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## Finding your place

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Danielle Damon '18 • January 31, 2018

“We cannot begin to fathom who we are as persons, until we examine and appreciate the wonderfully rich and diverse streams of human life and culture that formed us.”

The opening remarks made by University Provost Paul Benson to a full audience in the Kennedy Union ballroom on Jan. 24 were brief, but powerfully set the stage for the Spring 2018 Speaker Series keynote address by Imbolo Mbue.

A Cameroonian immigrant, author and PEN/ Faulkner Award for Fiction recipient, Mbue took the stage to discuss her experiences as an immigrant who came to the United States to attend college.

Reading excerpts from her book *Behold the Dreamers*, Mbue provided the audience of students, faculty, staff and community members thought-provoking insights on what it is like to be an immigrant in a foreign country.



“America gives immigrants a lot, but also takes a lot out of them,” Mbue said alluding to the same critical tone that is prevalent in her book. Mbue continued to explain that although many Americans understand the path to citizenship is lengthy and challenging, there is one misconception. “Becoming a citizen doesn’t make everything easy,” she said.

Mbue advocated for immigrants when she explained that even after gaining citizenship, many immigrants continue to struggle to feel comfortable and at home.

Amidst these frustrations, Mbue found a sense of welcoming in the people she met. It was the clergy member from her church that invited her over for Easter, and the friend from class whose family hosted her for Thanksgiving dinner.

It was those who listened to her story without judgement, and those who shared their own stories with her, that let her know she belonged. It was this found passion for listening and storytelling that kept Mbue in the U.S. She says that this country gave her the opportunity to be a writer, a career path she never would have thought of following in Cameroon. In America, Mbue realized her lifelong curiosity for others, and it is this curiosity that calls her to stay.

“There are many different ways to live a full life,” Mbue said. “All people have stories that should be listened to,” she continued, as she modestly stated her immigration story is not different from many others, it is simply known.