opportunities to really bring back to the community in some way, in ways that a lot of times feels very isolated to the Syracuse University campus. And I've tried to do that with my involvement in organizations that are based in work with people in Syracuse. But I think yeah, really just giving me resources related to research and academia, writing, things like that, networking, all of that, and letting me bring that back to my own engagement with the community here within the city of Syracuse.

John Boccacino:

I love the fact, and it's interesting when you ask students why they choose Syracuse, and a lot of times, we get a large population from California or from New York City, but you weren't looking to go anywhere, but stay here at home and go to school and earn your degrees at Syracuse and at Maxwell. What was it about Maxwell in particular that really just called out to you?

Erykah Pasha:

In high school, I really started getting into, not politics I'll say, but I started becoming more politically aware of the things around me and the things, federally and statewide. So I think with my knowledge that I was probably going to end up at Syracuse, I think that was just the natural path. I don't think I was super aware of Maxwell's reputation or how prestigious the school itself was. I think I'm super lucky that it was. But yeah, upon going here, Maxwell's provided me a bunch of opportunities that I've definitely benefited from and I'm super thankful for, and I try to use the privilege of being able to attend here to bring back to my people here in the city.

John Boccacino:

I know you've got a year still to go on your degree, but if you had to kind of reflect, how have you grown as a person, as a vocal leader and someone who can be an agent of change because of your time here on campus?

Erykah Pasha:

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How did you get introduced to Layla's Got You, and what does that organization really do to make a big difference here in Syracuse?

Erykah Pasha:

Yeah, so actually I got introduced from my friend, Niara, who's also from here and also goes to Syracuse University. She was

the Intercultural Collective and the

and I saw that they had opening and I was like, "Oh my God, perfect opportunity." So yeah, I ended up there. I think that was once again, something that found me, I really think, and I'm super glad I did. But yeah, I've been locked in, ever since.

John Boccacino:

I want to ask this question carefully and gingerly because everyone's story is different, but did you find yourself... Was it hard, was it tough finding acceptance from community, finding acceptance in high school with who you were before you came to Syracuse? And then, have you had success in finding that belonging of who you really are? Have you been able to really be who you are here on campus?

Erykah Pasha:

I think high school me, and me now, is very different, but generally, I don't think it was so much that I had a hard time finding community in high school, but there wasn't a very huge dead set queer community for me in high school. So I think, wasn't so much not being able to find community, but the community I had was very different and related to different things. So I think since being here on campus, there is a pretty carved out queer community. So that community just relates to different things still. So I think it's just been finding that different community and still having the community of people in high school and people here in Syracuse, but really just expanding what that community is for me and what community can be for me, I think, is where the Resource Center has come in.

John Boccacino:

And just to kind of expand upon that a little bit, because I love the sentiment you just expressed there, just how has the Resource Center helped you when it comes to feeling as comfortable as you need to be in your skin with who you are and what you bring to this campus?

Erykah Pasha:

I think a big thing about working with the resource center and what I've done so far is they really encourage you to bring what you're interested in, into the Resource Center. So I was interested in the Vogue and the Ball community. So I helped connect some of the ballroom community here in Syracuse and implementing the HalloQueen Ball and our Vogue workshop that we do each semester. So I think things like that, it's been really, once again, letting me expand on things that interest me. And I've been super lucky that those things have related to the queer community and LGBTQ people and that it's been so openly encouraged for me to engage in those things, in those ways that interest me and work for me and work for people here in Syracuse too and work for people on campus. So I think it's really just been that encouragement aspect.

John Boccacino:

It seems like you really have a great support system here and you've had a great support system in high school and growing up too, but having that really here on campus, it helps to make you thrive. It helps to make you feel like you can reach your full potential. And it's unfortunate with LGBTQ month being in June, our students really aren't on campus, but we do a celebration for the history month coming up in October. What does Pride Month mean to you? If you had to put your finger on the impact and the meaning, what does Pride Month signify?

Erykah Pasha:

your final year here on campus. Make the most of all your experiences and best of luck in Michigan too. That's such a great groundbreaking experience for you to get to go out there and pursue this research.

Erykah Pasha:

Thank you so much.

John Boccacino:

Thanks for checking out the latest installment of the 'Cuse Conversations podcast. My name is John Boccacino, signing off for the 'Cuse Conversations podcast.