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Kadeem L. Fuller
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

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Black Activism Matters: Breaking Down The Racial Oppression of Predominantly White Institutions

Kadeem L. Fuller
Doctoral Student, University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign

On November 18, 2015 at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, the Illini White Student Union was formed on Facebook in response to a Black solidarity rally that an organization that I am a part of, Black Students for Revolution, organized. The rally was meant to show solidarity with Black students across the country as well as bring Black students together on campus as a student collective to organize and plan our movement. Although the rally was a success, it created anticipated pushback from White students who saw the rally as a threat to their hierarchy on campus. The group claimed their mission was to monitor Black students that have proven to be anti-White. The people who created the White student union Facebook page publically asked its followers to submit photos of Black students that attended the solidarity rally. The Illini White Student Union used the same tactics that the Klu Klux Klan historically used to terrorize Blacks and other people of color. Allow me to be very clear about this matter, I denounce the group and recognize it for what it truly is, a White supremacist hate group. In the year 2015 there is an open White supremacist group on an American college campus. I, as a Black graduate student, was not alone in acknowledging the group for what it truly was. The Black students that were aware of the creation of the Facebook page also recognized the potential safety concern for all Black students at the university. Because of the very real threat that this White supremacist group presented to each and every Black student on campus, I was interested to see how the administration would handle the situation. Several campus wide emails were sent out in which university administrators spoke about the incident stating, “we recognize the right to free speech” and “we encourage you to exercise that right when you see examples of racism, discrimination or intimidation on our campus.” Although the email did mention that the university administration reported the group to Facebook and the page was flagged and pulled down, the email overall was worded in a manner that failed to denounce the White supremacist group or mention any repercussions for its students who intended to intimidate Black students. The university administration once again sided with White students who felt “uncomfortable” with Black students protesting at a public venue for radical change and the way we are treated at these institutions. The university once again turned its back on Black undergraduate and graduate students that came together to not simply ask for but demand change on our campus.

This is the current reality for myself and many other Black students around the country. Historically, Black students have been marginalized at predominantly White institutions and have for far too long been isolated, alienated, and made to feel as if we are not a part of the university. However, this year movements across the country have begun to sprout from Missouri and Harvard to the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. These movements are led by courageous Black student activists who have grown weary of the status quo and have begun to dismantle years of unconcerned administrators, micro aggressions, and White supremacy that play a part of the collective marginalization of Black students at White institutions. Black students, historically, have been at the forefront fighting for Black rights, and that trend continues today. I stand in solidarity with all movements that attempt to radically remove White supremacy and the oppression of all people of color as well as LGBTQ. As a Black activist-scholar I support and encourage my Black brothers and sisters, because now, more than ever, Black students’ lives matter.

“It is our duty to fight for our freedom. It is our duty to win. We must love each other and support each other. We have nothing to lose but our chains.”

- Assata Shakur