Dear Officer Bogash: Policing Black Bodies on College Campuses

Jordan S. West
Syracuse University

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Dear Officer Bogash:

Policing Black Bodies on College Campuses

Jordan S. West
Doctoral Student, Syracuse University

Do you remember November 13, 2005? I am almost scared that you don’t and that this day had no impact on you personally and professionally. Although this may have been another day for you as a College Park police officer, this day altered my life. What seemingly began as a fun evening with friends on November 12, 2005,2 surely ended as a horrible morning on November 13, 2005. As you think back and try really hard to remember what could have happened on November 13, 2005, I will begin to fill in some details.

Several friends gathered on the evening of November 12, 2005 in New Leonardtown Apartments and out of fear, engrained fear of Black and brown bodies, a staff member called the police and you arrived. I can situate myself right there in the exact moment when you entered the apartment without knocking or announcing yourself. Right there in the exact moment when you entered the apartment and called the police and you arrived. I can situate myself and ask you to remember November 13, 2005 about ten years later, I find you still exist in my eyes, Officer Bogash. You poisoned my soul. You poisoned my ability to teach. You poisoned my ability to continue to build my armor because you kept showing me that I need to be prepared for war. Perhaps one day I will be able to tell Black and brown people that there is nothing to be afraid of, but until then I will continue to build my armor because you keep showing me that I need to be prepared for war.

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Do you see how this all ties together and creates a system where Black and brown bodies are constantly fighting with the odds against them in everyday situations? Let’s take a few minutes to understand this cycle you failed to interrupt on November 13, 2005. Your treatment of Black bodies, without warrant, led to the arrest of two college students on university property. The arrest led to news coverage by both the campus paper and the local news. The coverage led to multiple pictures throughout the media, intentionally depicting these Black bodies as criminals from the different angles captured. The multiple pictures led to articles with language that only further oppressed and reinforced the idea that Black and brown bodies are criminals. The language used in these articles spread throughout the campus and surrounding community, leading to continued mistreatment by police on these Black bodies and other Black bodies because of course all Black bodies are the same. This continued mistreatment by police led to campus outrage by students of color and fueled dialogues in classrooms. This spread of dialogue within classroom settings was upheld and led by students of color, only furthering the obligation for students of color to be the educators of White people and being vulnerable for the education of White people. Does all of this make sense?

The United States created this really simple system years ago, before we existed, that unfolds each day in ways that oppress individuals who look Black and brown. In the realm of education, there is often discourse around people “trying harder” and the assumption that doing that alone will “equal the playing field.” If the system is intentionally designed to keep Black and brown bodies separate and valued less than White people, I don’t know how much hard work matters. On a daily basis, Black and brown bodies are sent messages by police, educators, and society as a whole that tell them how they should be and when these performances of Black and brown bodies go against the expectations placed upon them, they pose a threat.

When educators, ideally like yourself as a police officer, reinforce expectations that Black and brown bodies are bad, instead of dismantling this assumption, you only further the mistreatment of individuals with Black and brown bodies. The messages you sent to the entire campus community on November 13, 2005 when you brutally beat two Black bodies was that Black and brown bodies are bad, less than, and criminal. You had the chance right at that moment to be different and to interrupt, challenge, and go against the expectations of you as a police officer and educator, but you didn’t.

Thanks to you, I found my voice fighting for racial justice. I am an educator and I will make sure that I am never like you. When I think about November 13, 2005 about ten years later, I find you still exist in spaces throughout our country. Your like-minded colleagues are continuing to uphold the system through the killings of Black and brown bodies. The messages you and your colleagues are sending to each and every community are that Black and brown lives do not matter. You will forever be the system in my eyes, Officer Bogash. You poisoned my perception of police and have only provided me with the option to be a fearless educator and agitator. Perhaps one day I will be able to tell Black and brown people that there is nothing to be afraid of, but until then I will continue to build my armor because you keep showing me that I need to be prepared for war.

With Urgency,
The Unafraid Educator