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Dear Officer Bogash:

Policing Black Bodies on College Campuses



Jordan S. West
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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, 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. Very quickly, the layers of this incident snowballed into what became known as "The Leonardtown Incident." Within a matter of seconds, you made distinct decisions to go from asking us to turn off the music and leave, to using force on the apartment owners, and finally to brutally beating these two Black bodies to a point where

they physically could not do a thing. As you dragged their bodies down multiple flights of stairs, you also thought it would be good to pepper spray those of us being held inside the apartment by your colleague and fellow officer.

This evening ended with the arrest of two Black bodies, two actual people who in your mind were just Black bodies. What I am sure you failed to know was that these two Black bodies were real people. These two Black bodies were sophomores in college, on full scholarships, with futures ahead of them, but you did not let them be anything other than a statistic.

At this exact moment of arrest on November 13, 2005, you shifted my understanding of law enforcement and more specifically the ways in which law enforcement hypercriminalizes Black and brown bodies. I remember being filled with rage and pain. I literally sat at a window watching you brutally attack two Black bodies - you had no regard for who they were and you treated them as if they were not human just like you and me. You responded to a call on a college campus, to address the behav-

iors (loud music) of college students and these college students only became Black and brown bodies. I found myself asking over and over again, what is the hope for brown and Black bodies?

I knew very quickly that my anger, rage, and pain needed to translate into action. I knew no one inside the apartment that night did anything wrong and that I needed to make things better. I recognized that I had some power, which today I would identify as privilege and power. I did not fit the "image" of those you criminalize on a daily basis and I knew I had status as a student leader on the university's campus. Within hours, I had plans to take you down. From ongoing meetings with leadership to protests on campus, I refused to sleep until you faced consequences that could honestly never amount to those that the two Black bodies you beat would face for the rest of their lives.

You are responsible. Officer Bogash, you are Darren Wilson, Daniel Pantaleo, Johannes Mehserle, and the list scarily goes on.

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 arrests 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 bodies are to be feared and that Black bodies are criminals. The language used in these articles spread throughout the cam-

pus 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 be 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



Image Source: US Embassy, The Hague