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University of Dayton Campus Climate:

Sunny with a Chance of Microaggressions



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The University of Dayton campus racial climate is sunny with a chance of micro aggressions. "I can't see Kwynn, it is too dark!" "Kwynn is your hair always crazy and wild?" "Kwynn do you know anyone who is in a gang, since you are from Chicago?" was my welcoming statement at a freshman leadership camp. In retrospect, it was naïve of me to think that I chose a different kind of college. I knew what I was getting myself into; I knew that I was attending a predominantly White institution. The University of Dayton is a predominantly White institution. Majority, 87%, of our students are White. I am part of the 3.3% of African Americans. Ever since I stepped into my first class, I felt "minoritized." I have been the only student of color in my classes since my first year. I have only had four professors of color, one for each year, during my undergraduate career at the University of Dayton. The people of color are limited, as well as the resources provided to the people of color at the University of Dayton. Thus, education about different cultures and races, is very scarce. It has been disheartening the way my University has responded, or the lack of response, to many situations on campus. There are three out-

standing instances that I have experienced as a Black woman at the University of Dayton that support my argument for the tense racial climate: "I Heart UD" month, the lack of courses, and of course the nickname for the student neighborhood – "the Ghetto."

During my first year at the University of Dayton, the institution started a crowdfunding campaign during the month of February called "I Heart UD." The marketing for this campaign is ubiquitous on campus. There are "I Heart UD" cookies, t-shirts, email signatures, and brochures everywhere. This abundance of propaganda darkened the spotlight on Black History Month further perpetuating the ignorance around cultural issues on our campus. As the African American rep, I had to beg the Student Government Association (SGA) to intervene and help. Fortunately, the Office of Advancement and Alumni Relations agreed to not market "I Heart UD" month for the first two weeks of February. No student should ever have to compromise over the celebration of their heritage, or fight for the importance of their history. I find it rebarbative that I had to say anything to bring notice about the issue in the

first place. However, because of this and the numerous meetings held about it after, progress was made.

Over the years, the racial divide at the University of Dayton has continued to be divergent. As a columnist for Flyer News, I continued to press the issues of covert racism on the campus. There is an absence of courses on Black history, Latin American history, Asian American history, and Islamic culture at the University of Dayton. Even though I attend a liberal arts college, I feel as if I have only been educated about White culture, and have been fed the White hegemony of thought. The three classes that I was fortunate to take were an African American Film course, a Creating Inclusive Community course (this class examined White privilege) and an American Ethnic Literature course. All three of these classes had only 5-7 students compared to my other classes of 30-40 students. The majority of the students feel threatened by words like privilege, racism, and #BlackLivesMatter, because they do not know what they mean. This ignorance continues to breed racist acts. Racism may not have the face of lynching or yelling racial slurs as much on campus, but it appears in the lack of courses or celebration of history and the absence of opportunities.

The slithering smoke of racism appeared when the news of John Crawford and Michael Brown hit our campus. We held Die-In's and #BlackLivesMatter protests for a week. I was involved in protests, authored controversial articles, while being a Resident Assistant on a majority White floor. I also wrote a play called "UNNOTICED" inspired by the Invisible Man by Ralph Ellison. The play was a product of my experiences at the University of Dayton. The responses from my fellow students were unbearable. To me, the campus had become a

suffocating environment as a Black woman. I could not breathe. I could not be Black and be a student at the University of Dayton. I was forced to choose between the two. There were so many disgusting Yik Yak posts and articles in the campus newspaper. I found it very interesting how my lighter hued counterparts talked about racism as a past fad, a myth even. It just did not exist. Not in our community, not at UD. That is still the mindset of our student body currently.

A revered tradition at the University of Dayton is calling the student neighborhood "the Ghetto." The University of Dayton owns over 200 homes surrounding the college. Moreover, in the surrounding neighborhood near the Holy Angels Church there are in total over 400 houses currently used as residential space. The neighborhood used to be home to employees of the nearby NCR Corporation and other factory workers, but now only houses students. I challenged this so-called tradition. Along with other prominent Black student organizations, we wrote articles in the paper about the word "ghetto," held protests, and received support from SGA to host debates about the use of the word. We met with the provost, the president, and other university officials. Despite all that, the use of the word and the neighborhood nickname remain.

The University of Dayton is known for its community, and I will make sure that the community includes all students at the university. The incidents at Mizzou are not unaccompanied. The solidarity of Black students at Mizzou is paramount and stimulating. It is inspirational to students at predominantly White institutions everywhere, that we can be heard. There needs to be a critical conversation had about the University of Dayton campus climate, so it can actually be sunny without the chance of microaggressions.

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Image by Alex Garland