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My Presence is My Protest

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As a Black woman in higher education, my presence is my protest.

I believe in the power of education to increase one's social mobility and ability to pursue life, liberty, and happiness. Currently, access to higher education is limited and remains out of reach for some students. The disparaging underrepresentation of students of color in higher education continues to be an issue facing this nation. Unfortunately, the Black community is delving into a debate over whether or not our Black students should only go to Black schools. While HBCUs are masterful at developing and producing some of the nation's brightest Black leaders, I do not believe that being Black means you are meant to attend an HBCU. Every student has the right to attend a PWI that succeeded, and is succeeding, in an environment that society is trying to tell me is not for me. I'm tired of being a token, an exception, or a novelty because of my race and gender. But, if I don't fight to make a change and make it better for the next generation, then who will? Why not me? Maybe I will always be one of few instead of one of the many, but my students don't have to be. My future colleagues don't have to be. Others fought for me, and so now, I fight for those who are to come. I will not be shut down. I will not retreat. I will not back down.

As I write, my presence is my protest. As a Black woman, despite the barriers and limitations society tries to place on me, I am privileged. I proudly hold two degrees from two different PWIs and I am working on a terminal degree from a third. I refuse to allow myself, or anyone else, to be limited in their achievements because of who they are. I stand as one example of a student of color that succeeded, and is succeeding, in an environment that

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As I work, my presence is my protest. Despite the current debate, I refuse to give into the separatist mentality that Black students should only go to Black schools and will be better served at Black schools.

My PWI gave me a space to surround myself with Black students and explore my Black identity. I did not want to go to an HBCU and find out that I was still not Black enough. I knew that if something went wrong, if my Black peers didn't accept me, if it turned out that I wasn't Black "enough" I knew I could make friends somewhere else. I'd done it before. But where would I go if the Black kids at the all-Black school decided I wasn't good enough, Black enough, cool enough, down enough?

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