

November 18, 2015

An open letter from staff and faculty of color at Oberlin College and Conservatory:

To the students at Missouri, Yale, Ithaca, Claremont McKenna, and elsewhere, as you have raised your voices against racism to demand better, we have been overcome by heartbreak and inspiration. It is heartbreaking that in 2015 Black and other students of color still encounter racial insensitivity, invalidation, intimidation, and even violence on the campuses that promised to be enlightened and welcoming places of learning for them. Yet it has been inspiring and humbling to witness your courage and unity in confronting not just your campus cultures, but also your most powerful officers to demand accountability for *all students*. It is outrageous that it took putting yourselves and your bodies on the line to compel the changes that we're now seeing. We extend our respect and solidarity, as you are not just working to improve conditions on your campuses, but to create a better world.

To our Black and other students of color at Oberlin, these events have resonated profoundly for us, as surely they have for you. For many of us, supporting, advocating for, and counseling students struggling to find their place in what can be a wearisome racial environment has been a continuous theme in our employment here. We care deeply about your education and success, yet recognize that the culture of elite colleges like Oberlin (what the sociologist Eduardo Bonilla-Silva has called "HWCUs") can demand much more of you than it does on itself to be *truly* diverse and inclusive. Having once been students ourselves, it is disheartening and painful to realize that in many areas, so little has changed. That said, we have also been continually inspired by your resolve to speak up, support one another, and work toward a vision of a more just and equitable community. We celebrate your activism as a continuation of longtime struggles.

To the larger Oberlin community, we are proud of our institution's history and glad that "diversity" is one of our campus's core values, but let's not be complacent. Diversity as a goal is empty if it is not informed by an acknowledgment of racism and commitment to ending it, by *all of us*. Otherwise, recruiting students, staff, and faculty of color is meaningless beyond having colorful brochures and websites. When someone vandalizes the campus with racist graffiti, let's not simply tell the targeted students to ignore it, but take seriously the fear and pain that such incidents produce, understand their cumulative effect when they occur repeatedly, and condemn the actions as attacks on the entire community. When students approach us with their experiences of racial alienation, instead of dismissing their stories, let's consider what actions we can take to change the culture. And let's make sure that disrespect and invalidation do not remain routine experiences of our minority staff and faculty, and acknowledge that the "invisible labor" they perform is itself a symptom of systemic racism.

While the current unrest on campuses arises from ongoing challenges in higher education to promote and achieve diversity, it is also informed by recent developments that have laid bare

the persistence of racial inequality in America. We are in a moment where we can neither afford to deny our failures to achieve equality and justice, nor rest in our pursuit of these goals.

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(names are still being added. these are signatories as of 11/19/15 11:30 AM)