Speaker 1: The Disability and Philanthropy Forum presents Tolu Adegbite, product designer and developer at Meta.

Tolu Adegbite: As designers, there's so much power to influence what people's experiences are. And like you said, I think sometimes people don't think that designers have that much power in the process, like maybe developers have more influence on how accessible a website is, for example. But if something isn't designed with accessibility in mind, by the time development rolls around, it's probably too late to make any real significant, impactful changes. At that point, you're probably just retrofitting and making the best of the situation.

But I think when it comes to design, we have so much influence over how people experience things. One thing that comes to mind, for example, is alternative text attributes. So that's like descriptions that are read out by assistive technology for pictures. So of course developers are the people who implement these code tags when you're actually coding the website, but designers are the people who are choosing the pictures probably. And so they're probably the people who should be describing what the images have in them. The intersection, I think, here between race, design, accessibility when it comes to this particular thing is what those descriptions actually have in them, right?

So one example I like to think of is, for example, during the civil rights movement, during desegregation, you have Ruby Bridges, this Black girl who's the first Black girl to attend a white school to desegregate it. And if you have a picture with alternative texts and you just describe her walking into the school as girl walking into school, you're not really capturing the fact that this is a Black girl walking through a crowd of white people into an all white school with people yelling at her and heckling her because they don't want her to desegregate the school. Things like that paint the picture of intersectionality so well for me, where the fact that you need to describe what's happening in the image for alternative text for people using assistive technology. You should describe the race of the person in the image because it's so relevant contextually to this particular image. But also it features inclusion, right? We need to really think about who we're featuring in the images that we have on websites.

So I know that was a long example, but there's so many ways in which design influences intersectionality and accessibility. So many things to consider.

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