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We are Hurt, But We are Not Surprised

On a random Thursday afternoon, black organizations and student clubs at the University of Massachusetts Amherst received an email that degraded black people, their culture, and their intellectual abilities. The email praised white supremacy while demeaning the entire black race with racial stereotypes and deliberate name-calling. As a person who grew up in the South, I was often exposed to racial slurs and racial hate symbols and would continue to go about my day. It did not phase me, nor did I think anything of it because I felt that it was not worth such a reaction because I knew the value of my assets and who I am. This similar feeling that I felt was normal for other people of color and it was the same outlook I had when the UMass Amherst email came out. However, I was in my first-year seminar class when my professor felt that he had not done his due diligence by addressing this racial incident on campus because of the similar feeling of being completely desensitized to such racial incidents. It then dawned on me that this email and those other hate symbols that I experienced while living in Florida deserved the attention and reaction that I was so keen on holding back.

Since the summer of 2016, college campuses, as well as society in general, have seen an increase in racist hate groups across the United States (Ndemanu 238). The hate groups intend to "intimidate and terrorize minority students" with the acts of "vandalism, intimidating posters, [and] spray-painted swastikas" (Ndemanu 238). The increase of these acts has greatly impacted the safety and security of minority groups in universities, especially Black students. Oftentimes,

the response of such an act from administrations would be an email that condones the acts and promises and attempts to reassure the targeted groups that they are welcomed and safe at their school. The email emphasizes how there will be appropriate measures and consequences towards the perpetrators, but, unsurprisingly, the issue is rarely ever discussed again and the feelings of insecurity that are still apparent amongst Black students are completely overlooked and discarded. This continuous cycle begs the question of: To what extent are the actions of college administrations effective regarding racist hate acts targeted to black students on campus?

It is extremely apparent in U.S history that Black people have endured decades of exploitation and unfair treatment and it can be argued that this is still a major pandemic today. Institutional racism impacts people of color in services that are considered to be a basic humanitarian right like access to and good quality education, access to healthcare, affordable and sustainable housing, and living conditions, but unfortunately, the current policies in place discriminate against these members of minority groups. The effects of these policies follow Black people through various points of life. Ndemanu makes a compelling point that the "ongoing unrest on campuses emanates from the lack of racial diversity in higher education" which is caused due to the failure of K-12 schools to "prepare Black students for college" (Ndemanu 239). Simultaneously, the perpetrator that wrote the racist email from UMass Amherst makes this revolting point that:

Regarding your [Black students'] intelligence, you are clearly stupid and while not all students know the average IQ of a black person is 75 it is abundantly clear that you possess a lacking intelligence along with an elementary grasp of subjects that most of us learned in high school. Herein lays the problem with your presence at our college, you simply did not get here on merit...The only reason 99 percent of black students are at UMass is because

you were given an easy pass and this applies to every other post-secondary institution (Anonymous).

It is appalling and disturbing to read these words as a woman of color and decipher the level of hatred of this email. To be perceived as a person who has always been told by society that they do not belong is quite discouraging and disheartening. These biases formed by eugenic views like the ones of the author of this email have contributed to a low expectation of Black students (Ndemanu 239). It has created a culture in American school systems that strengthen "toxic environments...that undermine learning, social relationships, and distorts civic development" (Perez Huber 66). The fact that Black students have disproportionately received lesser tools due to the policies posed against their success does not justify the consistent racist hate speech and rhetoric. There have not been impactful and effective messages and conduct from school officials to adequately address and resolve these systemic issues of racism which will essentially create these safe and educational spaces for Black students as promoted by their administrators.

Like many other official statements, administrators hope for their messages to resonate with their students and staff on campus. However, statements that regard racial incidents on campus are often written in a sense where a "rhetorical situation [is used to] potentially alter human actions" (Cole and Harper 321). This rhetorical situation, across from different statements from college campuses in the U.S, "hardly mention the racial incidents" at hand, they also made the "perpetrators the focal point" and "rarely situate racial incidents within larger issues of systematic and institutional oppression" (Cole and Harper 326). These statements have begun to be highly formatted and extremely organizational that they begin to stray away from the essential component that the topic of race and racism is not fully understood within their campus. Cole and Harper emphasize that 84% of college presidents and administrators feel that their race

relations on their campus are "excellent or good" and this ignorance and lack of emphasis on a racial incident also shows to its campus its lack of importance (327). By always trying to cater to a positive version of the truth, these statements fail to "publicly [address the] racism on campus" and allow them to continue in the future (Cole and Harper 327). The failure of adequately addressing such incidents in these administrative responses "protect the right of white community members" to display continuous acts of white supremacy and also allows administrators to "maintain an appearance of commitment to equality" despite the repeated acts that maintain institutional racial inequality (Moore and Bell 1765-1766). There is a lack of emphasis on college and university policies that purposely and explicitly condone the racist acts targeted towards any ethnic group on campuses. There are very few racial harassment policies that can effectively acknowledge the presence of racism and race that would essentially promote the message of equality in colleges and universities (Moore and Bell 1766). To be able to effectively acknowledge the presence of Black students on college campuses is for these administrators to develop policies that focus on condemning racial harassment and place them in higher rankings in their code of conduct than the continuous efforts to protect freedom of expression with no limits on racist hate speech and expression.

There is nothing more authentic from a college or university to show their support for their Black students than to listen, uplift, and implement their voices. As college students, we are put into this community to be able to fine-tune our talents and learn about the world, each other, and ourselves. In response to racial incidents, black students propose logical demands to create a safer environment and campus life for their school's administration that is consistent for many campuses across the United States (Ndemanu 242). The most recurring demand from Black student activists is an increase in minority faculty and staff (Ndemanu 242). Many

students call on their administration to increase the percentage of black faculty by 10 to 20 percent (Ndemanu 242). It is important to emphasize that shortly, many students on college campuses will be non-White, so the representation of other ethnic groups in faculty members will enhance campus diversity and bring different perspectives. By increasing minority faculty hiring allows for more Black students to attend and partake in particular institutions because they find comfort in the idea that there are faculty and professors "who relate to their cultural and lived experiences" (Ndemanu 243). In response to the feelings of disappointment and anger at UMass Amherst, Chancellor Kumble R. Subbaswamy and his administrative team took the initiative to effectively listen to his students and launch the Black Advisory Council that is encompassed with Black faculty leaders and strive to "create a more supportive, just and equitable campus environment for [their] Black community" while also acknowledging the demands and apologizing for the criticisms posed by their Black students for their lack of urgency in response to this provoking issue (Subbaswamy). In no way do I believe that the actions of UMass's administration have effectively solved the issue of racism apparent on its campus, but the effort taken to rectify the damage of this email on their students is a step toward creating a safer campus with the inclusion of Black representation in faculty and campus life.

There is no denying that I am a Black student at UMass Amherst and could be subjected to multiple acts of racism throughout my life. However, there is also no denying that I deserve to feel as safe and welcomed at a university that I pay to be part of as my white counterparts. The importance of any student, regardless of their race, to be able to feel welcome at their institution is crucial for their personal development and intellectual development. It is difficult to achieve such a task when there is a constant threat to one's culture and appearance. I believe that if these college campuses want to embody the words that they promote about their campus they need to

start rebuilding and actively participating in this relationship with their students. For Black students words have become futile, promises have become white lies, and the only way that administrators can rectify the damage of their ignorance on racism is to first acknowledge that there is an issue of racism extremely present on their campus.

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