone Company and board members were white. A financial panic in 1873 stuck in the United States, the quarry loan fell into default, and depositors and the president the board made Fredrick Douglas the bank director.

When Douglas found out about Seneca, he desperately attempted to stabilize the bank, and even invested $10,000 of his personal funds. But sadly, later that year, the bank was terminated.

A Congressional investigation of Henry D. Cooke was recommended and it was promised that Congress would create a reimbursement system that would allow depositors to at least recover 62% of their savings accounts, but African Americans never received the compensation. This was the first touch of "financial planning" for the newly-freed African American community.

Some folks will say, "well this happened a long time ago," but let me put it under a financial planning lens. My great aunt is 98 years old. Her mother was a sharecropper. So, if we look at her life, the fallout from the Freedman Bank was only two lifetimes ago. More importantly, though, that's two/three financial life cycles of wealth growth and accumulation, and decades of compounding that never got started.

Latin/Hispanic American

The Latin/Hispanic community is the fastest growing group in the United States, representing eighteen percent of the population. When we look at median income for Latinx communities, it is around $46,882 annually compared to White families which earned a median income of $61,200. In America, the Latino poverty rate has hovered around 20% the past 40 years, according to Prosperity Now. There are also been political laws that have consistently redefined the problem of immigration in America… which means for the past 100 years, the Latin/Hispanic American community has been a subject of constant deportation laws, and the threat of mass deportation (even for otherwise legal immigrants) has economically affected three generations.

For instance, the Great Depression stirred a large push for Mexican American Immigrants in 1929. President Hoover agreed to the first mass deportation of Mexican Americans by the name of "Mexican repatriation." The first round of the repatriation raid in Los Angeles rounded people up asked them for their papers. If the Mexican Americans didn't have papers with them (even if they were otherwise legally in the US), they were put on a train.

Many people that were deported had citizenship papers, and it was estimated that 60% were American citizens. Many Mexican American children were left without their family members and the family stability that is often necessary to build wealth.

In 1954, US immigration started a new way to engage in mass deportation, as President Eisenhower approved Operation Wetback. A mass deportation of Mexican Americans was estimated to remove over a million people. People who had Hispanic sounding names were deported, again including many who were otherwise in the US legally, disrupting the ability of their family and community to build wealth.

Currently, in 2016-2018, there has been yet another deportation push.

Listening to folks' stories about their money and making it America, it made sense that the Latin/Hispanic community are not dabbling into financial planning yet, because so many are still just trying to stay afloat, and the constant stress of immigration and the risk of deportation is always in the back of their minds. Notably, although the deportations themselves are not directly correlated to financial industry, most of the deportations occurred when there was an economic downturn.

Asian American

The Asian American community has dramatically changed the landscape of cultures and traditions in the United States. For decades, Chinese Americans and others from the Asian Diaspora were limited from receiving citizenship, particularly through the use of the Chinese Exclusionary Act. It wasn't until 1943 that Congress repealed the Exclusionary Act. The Immigration Act of 1965 officially allowed Asian Americans the ability to legally immigrate to the United States.

One of the biggest problems that people overlook is that in Asia, there are over 300 ethnic groups, and over 4 billion people living on the continent of Asia. So, to say that one group of folks are "Asian Americans" is a gross over-generalization. Thus, while many point out that Asian Americans have closed much of the wealth and achievement gap – and a New York Times article in the 1960s even wrote an expose called "Success Story, Japanese-American Style" to highlight Japanese Americans as a rule-abiding group of folks (that differed from African Americans at the time).

Yet in reality, there are huge inequality gaps between ethic cultures in the Asian American community. In fact, Asian Americans have the largest inequality gap *within* their ethnic group than any other in the United States, according to Pew Research Center. In recent years, a growing number of people that are immigrating to the United States already coming from a higher social economic status, which is further skewing the Asian American income gap. One recent study found that "45 percent of immigrants who entered the country after 2010 had college degrees, compared to 30 percent of those who arrived between 2000 and 2009." Yet while this statistic itself is arguably a positive, it further accentuates the fact that Chinese Americans and many other Asian Americans who have *already* been in the US for decades are further behind on their own wealth accumulation, given that they couldn't even obtain citizenship until 1965.

Native Americans

Native Americans have a very unique positioning in the United States. Representing 1.8% of the population, Indian Nations have separate laws that represent "sovereign dependent nations." Because of this unique status, it is very difficult to be accepted into a new or different tribe, and this creates a lot of conflict between communities.

In the financial services context, when it comes to who has access to talk to those in Native American communities about money, the answer is that it depends on the tribe's negotiations, as well as their local property rights. But for two centuries, the relocation of Native Americans has hurt and confused many American citizens.

Historically, Native American Tribes have repeatedly been removed from their native lands. The most notable incident was the Trail of Tears. Advocated by President Jackson, Native Americans were forced to leave their homes in the southeastern US and live in other lands further west that were designed for them. Beginning in the winter of 1831, the US Army expelled the Choctaw tribe first, and some were "bound in chains and marched in double file" to be relocated to their designated new location. Many people did not survive the trip, and overall it is estimated that 15,000 died from the relocation. The Trail of Tears forced people out of their homes to a new land, in an attempt to force them to assimilate to American culture. The assimilation through relocation wasn't a success.

In 1934 Congress decided that Native Americans needed to better assimilate beyond the prior relocation policies. An advocate in Indian Affairs recommended that the government should give federal money to reservations with the hopes to preserve history, but also help the tribes assimilate into American Culture. Franklin Roosevelt signed the Indian Reorganization Act to reorganize people based on tribe, and provide federal money for those tribes to adopt "American-like "constitutions, and mimic municipal governments, with the hope that Native Americans would eventually assimilate into white culture. But there were many problems, due to a lack of sufficient structure and alignment to existing Indian governance. In practice, it created a power struggle between tribes about who had access to that wealth.

Twenty years later, the Indian Relocation Act in 1956 was the second to help Native Americans assimilate into American culture by seeking to dissolve prior federal funds supporting independent tribes in the hopes that they would then be assimilated more directly into urban cities (deeming the assimilation efforts of the prior acts as unattainable). The Relocation Act of 1956 didn't force people out of their native lands, but it did place greater financial stress on tribes that remained, while also not providing enough transition support and proper help for Native Americans trying to adapt, and being forced into cities in which they were discriminated against. It is not a coincidence that this discrimination occurred right around the same time that Operation Wetback happened. Racially-based policies can create significant financial change and have a long-lasting impact.

Once I was able to understand the historical problems between various communities of color and the financial industry, I was better able to see the big picture. It also gave me a huge amount of empathy for the financial struggles of people of color. I understood that there are systemic-level problems, and to ignore the injustices at this point would be doing a disservice to the financial planning community.

Although writing, researching, and talking to folks for a year has been one of the most eye-opening experiences, I was able to feel a quick sense of relief. I knew that the path to becoming a financial planner is filled with ups and downs, but I know the history now, and I am better able to serve clients in the future.

From my book writing experience, I was able to move past the insecurity that I wasn't adequate enough to enter in the community. I went from lacking self-confidence to saying to myself, "okay I want to be a financial planner, now what do I do?" Transitioning as a career changer can be challenging, but I was successfully able to start having the confidence in making more financial planning leaps after learning about the historical context. I moved from understanding people of color to moving into communicating to Allies. In the past I struggled with coming off as "too political", but now at least I am able to at least have a constructive conversation with anyone.

What To Do With Allyship Supporting People Of Color

Diversity and Inclusion are topics that are talked about across all industries these days, and the starting point is Allyship.

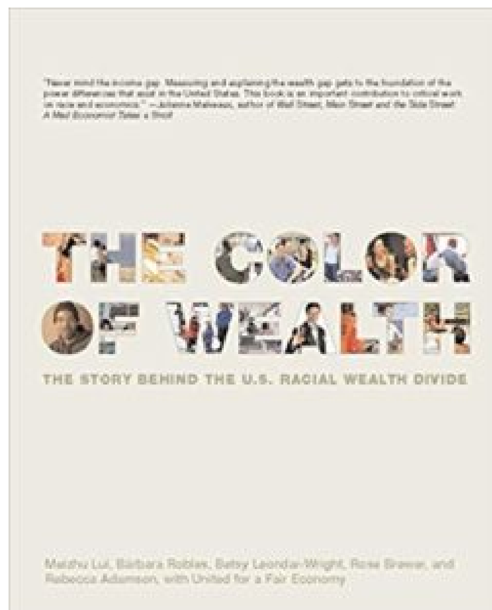
Allyship is when a white person acknowledges that there is a problem with privilege, and seeks to understand the problems that have been created. Allyship is a verb that helps white people understand how laws and systems currently in place came to be, what the current landscape really is, and wants to be a part of the change. Allyship is also being white and understanding how that has created privileges that have benefited them.

It's one thing to talk about diversity, but Allyship is the lifelong process of knowing that there are problems with American culture. The goal is to seek and understand and cultivate inclusive relationships. Allyship is a long process that is messy, because one has to relearn how discrimination has historically played a large role that created racial divisions in wealth and wealth building – a legacy that impacts the distribution of wealth (and the accessibility and relevance of financial planning) across different communities today.

There are a couple of bold folks that are talking about Allyship in the world of financial planning. Rianka Dorsainvil has a great series on Practicing Dynamic Allyship on her podcast the 2050 Trailblazers. The hope is to start a conversation on a topic that is very difficult to talk about. I know CFPs that are people of color are constantly being asked, “what action should I take as a white person,” or “how can I seek to understand people on a daily basis?” Fortunately, when I look at all people of color CFP professionals’ Twitter accounts, this is a conversation that is on-going.

On the other hand, one of the concerns of having these conversations is the constant brain drain of CFP professionals of color. They have constantly navigated who they are, and how they act as a person of color in an environment where nearly 90% are not people of color, every day. Being a person of color in the financial planning space is a political statement. This is a lot to bear for a person of color.

Since my journey of writing a book, many folks have reached out to me and have asked me about what they should do with Allyship. This is a question that is consistently being asked to me, and I’m not a financial planner yet. However, the constant interaction is a clear indication that folks are curious about change but still don’t know how to access the language of Allyship.



For example, a couple of months ago I attended an FPA workshop called “*#MeToo: What to do with Diversity and Inclusion in the Financial Industry”*. It was interesting to see that half of the attendees were white males. The conversation wasn’t as constructive as one would hope, but that’s when I recognized that this conversation is messy, so no one has figured out the “right” way. Also, I realized that this is probably one of the first times that females and people of color have the opportunity to speak their truth, and that’s an emotional experience. As a former educator that worked with underserved communities, I was used to having this uncomfortable conversation, because I had dealt with them on an everyday basis for five years. But most in the financial planning community are not used to these conversations, and in fact, people are probably learning about Allyship for the first time reading this article.

The most important piece that I want to stress, is to read The Color of Wealth. The book was mentioned in episode 97 of the Financial Success Podcast with Phuong Luong. The book has an overview of financial discrimination through various laws in history, and there are timelines and research backed by professors Barbara Robles and Betsy Wright Leon.

What To Do As A Person Of Color

As a person of color, I recognize that my positioning is difficult because not only do I have to relay the importance of diversity for financial professionals and the industry, but I also have to create a bridge for consumers who are people of color to gain trust in the financial industry. When I say my goal is to make financial planning accessible for women of color, most of my family and friends have no clue what I am talking about. I've now become a money expert, and I find myself helping my family navigating retirement papers. That is a huge responsibility, but I knew what I was getting into.

When I told fellow people of color that I wanted to target my future services to women of color, they told me "good luck with that, because black people don't want to learn." When I told folks that were Allies, they told me that I was ambitious and left it at that. I realized that I have to put in more work than lots of other folks, and that might require taking a longer time to get my designation.

Through this process of becoming a CFP professional, I found the value of the CFP community. I text, tweet, and chat with them on a daily basis. Some identify with me ethnically, some I relate to because of my gender. Some I tweet with to chat with about the Saints (I'm looking at you, Jude). I know that I have a supportive group, but I created it. I know that this industry is difficult to get into. The CFP exam is difficult to pass. I made the foolish decision to take CFP courses while I was in business school at the same time… oh, and I decided to write a book during National Novel Writing Month.

From the big picture to the details, in this next section, I will describe in detail the steps that I took to make the leap into the financial planning industry as a person of color. This is completely honest to my own personal journey, but anyone that makes a decision to become a CFP professional doesn't have to strictly follow my path. If there's anything I've learned from being a teacher in the Mississippi Delta, it's that when life gives you lemons, you make a meringue pie. Sometimes you just have to adapt as you go and try to make the best of it.

1.Transitioning To The Industry In An Unorthodox Way

I knew that I wanted to be a financial planner ever since I had my first conversation with Jocelyn Wright of the American College , but I needed funds and apprenticeship hours to make it a sustainable match.

I applied to paraplanning jobs, broker/dealers, wealth management firms, and found I had a huge problem. I didn't have a finance background, I was a teacher for five years, and I hadn't taken any of my Series exams. Oh, and I was a nomad. In my twenties, I lived in rural Mississippi, Connecticut, California, Texas and now I live in sunny Philadelphia. Although I had stable jobs in education and moved into the tech industry, my nomad background didn't scream "stability" for typically-stability-oriented financial advisory firms. At this point, I've been in the City of Philadelphia the longest out of any city, and I am now in my 30s, which means I've become an elder Millennial and yearn for stability. So I realized that now I was stuck here.

I started to look at my skills and tried to decipher what I could offer to the financial world. I knew that I had skills in sales and education, so I started reaching out to financial coaching programs. I also had experience in the tech industry. I started researching FinTech companies in Philadelphia. I am fortunate because I live in a city that has a thriving financial industry, so I had options. I researched companies and it just so happened that at that time I was searching for a position Philadelphia Tech week was happening. I looked for FinTech-related talks and sat in on one. I made it a point to reach out to multiple people, and was fortunate to meet up with Adam Holt of Asset-Map. I ran to my computer and typed in Kitces website and lo and behold, the company was mentioned on Nerd's Eye View.

I was able to meet up with Adam and the team, and it just so happened that they needed a contracted worker. So, I worked there as a paid intern, and because everyone worked in the financial industry and they sold their software to financial advisors, I was able to start to see the industry from the operational side of a FinTech company. I used the experience and used the company itself as a case study for two of my classes. I received finance hours credit. Though in the end, it still took months to get this position, and in the meantime, I worked a restaurant, plus doing side jobs with my business.

2. Making A Network Map

Ironically, while I was working with Asset-Map, I kept of list of people that I met in the financial planning world and started researching different possibilities of collecting CFP experience hours and finding sustainable work after I finished grad school. I started listening to every possible podcast I could get my hands on, from Kitces' Financial Advisor Success to 2050 Trailblazers. Each episode, I would write down who spoke, and one takeaway from each episode. If I truly identified with the episode, I would contact those people via LinkedIn, Twitter, or on their website to schedule time on their calendar.

Every single person was incredibly helpful. Before I would chat, tweet, meet up, etc., I would make sure I completed some research to find out who each planner was, and what their firm's mission was. I also would ask for help and offer some of my skills in appreciation for how incredibly helpful they were. When I look at my list now I've spoken to over 100 advisors, and that's not including the contracted work I was completing with Asset Map as well.

3. Identifying Your Superpower

Every financial planner has a unique superpower. For Sophia Bera, it's networking. For Joshua Brown, it's relatability. For Kitces, it's writing 5,000 words in a blog post. I can rattle off every financial planner's superpower based on listening to his Financial Success Advisor Podcast.

It wasn't until I chatted with Phuong Luong that I realized my superpower was project management. My conversation with Phuong Luong fundamentally changed my attitude with financial planning, because for a long time I felt that I had to fit into a mold, but after one conversation (and of course, 10 years of working), I figured out that project management was my superpower.

Personally, I am obsessed with agile and SCRUM. When I was teacher, I was focused on creating curriculum through projects. When I worked in the tech industry, I liked looking at the big picture and hashing out the details with a team. For years, I had no clue that creating projects was what I am good at. This is why I failed miserably with sales, teaching, etc. Because I was outgoing, people liked me, but because I never knew what my strengths were, I floundered to help a team out. I listened to Financial Success Podcast episode with Nancy Bleeke, and she talks about how everyone is in sales, and that it's once you're comfortable with your ability to sell yourself, you can dramatically change trust with other people.

4. Understanding That Being A Person Of Color Makes You A Role Model

I'm a big fan of basketball. Most folks that were born before 1990 know that Nike produced a commercial titled I'm not a role model. It featured Charles Barkley, who in so many words explained that, as an NBA player, he isn't paid to be a role model; he is paid to "wreak havoc" on the basketball court. For years this commercial was deemed to be the most controversial commercial in the 1990s. As honest as his ad was, it's unavoidable that Charles Barkley is a role model. From Space Jam to being on Inside NBA, he has positioned himself as a role model.

This is a big ask for people of color, but whether you stand out as an NBA superstar or you're one of the only people of color in a financial planning profession that is still 90%+ white, it's unavoidable when in a publicly visible position.

Due to the lack of diversity, it was important for me to understand that becoming a CFP professional is about breaking barriers for myself and also my family.

Fortunately, this is the best time to be a person of color entering the financial industry, but it's important to understand the narrative of financial planning.

5. How I Can I Fit Into The Narrative Of Financial Planning

One of the things that I love most about CFP professionals of color is that they are very honest about their financial planning story. Between Angela Moore, Rianka Dorsinvail, and Brittney Castro, I was able to see that my story can fit in the financial planning community.

Every month, I would write out a reflection piece. I would write out what went well, and what areas needed to improve on. I used my personal blog a reflection page.

From this exercise, I realized that in order for me to position myself in the financial planning community, I must be honest about who I am and what I stand for… even if that doesn't make money. Yet.

6. What To Do With Money?

Budgeting and planning for a career in finance have been difficult. For these past two years, I've done many odd jobs, and while I like having them on my resume, they don't make a livable wage. I was fortunate to have a business in operational management so I was able to get contracted for jobs, but it's not ideal for a student being enrolled into two programs: an MBA and the American College (for my CFP certification).

In 2017- 2018 I took up a service industry job. I've had to skim on basic essentials. Living frugally would be an understatement because I've been hustling and don't have fun like I used to. As someone who was an avid traveler, it's been very hard to give up on things that made me happy. I do a lot of marketing on Instagram for my personal brand, and it's very hard to see all my friends move up in their careers while I am starting over from scratch in a new industry. I've had to postpone parts of my life, like settling down with my now boyfriend, and starting a family, because I don't feel comfortable yet to have full-on conversations of future planning yet.

My family is by no means wealthy. I typically help a large portion of my family navigate financial documentation. For my CFP courses, I applied to the American College Scholarship for being an African American, so my cost was waived. For my MBA classes, I paid for half of my tuition, because my mother worked at the college and family members got discounts. But I still had to take out student loans, as part of the pathway to figuring out how to position myself in this industry. I think after I graduate in March, I will be about $40,000 in the hole.

I attribute being able to manage this from being a part of two camps prior to crossing over the fiduciary bridge: Dave Ramsey, and Teachers Club. I paid off all my undergraduate student loans prior to going to grad school. When I rode the Ramsey train, I at least learned that debt was "bad." When I was in the Teaching Club, I learned how to cook for myself and not overspend. When I lived in the Mississippi Delta, I made around $29,000 after taxes and managed to save $10,000 dollars during my two years there. Those skills became very helpful during this time.

7. What To Do With Identity (Your Name/Hair/Etc)

Identity Politics are a popular topic of conversation lately.

For the first year, I had a huge difficulty trying to fit in what I called the Financial Planning Mold. I hate to admit, but I completely changed who I was to fit in. For example, my hair.

The topic of wearing one's hair in the natural state is a topic that is heavily discussed in the African American community. On my current photographs that most folks see, I have straight hair. It is not how I wear my hair normally. I've had an Afro for 11 years now. In every occupation that I've had, I've worn my hair naturally. When I took professional photos, I made it a point to straighten my hair, because I wanted to make it in the financial industry. I thought that it would normalize who I was.

I wanted to point this out because not only is it a heated topic, but I've listened to several CFP professionals talk about their new ability to wear their hair in its natural state. After listening to other people, I realize that I have to re-take pictures because, while I wear my hair straight from time to time, it's not my identity.

I hate to admit this, but I actively used my middle name because it sounded more American. My name is Eugenié it's French. My family is from Louisiana. For six months, I used my middle name Paige for people to refer to me. Looking back at it, I knew that I couldn't keep not authentically being myself, and remain unethical to who I was. That's no way to start working in an industry. I refer myself back to as Eugenié (u-jin-nay) and eventually, I will get professional photos that look more like how I look every day. My identity is important to me. My family is from New Orleans, and I was raised in California, and all of those experiences must seep into my brand and practice.

8. Crafting Your Niche

If there is one thing that Kitces has taught me, it's that building a niche is everything.

Fortunately, I started blogging in 2014, so writing wasn't a huge problem. I started looking at my superpower and Network Map, and I realized that there is a huge gap in financial planning for Women of Color. There is a lot of building and education that is involved. So I started a personal blog and a podcast. For the first six months, I moved from "okay, I'm just going to write about being a student," to writing a book.

At this moment, I write for 20 minutes a day every day, and I write about things that are going on in my life. It's not on the Kitces level, but I'm finishing up my book and Capstone Project for my MBA. The podcast has created a lot of legitimacy for myself, but I know that because of my lack of certifications, I'm talking about basic information. I also teach Personal Finance classes with a company called *On the Goga,* so I am constantly refining my speaking skills in finance.

For my Capstone Project, I am using my project management superpowers and I am researching how financial advisors can use book publishing and e-courses to tap into an underserved market. Most of my research will be completed by the end of March 2019.

Although it's been roughly a year since I've jumped into the industry, I've already made leaps for the future.