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A Powerful Generation: Understanding and Overcoming Race Relations on College Campuses

Lyndzey R. Elliott
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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 exacerbated 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 color on college campuses, and 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.

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