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A Powerful Generation:

Understanding and Overcoming Race Relations on College Campuses



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We are powerful. We are the generation derived from those born free physically, but bound mentally by accounts of slavery and oppression from our forbearers. We are the generation that can demand respect from any human without trepidation of being hosed down by police or masticated by police canines. We are the generation in which more people of color have the opportunity to participate in higher education. Even so, we are the generation that attend universities (some of us are first generation attendees) where we must fear for our safety as we walk from class to class. We are the generation who, when protesting, are called farm animals and other derogatory terms. We are the generation that is exasperated by parties that plague college campuses mocking our phenotypes, language and culture. Yet we are still powerful.

In light of the racial injustices and acts of blatant racism, namely police brutality and racist and hateful speech, we are reminded that people of color are still not valued in the United States. We are reminded that some police officers still use excessive force on

people of color as seen in the March 2015 incident at the University of Virginia. We are reminded that blackface, taken from 19th century minstrel shows, still functions as a form of entertainment for some White Americans as seen at the University of California San Diego in February 2010, the University of Florida in October 2014, the University of Canterbury in May 2014 and many others. Most importantly, we are reminded through a lack of immediate and sincere retorts from university administration at the University of Missouri, and other campuses in which students must endure racial slurs and other racist incidents, that some Americans believe Black lives do not matter. Circa fifty years succeeding the civil rights movement we are reminded that diversity does not equal inclusivity, nor does it equal respect. It is evident that discrimination suffocates individuals of color, even in the presence of an integrated society. But those that have risen to the occasion and protested through hunger strikes, social media posts, and community discussions have firmly stood in their beliefs that creating equal opportunity, establishing a safe space for people of color on college campuses, and

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diminishing racist ideologies are important because Black lives do, indeed, matter.

For change to be crafted on college campuses there first must be a pervasive understanding that there is, in fact, an issue of race relations. Many Americans are not aware, are not taught, or do not understand the fact that people of color have been, and still are treated differently because of historical and institutionalized racism. In fact, some individuals would rather be unconscious to the fact that racial acts are a part of a larger scale of systemic racism because it disrupts their perception of the world and the institutions they support. Nonetheless, it is imperative that the raw, sometimes unfathomable, often times uncomfortable truth be told. But one of the most taxing aspects of revealing these truths is that people believe we exist in a “post-racial” society. However, in our society in which people of color that strive to receive the same

education as their White counterparts are threatened, disparaged, beaten and terrorized, how can a post-racial claim be made?

One instance in which college students have begun to reiterate the importance of Black lives on college campuses and expose our racist institutions, is through social media. Social media sites are at an apex since their creation and college students are able to better expose matters regarding race on their campuses expeditiously and more widespread. The use of hashtags such as “#insolidaritywith” and inserting a specific universities’ name, videos of protests, and even recordings/stories of racist acts have indicated we will not be complicit like the many faculty, administrators, and students that are at a point of privilege. Through social media we are able to hold those persons and others who may have racist ideologies accountable for their behavior and hopefully transform beliefs.

We are powerful. We are a generation cognizant that there is still racial unrest. We are a generation mindful of our forbearers fight for racial equity and determined to follow in their footsteps. We are a generation that will address the acts of discrimination against people of color, on and off college campuses. We are the generation that is prepared to hold individuals accountable for every act of racial injustice. We are the generation that will forever stand in solidarity with our brothers and sisters no matter what college campus they protest on, no matter how weary and fatigued we may grow. We are the generation that must not and will never give up, for we are powerful.



Image by Matthew Lewis