

a ticking time bomb due to the unaddressed racism on its campus. The first step in getting healthy is to recognize that you're sick.

Consider *Blackballed* as that diagnosis of societal cancer on the college campus body. Administrators at PWIs are going to have to figure out what's the correct treatment . . . or black students just may start making different choices.

SOURCE: Ross, Lawrence. (2015)

Blackballed: The Black and White Politics of Race on America's Campuses. New York, NY: St. Martin's Press.

Chapter 1: Pages: 1-15;

Chapter 4: Pages: 103-115;

Chapter 7: Pages: 207-213; 226-232.

READ this before you proceed further:

Folks/Guys/People: This is an important reading because it directly concerns you, either as a student or as an instructor (or both—in the case of TAs). How so? Because the university does not exist in isolation from society at large, it is to a significant extent a microcosm of society. Consequently, no one on any campus anywhere in the United States (and this of course is true in countries elsewhere too) is immune from matters of race/ethnicity, gender, class, and so on. This reading deals with the specific issue of race and how it is playing out today on college campuses—in United States. A couple of questions for you to ponder: How does coming from racially segregated neighborhoods and schools have an impact on how you relate to others from a different race/ethnic background? Given that in any society, the pervasive existence of

INTRODUCTION

A Century of Isolated Incidents

"isms" (ideologies) of oppression (e.g., racism, ethnicism, sexism, classism, etc.) implies that they perform a specific political function, how then does racism on college campuses tie in to this political function? NOTE: Some of the key words associated with this reading that you must look up in the *Online Course Glossary*: **Race/Racism, Stereotype, Socialization, Society, and Microaggression.**

SPANISH PHILOSOPHER GEORGE SANTAYANA, A HARVARD

classmate of African American philosopher W. E. B. Du Bois, was most famous for stating, "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it."¹ The phrase has been the go-to refrain directed toward anyone who lacks the depth or tenacity to dive into the treacherous waters of true historical analysis. For the most part, the observation has morphed into cliché—something said over a couple of drinks or while watching *Jeopardy!* as you sit on the couch. When it comes to America and race, I'm predisposed to another quote by Santayana, one that I think more fully explains white America's collective historical amnesia regarding the realities of racism and the effects of brutality on African Americans, past and present:

History is nothing but assisted and recorded memory . . . Memory itself is an internal rumor; and when to this hearsay within the mind we add the falsified echoes that reach us from others, we have but a shifting and unseizable basis to build upon. The picture we frame of the past changes continually and grows every day less similar to the original experience.²

For the past 400 years, African Americans tried to assist white America in recording a memory of racism, often to no avail. White Americans clings stubbornly to a collective narrative, what Gore Vidal famously called “the United States of Amnesia.”²³ That amnesia acts like a cloak of ignorance, warm and embracing enough to make the issue of racism a mental no-go zone for those who refuse to acknowledge its existence.

In a post-Civil War world, decade after decade, African Americans have done their best to elicit sympathy for their struggle against systemic white racism. In explaining the day-to-day indignities of state-sponsored second-class life under Jim Crow degradation, along with the domestic terrorism that resulted in thousands of African Americans throughout the United States being lynched for the most capricious of reasons, African Americans pointed at the racism and said, “Look.”

Today, systemic and institutional racism still plagues African Americans, long after the “Colored Only” signs have been taken down. African Americans are primarily the ones burdened with the task of fixing a race problem they didn’t produce or perpetuate, while white America continues to say, “I don’t see it.”

Even when forced to confront overt racism, white America has been slow, reluctant, and dishonest in recounting that memory, a memory that is deep in their guts, a memory that they know is true. As individuals, white Americans have learned that they can deflect, refuse, and delude as a way to maintain the charade: “This is not a race issue. The people who did this are jerks, but this is not about race”; “This may have been insensitive, but can we move on from this and get back to normal?”; “Because you’re talking about racism, you’re being racist, and that’s the reason why we can’t get beyond race in this country”; “This is not who I am. This is an isolated incident.”

As the unelected governing body for the purpose of evaluating the validity of racism, white America consistently discounts black witnesses to racism as unreliable, as in *you’re playing the race card*, and the falsifying echoes are often those black sophists who ply their trade on Fox

News, or for the Republican Party, eager to comfort the uninformed. Their message? No matter what authentic black voices say, nothing about white racism is worth taking up space in the collective white American memory: “Black people who talk about racism are just trying to be the victim. And that in itself is a form of racism”; “Everything is just fine. Just fine”; “Just don’t think about racism, and don’t think about color. Feel free to maintain the amnesia.”

But everything isn’t fine.

Most African Americans live in a world where white racism is an omnipresent entity, an obstacle they attempt to navigate while becoming highly successful, exceedingly mediocre, or abject failures. But pointing out the realities of white racism to America as a black person who lives them, and then having that reality dismissed unheard, logically makes black people question their sanity. When racial inequities around housing, education, jobs, wealth, health care, and a thousand other categories are quantifiably tilted toward the benefit of white Americans, often because of overtly racist public policy, why did a 2013 Rasmussen poll show that 49 percent of white Republicans viewed African Americans, and not themselves or other white Americans, as racist?²⁴

It’s intentional delusion.

And for most white Americans, the delusion begins with the idea that every child in America begins on an equal footing with every other child, regardless of race. The formula for success, and the formula most often preached to African Americans, is work hard, carry on with your life as though you believe wholeheartedly in the American Dream, and with a little bit of pluck and ambition, you *too* can go far. And for many, including African Americans, you *can* go far. Failure *isn’t* a fait accompli when it comes to an African American’s life destiny.

But it’s also important to note that racism isn’t just some “thing” that you overcome. It’s omnipresent, like a sea of shit in which you swim, always stinking no matter how many showers you take. But to white America, the inequities of society created by racism are trivial

when compared with the opportunities America allows everyone. Racism is simply, in the eyes and ears of white America, an unfortunate but inconsequential aspect of life, like being short or losing one's hair at an early age. An aspect of life to be discounted where the presence of racism is more than balanced by the multitude of mitigating factors.

"I don't see color" is the common refrain for those trying to deflect statements about racism, not knowing that what they're really saying is, "My learned racism, along with my participation and benefit from living in a racist society, has an effect on how I treated you. So in order to counter that, I must pretend that I don't see you or the essence of who you are. And if I don't see you, then I can ignore the facts around your color, and in my mind, the problem goes away."

Racism. It's the great American cat-and-mouse game, with African Americans playing the role of the mouse, desperate to escape from the maze and white society's deadly paw. Racism's genius is its ability to arbitrarily change rules, impact lives, and yet disavow itself, along with its effects on victims. It is the Keyser Soze, or more recently, the Rachel Dolezal, of societal maladies. Real to some, unreal to others, camouflaged in many layers of white privilege, yet always staring us right in the face.

However, in spite of everything, white America and black America have a co-dependent relationship. White America needs to support the illusion that its country's ideals have been realized, at least enough to claim that America is an exceptional nation, where white privilege can be ignored as being an inconsequential advantage *over* blackness—a nation where even the product of a white Kansan mother and a black Kenyan exchange student can rise up to be president of the United States. And African America needs to believe that the journey, one fraught with unwanted, unsaid, and unheard dangers, is ultimately worth it. If not, how else would one remain sane?

And when it comes to college, from the moment African American high school students receive those wonderful large envelopes, the ones with the beautifully written acceptance letters from a predominately

white university saying, "Congratulations!", little do they know that despite the brochure showing smiling, happy multicultural faces, they're about to step foot on some of the most racially hostile spaces in the United States. And in their most formative years, when their belief in American ideals is the strongest, or being questioned, these African American students will learn that their white university, their white fellow students and their white faculty are not automatic allies in their journey toward educational success. And that's been a fact for over a century.

Before they buy their overpriced books, settle into their tiny Spartan dorms, and eat their first bad meal in the cafeteria, they'll learn that overt acts of racism on their campus are often dismissed as a series of disconnected incidents, outside the collective responsibility of the university and always surprising to those who are exposed to them, particularly white university administrators.

"We're surprised and shocked that this would happen on our campus, and we'd like to say that this racial incident doesn't reflect the values of who we are as a university community . . ." is the pro form response, as we'll see later in *Blackballed: The Black and White Politics of Race on America's Campuses*.

Even more extreme than Santayana's picture of the past, which gets less accurate by the day, white America never recalls the events of college racism at all, leaving the burden of remembering to eighteen to twenty-one-year old African American college students. From there those students are tasked with creating new solutions for old and present problems, often involving white people who refuse to recognize the historical context of racism. And they have to do it every four years, as new group of black students cycle in and out of the university, while the campus racism always remains. What is the resulting mindset of typical African American college students after they experience episodes of campus racism? Again, it's to question themselves and their sanity: "Are we going crazy, or is there a racist incident on a college campus every day? If so, why are people saying this is an isolated incident . . . again?"

One space where all Americans hoped race would be inconsequential is on America's college and university campuses. As colleges and universities have moved from being the providence of the elite to reflecting the populace of a young democracy, they've long vacillated from openness to the idea of an egalitarian society (as at Berea College in 1850s Kentucky—the first college blacks were welcomed to attend below the Mason-Dixon line *during* slavery) to fighting to keep blacks out (as at southern schools during the turbulent civil rights era of the 1950s and 1960s).

College campuses are supposed to be places where the young elite of all races, sexes, and creeds seek knowledge, a knowledge that throws off the shackles of racism, sexism, and other "isms" in order to create a better, more just society. And that utopian vision is often expressed in Latin, through official school mottoes.

At Amherst it's "*veritas irradiat*," which translates to "let them give light to the world." At the University of Arkansas it's "*veritate duce progredi*," which means, "To advance with truth as our guide." And Harvard's famous one-word motto is "*veritas*," which translates as "truth."

It's with college students, the future leaders of American society, that we place our dreams, hoping that the ignoble sentiment of racism will erode to the point where everyone can move forward without that burden. New ideas of equality and respect for all will, we hope, trump bigotry and prejudice through a college education. But when you look closely at America's colleges and universities, the *veritas*, the truth, is much stranger than the fiction we Americans tell ourselves. The truth is that for African American college students, there's a campus racism crisis going on.

And no one seems to recognize that truth.

The University of Oklahoma campus sits in Norman, Oklahoma, a small prairie town about twenty miles south of Oklahoma City. With a population just over 100,000 people, the city is your typical college town, about 85 percent white and only 4 percent of the city identifying

as African American. Norman matches, almost to a tee, the student demographics of the university. In the heart of Tornado Alley, that swath of Midwestern volatility where twisters seemingly come out of nowhere to devastate prairie towns, a storm hit the University of Oklahoma on March 7, 2015, rivaling some of the biggest dust devils ever to hit the plains.

And that storm's name was Parker Rice.

By all measures, the Saturday night had been a success. The Oklahoma Kappa chapter of Sigma Alpha Epsilon fraternity had rented a party bus, everyone was wearing tuxedos, and the alcohol flowed like water in the Nile. It didn't matter that some of the fraternity members like nineteen-year-old Rice, were underage. There was a wink-wink polycy, just like on most Greek Rows in America, of ignoring that. What happens in the fraternity stays in the fraternity.

As for the fraternity itself, Sigma Alpha Epsilon was founded in the antebellum South—at the University of Alabama in 1856—and it is proud of it. Every fraternity and sorority has heroic lore to exalt early members, and Sigma Alpha Epsilon was no different.

Part of the historical pride within SAE, as it's known colloquially is that early fraternity members enthusiastically joined the Confederate Army, with many dying for the Lost Cause of protecting slavery in the South. After most of its chapters were devastated by the Civil War, SAE would eventually regroup to become one of the largest fraternities in the country.⁵

So how did SAE's members see themselves in today's society? A "true gentlemen," that's how. The fraternity had always harkened back to that antebellum myth of southern male chivalry among the white slaveholding planter class, with Confederate legends Robert E. Lee and Stonewall Jackson as the ideal role models. But that was then, and this was now, and now the fraternity that proudly proclaimed its Confederate ancestry also stressed that it was open to all, including the great-great grandsons of the people its Confederate heroes unsuccessfully

attempted to keep enslaved. "True gentlemen" saw no color in today's SAE. Or so some thought.⁶

For Rice, being in SAE was the perfect fit. The camaraderie among the brothers reminded him of the feeling he got while attending a prestigious all-boys Catholic high school, Jesuit College Preparatory School of Dallas. Later, once he'd become a national figure of derision, Rice would describe the Jesuit motto, "Men for Others," the selfless ethos of Jesuit-educated men worldwide, as being his guiding principle in life, while apologizing for what happened on that party bus.⁷

In essence, the party bus was there mainly to keep SAE brothers from drinking and driving, and if that kept the party going, all the better. On the bus were not only the aforementioned tuxedoed SAE brothers, but at least two or three members of Delta Delta Delta sorority, or Tri-Delt. Everyone was in a fine mood, laughing and singing. And everyone on that bus was white.

Rice, now inebriated and fully in life-of-the-party mode, stood in the aisle and led the fraternal singing. With a smile on his face and the confidence of a conductor at the Boston Philharmonic, he began to chant: "There will never be a nigger SAE! There will never be a nigger SAE! You can hang 'em from a tree, but it will never sign with me! There will never be a nigger SAE!"⁸

Those on the bus sang the chant at the top of their lungs, and no one appeared to object to the offensive words. In fact, when someone pointed a smart phone at Rice and recorded, Rice didn't seem bothered in the least. Most sang lustfully, and without hesitation, as though they'd sung the lynching song hundreds of times. The atmosphere had a comfort level that said, "We're among like-minded friends."

While Rice and his fraternity brothers joked about lynching blacks, for African Americans, lynching represents a very real and painful segment of white supremacist history. Black family histories are peppered with stories of real fathers and mothers, sons and daughters, aunts and uncles, grandfathers and grandmothers who were taken from their

beds at night and strung up from telephone and telegraph poles. Some were falsely accused of crimes, others just the unfortunate targets of white rage. White mobs strung them up from trees, mutilating them by cutting off their toes, fingers, and genitalia as souvenirs. Many of the victims would be photographed, their images sent around the country as popular postcards, examples of how white supremacy was being enforced not just in the South, but everywhere in the country.

Alice Walker once talked about growing up under the threat of being lynched: "I grew up in the South under segregation. So, I know what terrorism feels like—when your father could be taken out in the middle of the night and lynched just because he didn't look like he was in an obeying frame of mind when a white person said something he must do. I mean, that's terrorism, too."⁹

My grandmother, Willie Lee Johnson, grew up in Texas, with the family migrating between Waco, Temple, and Dallas, as the cotton-pulling season demanded. In her final days, her brain racked by the ravages of Alzheimer's, it was as though her consciousness had been opened to allow suppressed memories to flow back to the fore. And one of the memories that would panic her was some midnight lynching she'd seen as a child.

"Don't let them get me, baby," she'd say to me, her eyes ablaze. "They hung them men in that field, and they buried them underneath that tree."

Lynching wasn't, and isn't, a subject for a drinking song to black people.

But there weren't any black students on the bus, just as there aren't any black members in the current Oklahoma Kappa chapter of Sigma Alpha Epsilon. And more than likely, given the student population on campus, Rice and his friends didn't have many black friends whose memories might have made the frat members think twice about singing this song. So if they sang a song about "hanging niggers from a tree," who would know? More importantly, who would really care?

Little did they know that there was at least one person who would object, and it was that person pointing a camera at Rice. That anonymous partygoer would send the video of Rice and his fraternity brothers singing about hanging “niggers from a tree” to OU Unheard, an African American student group on the University of Oklahoma campus. And by the next morning, OU Unheard would make sure that the world heard what was going on inside that SAE party bus.

But SAE wasn't the only issue for black students on the University of Oklahoma campus, nor the first. In January 2015 OU Unheard sent University of Oklahoma president David Boren a list of grievances, alleging that the university marginalized black students. Those students felt they were ignored, invisible, and subject to the same racist indignities that plague campuses around the country, yet their pleas for a non-hostile atmosphere at OU were not being listened to—hence the name OU Unheard.¹⁰

But after Rice got through singing, OU Unheard was in possession of a video that would make them heard not only on the University of Oklahoma campus but around the world. And, as happens with all episodes of racism, some would try to characterize the significance of the incident as being limited (in this case, to the University of Oklahoma campus, which was not the case). It was important for people to know that all of those isolated incidents were part of a trend that stretched back for decades, a trend that even those without a recorded memory of racism had to acknowledge.

Blackballed is the book that creates that recorded memory.

The campus racism situation at the University of Oklahoma is neither new nor surprising. What is surprising is that most Americans think it *is* new, and as I said on MSNBC after the SAE incident blew up, “I’m surprised that people are surprised.” But that illusion of surprise also gave rise to the usual excuses for Rice and his SAE fraternity brothers and their behavior.

Every time a racist campus event occurs, white privilege explain it as just the act of some immature young white students, who made a mistake of youthful exuberance. In their hearts, apologists say, these white students are not racists. There’s always an external reason for their racist behavior, such as being drunk and so not thinking clearly. Or they didn’t mean what they said in a racist way, and so they apologize to anyone who may have been offended.

For many white Americans, the bar for branding students as racist is so high that we’d first have to confirm that they were all dues-paying members of the Ku Klux Klan, wearing white hoods while writing editorials for the John Birch Society *and* using the Nazi Party salute . . . in a Hitler mustache. Only then would we get a “maybe” they’re racist. Others would inevitably say that they’d like to get “more information.”

And if there hadn’t been a video of the SAE party bus full of singing white fraternity and sorority members, you can be sure that the full impact would have been diluted for one of the reasons above.

And this is a problem.

But because there *was* a video for everyone to see in the SAE case, it was increasingly hard for even racism deniers to dispute that what they were seeing was racism. And the SAE case was only a small part of the picture. The real fact is that campus racism is as common as underage drinking at colleges, and just as traditional. For over a century, whether it’s overt hostility in the form of racial epithets scrawled on campus walls, or nooses being hung on dorm room doors to intimidate black students, or white fraternities and sororities painting their faces with black paint for Halloween parties, there’s been a clear pattern of intimidation, racial hate, and violence that’s targeted African Americans on college campuses throughout the country.

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There are close to 3,000 four-year universities in the United States, and most have generally stuck their heads in the sand, hoping that the latest controversy would pass them by or be forgotten by a public ever

tiring of the issue of race. And when confronted, these universities have been reactive instead of proactive.

And that's not good enough.

Blackballed points out how colleges and universities have historically either been complicit in fostering a campus environment that was friendly to racist behavior, or reacted so superficially that they made the conditions even worse. In other words, racists are more than welcome at PWIs, and they know it.

And it's not like the universities don't know they have a problem. Hundreds of colleges and universities have hired hundreds of staff for their student affairs departments, their equal opportunity programs, and their African American studies departments, and yet . . . these hardworking professionals can only put their fingers in the dike of campus racism.

Why don't their efforts work? For the same reason why antiracism efforts tend to fail in general society: we don't want to take them on honestly, with the full resources available to us. Creating a racism-free environment on campus isn't as large a priority as making sure the donors are happy, the football team is winning, and the tuition money keeps flowing. Everything else is superfluous. And as a result, black students suffer.

Blackballed talks about public policy, including anti-affirmative action measures such as California's Proposition 209 and Michigan's Proposition 2 that have decimated the ranks of African American students at top schools like the University of California at Berkeley, UCLA, and the University of Michigan, creating school segregation that causes black students to despair for their existence while increasing the racial microaggressions black students face each day.

Blackballed also goes back in history, pointing to a time when colleges and universities, feeling the exuberance of the Allied victory over the fascist powers of Germany, Japan, and Italy during World War II,

figured that if democracy abroad was worth fighting for, then how about on their campuses, specifically in the racist white fraternities and sororities that dominated there? But as *Blackballed* will show, change can be glacial, and even in the Age of Obama, it may be easier for a black man to sit in the White House than in a University of Alabama fraternity house.

While *Blackballed* documents the racism against African Americans, it's important to note that African Americans have not been passive in confronting the hostile campus environments. The tradition of African American college student activism is strong, and often the civil rights marches that changed society had their beginnings in a main quad at a university. From the militancy of taking over buildings to the demand for African American curricula, black students have demanded changes to the college environment from the early days of integration to the present.

And surprisingly, these black activists weren't protesting the encroachments on their sense of black identity and the need to be heard as college students only at predominately white colleges and universities. I chronicle how activism at historically black colleges and universities was often the point of the spear when those schools' policies skewed too closely to those of the more conservative white schools they emulated.

Finally, *Blackballed* asks whether, given all of the racial obstacles, going to a PWI is really worth it for African Americans. This is not the same as asking whether the education is valuable—we can say definitively that it is—but whether or not that education is worth the psychological damage to the African American student due to racism. That is a question that all stakeholders are going to have to answer.

In the spirit of Thelonious Monk's composition "Straight, No Chaser," *Blackballed* tells the story of campus racism in an unblinking search for the truth, the same word that peppers the moteros of so many American colleges and universities.

This book is a no-holds-barred look at how black students often find themselves at the mercy of white campus racism, both individual and systemic; why the average college and university has turned into a hostile space for African American college students; and why, as a result, black college students feel blackballed from their campuses . . . and American society.

Blackballed doesn't maintain that blacks shouldn't go to college. Today, attending college is vital. But what is the ultimate solution for modern African American college students? Should they give up going to predominately white universities and instead attend black schools? Or should they fight it out and demand a racism-free environment?

As with any answer to a complex question, there are always mitigating factors. Yes, white fraternities and sororities do great work both on campus and off. I have seen that work with my own eyes. Yes, not all fraternity/sorority members agree with the racist views of their brethren, nor do they all participate in racist acts. I have met many wonderful members of predominately white fraternities and sororities on hundreds of campuses. And yes, not all predominately white campuses condone creating uncomfortable racial environments for their black students, and most at least *try* to spend resources to create a comfortable home for black students.

But *Blackballed* isn't about those mitigating circumstances.

Blackballed argues that no number of good intentions, good deeds, nice individuals, or concerned administrations can come close to making up for the racist experiences many African American college students have when attempting to get college degrees from predominately white institutions. What we see clearly, from the sheer volume of racist incidents, is that what colleges and universities are doing to stem campus racism has been a failure.

As a result, *Blackballed* rips the scab off the open secret: that predominately white college campuses, despite the pretty pictures, are now hostile spaces for black students, and they need to do something about

it—*now*. This book makes certain that colleges and universities can never say they didn't know or understand past and present campus racism, making it as real for the university as it is for the African American students who live this repeated history year after year.

The great Nigerian novelist Chinua Achebe once quoted an African proverb: "Until the lions have their own historian, the history of the hunt will always glorify the hunter."¹¹ *Blackballed* is written from the perspective of the lion.

And it's time for the truth.

THE GREAT AMERICAN HAFF-BAKED SALE

"I had no need to apologize that the look-unders, search-more affirmative action that Princeton and Yale practiced had opened doors for me. That was its purpose: to create the conditions whereby students from disadvantaged backgrounds could be brought to the starting line of a race many were unaware was even being run."

—Sonia Sotomayor

EVERY FEW YEARS, THE UC BERKELEY COLLEGE REPUBLICANS host a very special bake sale. Setting up the event in the main quad, Sproul Plaza, for maximum exposure, the young conservatives pack a table full of items necessary for a successful fund-raiser—cakes, cookies, brownies, cupcakes—and sell them to students who pass by. The problem? This particular bake sale isn't designed to satisfy any Cal student's sweet tooth. Instead, it's designed to put a sour taste in their mouths.

You see, the UC Berkeley College Republicans have a unique price list for their baked goods, one on which price is determined by one's race (and, in some cases, gender). So if you're white, the price of a slice of cake is \$2.00, the highest of any race. If you're Asian, the price is

\$1.50 (unless the College Republicans want to avoid any suggestion that they're being racist, in which case they'll make the Asian price the same as the white price; for them, it's a sign that the so-called model minority has essentially reached equality with the downtrodden white students in terms of merit). For Latino students, the price is \$1.00, while for blacks, the price is even lower, somewhere around seventy-five cents. If they remember to add Native Americans, those individuals can get the baked goods for about a quarter. Women? They receive twenty-five cents off the price for any goods, regardless of their race.

So what's the point of the different prices for different ethnicities? According to these millennial future low-tax, free-market Republicans, the bake sale prices illustrate the injustices of affirmative action, or, as they like to term it, racial preferences, in college admissions. And in the eyes of these students, it is unfair to white students applying to Berkeley that affirmative action includes race as a factor.

"The purpose of the pricing structure is to cause people to disagree with this kind of preferential treatment," said Shawn Lewis, president of the Berkeley College Republicans. "We want people to say no race is above another race, or no race is below another one. Why put one over the other? Why rank them that way?"¹

Obviously, I beg to differ. This "Increase Diversity Bake Sale" wasn't designed to start a dialogue about affirmative action, despite the protestation of young Shawn Lewis. Instead, it is intended to provoke a response from supporters of affirmative action on campus, specifically minorities. And at other campuses, where they've conducted "Anti-Affirmative Action Bake Sales," that response has been almost universally negative.

At Bucknell University, in Pennsylvania, officials shut down a similar bake sale. Officials at the College of William and Mary in Virginia cut off a cookie sale, saying they were "shocked and appalled." The University of California, Irvine, shut down a bake sale on campus, saying it was discriminatory. And a bake sale at Southern Methodist University

in Texas was shut down after forty-five minutes because of what officials called an "unsafe environment."²

These bake sales may seem silly and laughable, and most write them off as minor distractions on the part of immature politicians. But they're more dangerous than that. They're disingenuous, ahistorical, and meant to intimidate African Americans and other minorities via a philosophy that says, "You're not good enough, and we're the ones to who set the standards." It's another form of racism that hopes to make inequity generational and systemic, and it contributes to the real pain minority students feel on campus.

At some point political conservatives began wondering: if they couldn't destroy the historical legacy of Martin Luther King Jr., what if they could do the next best thing and co-opt it? So over the years, affirmative action critics have enjoyed pointing to one line, delivered as part of King's "I Have a Dream" speech during the 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, as summing up America's color-blind ideal. And since America's historical memory has been reduced to 140 characters, this quote serves as a kind of Cliff's Notes to King's entire political philosophy, warped for the benefit of conservatives: "I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character."³

It's the money quote. The quote children are given to study, understand, and then regurgitate as King's ultimate vision for America. But it's incomplete. Conservatives never seem to quote *another* section of the speech, in which Dr. King says, "It is obvious today that America has defaulted on this promissory note insofar as her citizens of color are concerned. Instead of honoring this sacred obligation, America has given the Negro people a bad check, a check which has come back marked 'insufficient funds.'"⁴

And for all their newfound love of Dr. King, conservatives have failed to read his book *Why We Can't Wait*, published a year later, in

which King wrote, "Whenever this issue of compensatory or preferential treatment for the Negro is raised, some of our friends recoil in horror. The Negro should be granted equality, they agree; but he should ask for nothing more. On the surface, this appears reasonable, but it is not realistic. For it is obvious that if a man is entering the starting line in a race three hundred years after another man, the first would have to perform some impossible feat in order to catch up with his fellow runner."

"If a man is entering the starting line in a race three hundred years after another man, the first would have to perform some impossible feat in order to catch up with his fellow runner."

Puts those bake sale prices in perspective, doesn't it?

And while the words of Dr. King were inspirational, it was the words of President Lyndon Johnson that put meat on the bones of affirmative action policy. During a commencement address at Howard University in 1965, he laid out the reasoning behind it.

"Thus it is not enough just to open the gates of opportunity. All our citizens must have the ability to walk through those gates. This is the next and the more profound stage of the battle for civil rights. We seek not just freedom but opportunity. We seek not just legal equity but human ability, not just equality as a right and a theory but equality as a fact and equality as a result.

"For the task is to give 20 million Negroes the same chance as every other American to learn and grow, to work and share in society, to develop their abilities—physical, mental and spiritual, and to pursue their individual happiness.

"To this end equal opportunity is essential, but not enough, not enough. Men and women of all races are born with the same range of abilities. But ability is not just the product of birth. Ability is stretched or stunted by the family that you live with, and the neighborhood you live in—by the school you go to and the poverty or the richness of your surroundings. It is the product of a hundred unseen forces playing upon the little infant, the child, and finally the man."⁶

The UC Berkeley College Republicans fail to realize that given the historical context, their menu pricing is off . . . by a lot. To be truly fair, they'd first have to realize that American society already puts one race over another, and has for over four hundred years. And that fact didn't just go away when blacks could eat at integrated Woolworth lunch counters. But let's keep to the bake sale analogy.

Prior to affirmative action, white students were given nearly unlimited preference, a white-skin subsidy that came with a near-monopoly to purchase any baked good on the table, no matter the price. African Americans were allowed to purchase the baked goods, but only while public policy suppressed their wages, which made the baked goods hyper-expensive. Also, since the white-owned baked goods industry didn't value the black dollar, blacks would have to go longer and farther to even get the opportunity to buy the baked good. And even when they did, they'd be denigrated by being asked to buy from the back.

But forget purchasing the baked goods. Whites also controlled the means of production, dictating who was employed and who wasn't. That meant that whites made the life-and-death decision about who are and who didn't, or, in the case of education, how many blacks were given an opportunity to build enough wealth so they could even consider participating in higher education. And artificial quotas further limited African Americans, to the extent that only a certain number of blacks were allowed to purchase the baked goods, while generations of mediocre white students were given free access to the beneficial properties of the baked goods.

The white-skin subsidy also came in the form of the inherent value of white skin in America. This subsidy provided societal protection from violence, like the overt violence faced by James Meredith as he tried to integrate the University of Mississippi, or the microaggressions black students face every day, on the basis of skin color. Approaching the baked goods table sometimes meant being assaulted by ravenously

angry whites, who believed that they, and they alone, had a right to the goods. And this has gone on not for years, or decades, but for *centuries*.

What's the price for that?

You have to look at racism as not just an "ism" of inconvenience, but also one of substantial depth and cruelty. One that encompasses slavery, the legacy of slavery, black code laws, domestic terrorism, segregation, disfranchisement at the polls, health and housing discrimination, banking discrimination, job discrimination, just to name a few things. And they all have an effect down to the present day, since racism has never gone away. Have things gotten better? Sure. But as Malcolm X once said, "If you stick a knife in my back nine inches and pull it out six inches, there's no progress. If you pull it all the way out that's not progress. Progress is healing the wound that the blow made. And they haven't even pulled the knife out much less heal the wound. They won't even admit the knife is there."⁷

The UC Berkeley College Republicans deny the existence of a knife.

Noam Chomsky once noted, "Racism is a very serious problem in the United States. Take a look at the scholarly work on it, say, George Fredrickson's study of the white supremacy, comparative study. He concludes, I think plausibly, that the white supremacy in the United States was even more extreme and savage than in South Africa."⁸

Still, even if you took the Berkeley College Republican price list at face value, with whiteness as the end-all, be-all standard for non-preferential admission to college, you'd be wrong. College admissions include a lot of variables.

In a 2004 study of nineteen elite schools, including Harvard, Middlebury, and Virginia, former Princeton president William Bowen and two other researchers discovered that a recruited athlete was 30 percentage points more likely to be admitted than a non-athlete. A black, Latino, or Native American student was 28 percentage points more likely to be admitted than a white or Asian student. And a legacy applicant

received a 20-percentage-point boost over someone whose parents hadn't attended that college.⁹

It is an open secret that even if you looked at college admissions, and racism itself, ahistorically, white students and others *will* could receive a preference. It's just that only minorities are asked to explain themselves. You can't be an average black student, like a substantial number of white students are, and be admitted to colleges and universities every year. At top universities, the black student needs to be extraordinary, even if she comes from a community that has disadvantages that are hard-baked because of race. That said, conservatives have successfully made the idea of race-based affirmative action the one segment of affirmative action policy that is not politically acceptable.

"Those liberals who have defended affirmative action have not been able to popularize even the most uncontested arguments in its favor: for instance, that preferences of various sorts are often used in selection processes, such as, benefits for veterans, or college admission for athletes and the children of alumni and alumnae," wrote political scientist Jean Hardisty.

"What makes those practices acceptable, especially in the case of veterans and athletes, is the widely held judgment that these recipients are 'appropriate' and 'legitimate.' Most white Americans do not extend the same benefit of the doubt to 'average' people of color."¹⁰

Even before President Johnson's Howard University speech, there were some colleges who made overt pleas for the recruitment of African American students via affirmative action measures. In a 1944 editorial to the black newspaper the *Afro American*, Antioch College wrote, "It is our belief that we can never secure interracial understanding until we get children, high school and college students of all races working and playing together. It is difficult for people to start to co-operate with one another in middle age. We consider exclusively one-race schools an abnormal situation unlike the outside world, and therefore to be avoided."

To help foster this idea of integration, Antioch formed a Race Relations Scholarship Fund and asked *Afro American* readers to contribute.¹¹

Another advocate for racial integration on college campuses was Felice Schwartz. When Schwartz was a junior at Smith College in the late 1940s, she “saw Smith’s six Negro students hurt by chance remarks, by the snobbery of the townspeople in the socially alive college town.” Schwartz thought, “This sort of thing will keep happening until there are enough colored students in school to give their group a feeling of security and companionship. Why don’t more Negroes go to college anyway?”¹²

Schwartz would go on to found the National Scholarship Service and Fund for Negro Students, one of the first agencies to fight for the inclusion of African American students on college campuses while also providing financial assistance. Schwartz would later become a stalwart of the women’s movement, identifying ways that employers could better support working women by providing services like day care and flexible work hours, in what eventually became known as the “mommy track.”¹³

But none of this matters, because the College Republicans know that they’re winning the affirmative action battle in terms of the public policy of *today*. Not because they have the right argument, but because they’ve been able to convince white voters that fixing the inequities of society through affirmative action somehow violates the civil rights of white students.

But white anti-affirmative action proponents knew that it would be politically impractical to have someone white make the argument initially. What they needed was a willing black face, one who just happened to be on the Berkeley campus helping sell cupcakes for the College Republicans.

A black man named Ward Connerly.

Actually, Connerly uses the term “black man” to identify himself very reluctantly. Mr. Connerly considers himself black “because blackness is an experience and others have thrust that experience upon me.”

He takes great pains to explain that his ethnicity goes beyond being black. “One drop of blood does it,” he said, reviewing the computation: “25 percent black plus 37.5 percent Irish plus 25 percent French plus 12.5 percent Choctaw equals 100 percent black,” Connerly said in a 1997 *New York Times* article. “I suppose I could claim to be Irish, but who wants to stand there and argue the point every time? So I’m black.”¹⁴

Connerly, a Sacramento businessman, was appointed to the University of California Regents by Governor Pete Wilson, after ironically making his fortune through affirmative action set-aside programs. The *San Francisco Chronicle* reported that Connerly repeatedly listed his land-use consulting company as a minority contractor with the California Energy Commission, which guaranteed his firm, which he co-owned with his wife, at least three contracts to carry out energy conservation training worth \$1.2 million. Connerly’s firm was hired by fifteen California communities, which used his minority status to take advantage of affirmative action regulations.¹⁵

Connerly continued to be seen as benefiting from affirmative action. The first time was in 1969, when he was added to the California State Housing Committee by his longtime political benefactor, then state legislator and future California governor Pete Wilson. And then in 1993, when Wilson again chose Connerly to be on the University of California Board of Regents. It’s no surprise that Connerly had donated more than \$100,000 to Wilson’s campaign.¹⁶

And yet, once Connerly had risen to prominence, he suddenly thought affirmative action was a bad thing, and it was his job to kick away the ladder that had allowed him to rise so high. It’s as old as America. Delude yourself into thinking that your achievement came only from your own enterprise and pluck, and that justifies denying to others all of the instruments that were responsible for your success.

For African Americans, this is a particularly pernicious and egregious manifestation of self-hate. But Connerly isn’t alone in being an

African American against affirmative action. One of conservative radio commentator Rush Limbaugh's favorite quotes is from Condoleeza Rice, the former U.S. secretary of state and an African American woman: "I tell you what affirmative action is, soft bigotry, low expectations. Affirmative action is a racist insult disguised as social justice by the Democrats."¹⁷

Black conservative social commentator Thomas Sowell once wrote that affirmative action is "one of the few policies that can be said to harm virtually every group in a different way . . . Obviously, whites and Asians lose out when you have preferential admission for black students or Hispanic students—but blacks and Hispanics lose out because what typically happens is the students who have all the credentials to succeed in college are admitted to colleges where the standards are so much higher that they fail."¹⁸

Connerly soon began working to dismantle affirmative action in the state. And when Proposition 209, a voter initiative, was drafted by Cal State anthropology professor Glynn Custred and California Association of Scholars executive director Thomas Wood in 1996, it amended the California constitution to include a new section: "The state shall not discriminate against, *or grant preferential treatment to*, any individual or group on the basis of race, sex, color, ethnicity, or national origin in the operation of public employment, public education, or public contracting."¹⁹

But contrary to popular myth, affirmative action in admissions continues to be a popular concept, as the American public understands that the disparities in K-12 are not just economic, but racial. But to move the needle, the Proposition 209 proponents knew they had to present the initiative in a way that tapped into the white voters' racist DNA, without making it appear that they were *acting* racist. It was akin to Tom Sawyer getting his friends to whitewash the fence; instead anti-affirmative action proponents were whitewashing their flagship campuses of black students.

In a Pew Research Center survey conducted in 2014, "63 percent of people said [affirmative action] programs aimed at increasing the number of black and minority students on college campuses were a good thing, versus just 30 percent who called them a bad thing."²⁰

The Orwellian language in the initiative, *or grant preferential treatment to*, equates the remedies used to fix the past and present discrimination against African Americans as somehow being discriminatory against whites, thus making them the victims. It would be like preventing a surgeon from using a scalpel to operate on a patient dying from knife wounds, all because one equates knives with being bad in all contexts. The argument was a perversion of the 1964 Civil Rights Act.

But it was effective.

Connerly became the black face of the initiative, which was backed by big money from right-wing activists, including media mogul Rupert Murdoch, who contributed \$750,000; Howard F. Ahmanson Jr., who contributed \$350,000; and Richard Mellon Scaife, who contributed \$100,000. Altogether, Yes on Proposition 209 raised \$5,239,287, while its main opponent, the Campaign to Defeat 209, raised \$2,185,086. The anti-affirmative action side was able to convince white Californians that it was okay to vote against a public policy that was falsely portrayed as a "quota" for African Americans when it came to college admissions.²¹

Using a black man as the face of the proposals, as even Connerly admitted, allowed whites to protest affirmative action "without having to feel like they appear racist." It was the perfect way for the majority-white population of California, and later Michigan, whose Prop 2 emulated Prop 209, to codify inequity into college admissions. The measures prevented universities, particularly top public universities like the University of California at Berkeley and the University of Michigan, from using race as one criteria for admission.²²

Syndicated columnist Leonard Pitts Jr. asked, "Who isn't fascinated at the sight of a hen campaigning for the foxes." He went on to say that

Connerly was “a confused Negro who should know better than to allow his skin color to be used as moral cover by those whose truest goals have little to do with liberty and justice for all.”²³

Social commentator Jean Hardisty wrote in her book, *Mobilizing Resentment: Conservative Resurgence from the John Birch Society to the Promise Keepers*, “When the early architects of affirmative action developed it as a policy to benefit African Americans, who had mounted a strong civil rights movement to demand an end to racial discrimination, the right reacted almost immediately. Later, when other people of color and white women began to benefit from affirmative action, many white people continued to see affirmative action as a program to benefit African Americans. The right often frames the issue to reinforce that perception, perhaps because, in the United States, African Americans are the principal target of white racism, and benefits for Blacks, especially if they are cast as ‘special’ benefits, are politically unpopular among many white voters.”²⁴

It is just that framing, along with President Bill Clinton’s milquetoast support of affirmative action through his “Mend it, Don’t End it” statement, that allowed Proposition 209 to pass with 54 percent of the vote. The result was immediately tested, and in 1997, after the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals upheld Proposition 209, Connerly would remark, “Now the people of California can get on with the business of making the dream of equal opportunity a reality, without the use of artificial preferences that are divisive and promote the ethnic polarization of our society. We must now focus on ways of providing access for all of our children to an education that prepares them for the rigors of a competitive society.”²⁵

Ward Connerly’s “dream” immediately turned into a nightmare for black students, and not just for undergrads. The year after Prop 209 eliminated race from consideration for admission, only 14 black students out of 792 students were admitted to UC Berkeley’s law school, Boalt Hall. And none decided to enroll.²⁶

Before Prop 209, the African American undergraduate population at the University of California at Berkeley was 8 percent, roughly the same percentage as the African American population of the state of California. The next year, in 1997, black freshmen only made up 4 percent of the freshmen admitted, and from 2006 to 2010, the black student population at the state’s flagship university hovered around 3.6 percent, with many of the black students on scholarship for athletics.²⁷

So it’s been twenty years since the passage of Proposition 209. How are things at UC Berkeley for black students? Well, in 2013 UC Berkeley conducted a survey of the campus, sort of a finger in the air to see which way the wind was blowing for the student body, administration, and faculty. One thing in the study was very clear. According to the report, “Underrepresented minority respondents and multi-minority respondents were less comfortable than white respondents and other people of color respondents with the overall climate and the workplace climate. White respondents were more comfortable with the climate in their classes than other racial groups.” So in short, if you were a white Cal student, things were hunky-dory. But if you were black, or another minority, things weren’t so sunny.

The decimation of the African American student population on the Berkeley campus also had a residual effect on the decisions of the qualified African American students who *were* admitted to the university. What the university found was that these students had better options than to go to a university devoid of black students. If they could get into Berkeley, then it was pretty certain that they could get into pretty much any other top academic school in the country, schools like Columbia, Northwestern, and Cal’s arch rival to the south, Stanford, so why not choose based on the racial diversity of the campus, the very thing Prop 209 prevented California public universities from doing? In all, between 2006 and 2010, there were 1,539 African American students admitted to Berkeley, yet 885 black students enrolled elsewhere.²⁸

on campus, black students have a right to burn that flag. If a racist is honored on a building, black students have a moral right to erase that name wherever they see it on campus.

Black students have a right to demand that the degrading iconography of the past be eradicated from their college campuses, in the same way that all through the Soviet Union the statues honoring Lenin were destroyed. Or the way Saddam Hussein statues in Iraq were taken down during the Iraq War. And in fact, it is their *duty* to do so. And doing so will force the university to decide between the hateful racist they're honoring and the black student they're educating.

It has only been in the past decade that university administrations have begun to understand that these buildings' names are not only offensive to African American students, but should be offensive to the entire student body. And keeping these building names, statues, and monuments on campus also tells African American students that they don't matter enough to change them, and that their views are unimportant. But when most colleges and universities refuse to engage in self-analysis and think about how each and every item either does or doesn't represent their commitment to diversity, inclusion, and a pluralistic society, then they're complicit in institutionalizing and normalizing white racism in American society.

Or in the words of Assata Shakur, "People get used to anything. The less you think about your oppression, the more your tolerance for it grows. After a while, people just think oppression is the normal state of things. But to become free, you have to be acutely aware of being a slave."⁷²

The same goes for the names on the buildings that grace college campuses.

7

WE'RE MAD AS HELL . . .
AND WE'RE TAKING
OVER THE BUILDING

"There's a time when the operation of the machine becomes so odious—makes you so sick at heart—that you can't take part. You can't even passively take part. And you've got to put your bodies upon the gears and upon the wheels, upon the levers, upon all the apparatus, and you've got to make it stop. And you've got to indicate to the people who run it, to the people who own it that unless you're free, the machine will be prevented from working at all."

—Mario Savio

IN 2014, AT COLGATE UNIVERSITY, OVER THREE HUNDRED BLACK

students staged a three-day sit-in of the Hurwitz Office of Admissions building. The reason? Anonymous racist postings on Yik Yak, a popular social media app for college students. Organized by the Colgate University Association of Critical Collegians, the students were upset after reading Yik Yak posts from white Colgate students, including, "White people won life, Africa lost, sorry we were so much better than you that

we were literally able to enslave you to our will," "I don't want Blacks at this school," and "Niggers be complaining."

"In order to obtain a complete liberal arts education, one must learn and be aware of different identity politics," the group stated. "Colgate University, at this moment, has insufficient methods to address equity and inclusivity."¹

The black Colgate student activists organized using the social media hashtags #CanYouHearUsNow and #ThisIsColgate. The group also posted student video testimonials on YouTube as well as photographs of students sharing their stories with handmade signs on Instagram.²

Jeffrey Herbst, Colgate's president, like university presidents everywhere after racist incidents happen on their campuses, said all of the right things.

"Bias incidents and racism, while not unique to Colgate, are unacceptable and will not be tolerated. They have no place on a college campus, and they have no place at Colgate. We have heard you, and we will join you in the common goal of creating a campus environment that is welcoming and supportive of all of our students."³

But because George Santayana's theory about history continues to ring true, this wasn't the first time that Colgate faced a sit-in over racial microaggressions. Back in 2001 more than seventy black students occupied the same admissions office over "a series of racially insensitive events, including an email message from a political science professor to a student saying that many minority students took soft courses where they could discuss their feelings and might get 'undeservedly high grades.'" Also, three black men were accosted by a white man on campus and taunted with a racial epithet.⁴

"You can look at this as problems to be solved," said John Dovidio, the interim faculty dean at the time. "We see them as symptoms of larger issues Colgate needs to address to become even better than it is,

that will move us ahead and not simply put Band-Aids on a series of temporary problems."⁵

And yet it's clear that the problem hasn't been solved at Colgate, just as it hasn't been solved at other schools. American University had to deal with racist Yik Yak posts like: "I really don't like 99 percent of the Black people I meet"; "Their entire culture just isn't conducive to a life of success: The outfits. The attitudes. The behavior"; "Tell your people to dress cleanly. No hootin and a hollerin in public"; "At my work, EVERY single case of theft and fraud has been committed by a Black person."⁶

The common response by non-African Americans to the concept of racial microaggressions is to see them as individualized experiences and not part of a larger picture. Where only the white individuals themselves are responsible for the actions, and aren't tied to any systemic racism that's assaulting black students as a whole on a daily basis. As a result, African American students are then told to get thicker skins about the insensitivity that assails them, even though their skins are already thick by the time they get to college.

By dismissing these racial microaggressions, we build a tinderbox among black students that is bound to erupt. And with the election, and reelection, of the first African American president, Americans continue to be seduced, and deluded, by the idea that we're now in a new state of racial being, a postracial world where race is insignificant. But on today's campuses, the racial hostility is as prevalent as ever, and it's a ticking time bomb.

"We're clearly not postracial," said Tiya A. Miles, chairwoman of the University of Michigan's Department of Afro-American and African Studies. "Sometimes I wonder if having a black president lets people feel like that gives them cover. It absolves people of being prejudiced."⁷

David J. Leonard, a professor in the Department of Critical Culture, Gender and Race Studies at Washington State University, said young

people often view racism as being associated with extremist groups like the Ku Klux Klan. "People who don't see themselves like this think: 'We can poke fun. We can engage in stereotypes,'" Dr. Leonard said. "Racism gets reduced to intent, as if intent is all that matters."⁸

But the fact of the matter is that white students at colleges and universities *have* been acting like they're members of the KKK. Over the past twenty years, *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education* has documented hundreds of incidents in which white college students have assaulted black students with a volume of withering racist aggressions that would make the Ku Klux Klan proud. And as a result, there's been an awakening of black activism on these campuses.

At the University of Michigan, black students started a twitter hashtag, #BBUM, or Being Black at the University of Michigan, and Twitter timelines were flooded with over 10,000 tweets about the isolation and microaggressions that come from being among few black students on the school's campus: "That first class when black culture becomes the topic and you suddenly become the voice of all black people #BBUM"; "#BBUM is my mom calling me worried about my safety because I wrote an opinion piece about my identity"; "Assuming that because I'm black I don't deserve to be here and am a result of affirmative action, which is not even in place right now #BBUM"; "When every room you stand in on campus 9x out of 10 your the only one that is black #BBUM."⁹

The concerns ranged from being the only black student in classes, to being subjected to white students who are racially insensitive if not hostile, like those at the aforementioned Theta Xi fraternity "Hood Ratchet Thursday" party. And of course, ironically, one of the main complaints was that despite the demise of affirmative action, white students assumed that black students were only admitted *because* of affirmative action. This demonstrates that the racial stereotypes white students held about black students were independent of the facts and were much more destructive than any self-esteem issues arising for black students

who were *indeed* admitted via affirmative action. Black students were damned if they were, and damned if they weren't, at least in the minds of white students, so the conservative argument that affirmative action needed to go for the benefit of the black student was fraudulent.

As for the campaign itself, Black Student Union president Tyrell Collier said, "I don't think this is a problem specific to the University, I think it's an experience that Black students at predominantly White universities across the nation are facing."¹⁰

Again, the university expressed support for the students—"Thanks for engaging in this conversation. We're listening, and will be sure all of your voices are heard. #BBUM"—but was essentially impotent when it came to addressing the students' concerns. Typically, universities left the burden of dealing with these social issues on the backs of their student affairs offices.

Inspired by the #BBUM campaign, black students at the University of New Hampshire created their own hashtag, #BAMUNH, for Being African American at the University of New Hampshire, to recount their own experiences: "#BAMUNH realizing that the things you have experienced aren't rare and happen many times to students on this campus"; "When a whole table of white students try to justify saying 'nigger' . . . it's only offensive if black people take offense to it? Right #BAMUNH"; "When people stare at you anytime the topic of race, ethnicity, and skin color comes up. #BAMUNH"; "When professors assume your either on the basketball team or the football team. #BAMUNH"; "#BAMUNH talking about race causes havoc with those it doesn't effect on a daily basis"; "1998 UNH promises 300 Black students by 2004. 2013 and we still aren't there. #BAMUNH."¹¹

Just over the past two years, we've witnessed the following incidents:

- In 2015 Bucknell University, in Lewisburg, Pennsylvania, expelled three students who were said to have made racist comments during a broadcast on WVBU-FM, the student radio

station. According to Bucknell president John Bravman, the following discussion occurred on the broadcast:

Student #1: "Niggers."

Student #2: "Black people should be dead."

Student #3: "Lynch 'em!"¹²

- On October 21, 2014, racist messages were scrawled on dormitory room doors at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst. One of the messages read, "Kill these Niggers!!" Nearly 200 students attended a meeting at the Student Union building to discuss the incident. Chancellor Kumble Subbaswamy also attended the meeting, telling the students, "We are doing everything we can to find the perpetrators. I wish I could tell you this will never happen again, but I can't."¹³
- In 2014 the Office for Civil Rights at the U.S. Department of Education launched an investigation into whether Lehigh University, in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, had properly addressed racial bias incidents on campus. The investigation began after a Lehigh alumna, Susan Magaziner, notified the Office of Civil Rights that the Umoya House, a multicultural residence on campus, had been vandalized in 2013 with eggs and graffiti that included the word "nigger" on both the building and the sidewalk. Years before, the skinned head of a deer had been left in front of the house.¹⁴
- The stakes were high for Lehigh, as the university's counsel had warned their students. If the Office of Civil Rights found that the school had violated federal laws, then the school could lose federal funding and be forced to close. But in 2014 Lehigh avoided that fate. A voluntary agreement, by which Lehigh would create a new racial harassment policy and chronicle racial

incidents, was agreed upon with the Office of Civil Rights. And with this, the investigation ended.¹⁵

Black student activism has a long tradition on both white and black college campuses, as students struggle to make the campus space reflective of their wants and needs. Activism among black college students typically reflects the ever-changing mindset of African America, the shifting political, cultural, and social philosophies as black people strive for self-determination, both on college campuses and in larger society. Every generation of black students has an activist awakening, based on the realization that the status quo is no longer satisfactory, and that it's now their turn to throw their bodies upon the gears of the machine, whether that machine be on a black or white campus. In essence, each generation of black college students is determined to make the college campus their own, by any means necessary.

The tradition of black student activism goes back to the early nineteenth century, when John Newton Templeton, an ex-slave, pro-Africa colonizer, and the first black Ohio University graduate, spoke at his alma mater in 1828. He noted in his talk, "Claims of Liberia," that "slavery is one of the greatest evils existing in our day, and for the abolishing of which, was the object in forming the Colonization Society; it is an evil which has long existed, its decline must therefore be gradual, in order that its total overthrow be permanent. You will, therefore, hear me while I urge upon your patronage and liberality the claims of Liberia."¹⁶

And the establishment of black colleges, and the flood of new black students entering these schools during the post-Civil War Reconstruction era, did nothing to dull their activism. In fact, these black college students, eager to use education as a way to transcend the ravages of racial and economic degradation, heightened their activism. In a world where all colleges treated their students paternalistically, regardless of color, students at these newly created black colleges saw themselves

connect their plight on their own campuses with what is going on in communities. And one of their spiritual leaders is Phillip Agnew.

Agnew, the leader of the Florida-based Dream Defenders, a group of black activists who famously took over the Florida state house in Tallahassee after the acquittal of George Zimmerman in the Trayvon Martin murder, got his start as an activist at Florida A&M. After graduating he engaged in community activism at Florida A&M University following the death of fourteen-year-old Martin Lee Anderson at a Florida boot camp. That tragedy led to the formation of the Dream Defenders, which has chapters on nine college campuses and “highlights racial and social economic-justice issues like prison privatization, racial profiling and ‘zero tolerance’ policies in schools—which many believe lead students of color straight into the prison system.”⁴⁸ His vision of black student activism should serve as a guiding light for black students at predominately white institutions (PWIs):

I want to see us move from protest to resistance to full revolution. Constructing and building our own economy and systems and schools. I want to see community control of our food and [access] to food that enhances our bodies and our minds. And to see true self-determination for every person in this country, and that does include white people. But it means balance. Right now, black people, brown people, poor people don’t have any rights to their lives and their destinies. I’d like to see the government not engage in wars where we perpetuate an economic system that ruins democracy around the world. That’s not a five-year goal; that’s probably a lifetime goal. And I’d like to see the prison-industrial complex end. In five years, I’d like to see a good majority of states around this country closing jails, and police departments looking completely different—being governed by the people.⁴⁹

To make change in society, we first have to make change where we already are. And for black college students at predominately white

universities, campus racism is the one issue that prepares you for making revolutionary change as a college graduate. It is a reason why some African Americans go to college, not just for individual goals, but also to change the lives of other African Americans. By winning the battle of campus racism at PWIs, they’ll be ready for that revolution.

ENOUGH.

Racism is icky to talk about, as everyone usually retreats to their comfortable box when dealing with it. To make folks feel good when we confront issues of campus racism, there’s always a call for reaching some sort of middle ground of understanding. A place where compromise can be found, and all points of view are taken into consideration in order to reach some sort of consensus. Maybe we agree to meetings, a commission, or a white paper, all so we can pretend to create solutions, while in reality, all we’re trying to do is push the ball far enough down the line so that a future administration, or another group of students, will have to deal with it. “Let’s look forward, and not backward,” is always the cry.

Enough.

No more conversations, town hall meetings, white paper studies, or toothless appointments of diversity officers as stopgaps for dealing with the racism on campus. The era of gradualism is over when it comes to white campus racism, and colleges and universities need to understand this. They need to take proactive and not reactive measures *now*.

Whether college administrations recognize it or not, African Americans are constantly under attack via the white racism that flows through American society. Whether it’s a black Florida teen walking home, only to be murdered by a vigilante with a gun, or police targeting African American communities for overpolicing, or the slaughter of African Americans in black churches, or the predominately white college campus becoming yet another hostile space for African Americans, one

that is a ticking time bomb. And to be blunt, if predominately white universities aren't proactive, instead of being reactive, that time bomb is destined to go off, and they'll be the ones watching a tragedy during the next national news cycle.

No one wants that. And it is preventable.

There are some harsh truths when it comes to white college students and their racist aggression against black students, and one is that unless universities work to decrease that behavior to levels below infinitesimal, then they're part of the problem. Not one black student on a college campus should have to spend one second dealing with the scourge of racism or its symbols. It goes beyond the idea of zero tolerance; it means creating such a level of proactive antiracism that white high school students think twice before applying to your school.

Universities need to move campus racism from the backwaters of their administrations to the forefront. They need to triple their current budgets for diversity education. The programs they create for white students should not just be a one-off during freshman orientation but a process that continues through each year of attendance.

And for students, this shouldn't just involve listening to lectures. White students on PWI campuses need to fully participate in discussions and academic classes that break down the racist beliefs, prejudices, and bias they bring to campus from their own communities. Breaking the cycle means undoing the hardwiring, the connection to white supremacy, that these white students bring to campus, and making them cognizant of the complexities of race and racism. No more "we didn't know" excuses.

Universities need to demand *radical* change within the white fraternity and sorority systems, with comprehensive antiracism plans from the national headquarters of each organization. It is obvious that the current workshops, conferences, and advising systems aren't working, and the penalties for racist acts are not strong enough to have an effect. Also, many national white fraternities and sororities are myopic with

regard to patterns of racist behavior and thus empower the local chapters to continue that behavior.

Today, the penalty for racist activities on college campuses is basically the equivalent of a hand slap, when decisive action, like that taken by University of Oklahoma president David Boren, needs to be the norm. In other words, the safety of the university's black students needs to trump the pressure schools receive from alumni fraternity and sorority members, some of whom represent the powerful donor classes of their schools. If white fraternities and sororities can't deal with that, or if they see continued instances of campus racism in their chapters, then those chapters need to be shut down permanently.

Every predominately white university should do a complete audit of its physical campus and investigate the backgrounds of those who are honored with statues and buildings. Check to see if the honorees are as diverse as your student body, and if there are reprehensible characters among those honored, then remove them immediately.

Too often, black students feel like interlopers on their own campuses. All they want is to be members of the university family, and yet their needs are shuffled to the side and not prioritized. This needs to stop. Budgetary cuts should not happen at the expense of the few black spaces on PWI campuses. Black student unions, African American-themed houses, and African American studies departments should be immune from budgetary cuts. They are too important for the mental health of African American students, and to cut them is to ignore the needs of black students.

Lastly, colleges and universities need to fight for *hard* affirmative action policies, not soft. It is unacceptable for public universities, particularly flagship universities, to not be representative of the population. Schools without a critical mass of black students should declare an emergency and either demand changes in public policy or use their clout to influence future court and election battles. Too often, colleges and universities throw up their hands and claim to be powerless to fight

for the rights of black students to attend their universities, even though they're quite aware of the K-12 disparity that exists in the United States and of how valuable a university education can be for transforming individual lives and communities.

As for African Americans, we need to stop sending our children to PWIs that are not proactive about ridding their campuses of racism. Those of us who are PWI graduates must rid ourselves of our blind loyalty to our alma maters, and understand that if our institutions don't believe that black lives matter, meaning that campus racism must be eradicated, then our alma maters shouldn't matter to us. Too often, we believe in the inevitability of campus racism, when in reality, it just hasn't been confronted effectively.

We must challenge campus racism wherever we find it.

Back in 2014, the cable network VH1 created a reality show about black sororities called *Sorority Sisters*. Thousands of black fraternity and sorority members were outraged by the program, but no one was doing anything effective about it. So I created a social media strategy to defeat the show. The strategy was simple: attack the advertisers, swamp social media with negativity about the show, and then drive down ratings. Thousands of black fraternity and sorority members followed my *Sorority Sisters* strategy, setting up websites and creating coalitions, and within weeks, *Sorority Sisters* was no more. Strategy and consistent, coherent pressure made a multibillion-dollar corporation ditch a television show.

We can do the same with campus racism.

African American graduates of PWIs need to break out beyond their own black alumni associations and work together to gather information about the status of black students on over 1,000 campuses. The collective action of black PWI alumni can place pressure on schools to change, while also rewarding others that are proactive. We also need to create a racial climate metric for every college and university in the United States, as a way for African American parents to help their

children make decisions about which schools to attend. And African Americans need to leverage one of the most powerful chips we have change . . . the African American high school athlete.

Too often, predominately white colleges and universities enter black communities and offer scholarships to our high school athletes without doing anything to reduce the racism on their campuses. It is classic exploitation, but African Americans can use this situation to change the campus racism dynamic. Simply make sure to inform all African American high school athletes about the racial conditions on campus something that the University of Maryland's Colin Byrd attempted to do, and negatively recruit against any college or university that does not have an acceptable track record of deterring campus racism.

This is activism by African American alumni of PWIs. But the truth is who can make the most difference are the African American students who are already on PWI campuses. Again, it's time for these students to reach beyond their own schools and work together with black college students nationwide. African American college students need to create a national Black Congress of Students, which would meet annually to identify issues that affect not just a handful of campuses but students throughout the country. Working as a collective effectively multiplies the power of black students, particularly on PWIs, where black student numbers are below critical mass.

More than anything, the black college students of today must learn how to confront, confront, and confront their universities' administrations about campus racism. Making the comfortable uncomfortable should be the mantra. You are *not* powerless, and confronting campus racism is about making those who think they have power understand that your moral power is not only greater but inherently predisposed toward victory. Protests, advocacy, and the use of strategy to eradicate campus racism means taking risks, pushing boundaries, and yes, making some people angry. Never compromise on principles, as you'll never get a second chance.

Also, African Americans need to take a second and third look at sending their children, the best and the brightest, to historically black colleges and universities. Too often, African American grads of PWIs look at HBCUs as schools that don't provide that real-world quotient. But isn't a quality education the African American college student's most important need?

As Nikki Giovanni said, she teaches at a PWI because "black students are there." And if those black students are going to be there, then my feeling is that these predominately white schools must not be allowed to treat racism as a normal aspect of college life. Eradicating campus racism produces better college students, both black and white, along with better Americans. And isn't that why we send our children to colleges in the first place?

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