

10/2/15, 9:58 PM Princeton University Google Apps Mail - An Invitation

Wilglory Tanjong
<wtanjong@princeton.edu>

An Invitation ⁶

messages

Christopher L. Eisgruber <eisgruber@princeton.edu> Thu, Apr 9, 2015 at 6:00 PM To: allug@princeton.edu

Dear Students, Faculty, and Staff,

Our campus community is in the midst of two impassioned debates about the impact and limits of stage performances. One debate pertains to the moral culpability of a now-defunct student group “Urban Congo,” a group whose performances were described by its own president as “inexcusably offensive.” The group has apologized and disbanded. The second debate addresses the Undergraduate Student Government’s invitation to Big Sean, a rapper whose songs include lyrics that are vile and demeaning to women and LGBT individuals.

Comedy, satire, and stage performances inevitably transgress boundaries. The controversies they provoke may be genuinely painful, but they are also fundamental to the life of any great University. As the faculty of this University affirmed in a statement that it adopted earlier this week, “the University’s fundamental commitment is to the principle that debate or deliberation may not be suppressed because the ideas put forth are thought by some or even by most members of the University community to be offensive, unwise, immoral, or wrong-headed. . . . Indeed, fostering the ability of members of the University community to engage in such debate and deliberation in an effective and responsible manner is an essential part of the University’s educational mission.”

We must all be mindful, however, that the debates now agitating our campus play out against two backdrops that profoundly affect their impact on the members of our community. First, these debates occur in a time scarred by searing violence—by, in one case, the discriminatory and sometimes deadly use of force against African-Americans, and, in the other case, the disturbing and damaging incidence of sexual assault on college campuses and throughout society. Second, they occur in a new era of social media that breeds an insidious combination of hostility, anonymity, and proximity. In venomous slurs uttered online by anonymous neighbors or classmates, our students see distressing and painful expression within our community of the prejudices and motives that underlie the violence disturbing our nation.

We owe it to ourselves to do better, to be better, and to embrace all the members of our community with respect and with genuine appreciation for the perspectives they bring. We must treat individuals, groups, and cultures with the dignity they deserve; we must not traffic in stereotypes. I accordingly implore all of the Princeton

community to live up to our ideals, to recognize the pain being felt by some members of our community, and to express ourselves in the veiled and dehumanized precincts of social media with the same care that we should bring to more personal interactions.

I also invite you to come together in a fuller, more human, and more personal way by joining me this Sunday, April 12, at 2:00 p.m. for a gathering of our campus community in the University Chapel that will provide us all with an opportunity to recognize the obligations we have to understand and care for each other, to affirm the ties that bind us

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9:58 PM together, and to strengthen the community that we share. We hope that this gathering will also lay the groundwork for further constructive engagement in the weeks to come, including a faculty panel to be held next week.

! ! Chris Eisgruber

Destiny Crockett <datc@princeton.edu> Thu, Apr 9, 2015 at 7:55 PM To: "Christopher L. Eisgruber" <eisgruber@princeton.edu>

President Eisgruber,

I'm not sure we've met in person yet. I'm Destiny Crockett, a sophomore studying English and African American Studies.

With much respect, I do regret that you sent this out as a response to debates going on on campus. Many of us were waiting for a response from administration, and since you act as the necessary spokesperson for Princeton University administration, I was glad when I saw that the email came from you (this time).

However, I wish you would have kept your response if this is the most sincere call to action you can muster. I have a million thoughts in my head, but I'll outline a few that I think I can make most clear to you--as I can tell that you and I probably would not agree on many things regarding race and its role in scholarly thought and discourse.

My first problem is your language, which I assume was meant to be inclusive, but it was not.

Discourse shapes how we think of things. You begin by saying that police violence is "sometimes deadly" for African Americans. This means that either the protests my friends and I organized were not successful in raising your consciousness, or you genuinely see nothing wrong with being dismissive about the violence Black people either dodge or fall victim to *every single day*.

But that's not it on discourse. You say that "some members of the community" were hurt by Urban Congo's performance. It would be nice for you to acknowledge that this is seen as violence on Black students. You can, and should, say Black people. It shows that you see us, and, for once, acknowledge us as students on this campus. My firm belief is that anyone (in this case, you) who is afraid to say "Black people" when referencing us is trying fervently to hide some anti-Black sentiments.

Now I'm on to what you call "debates." Racial slurs are not scholarly thought. Telling Black students that they just need to be glad that they go here do not make for deliberations. When you say that these things are hurtful, they are mostly hurtful to Black students (but I think you knew that) and you should make it clear that anything that is disproportionately hurtful to one group of people of color is almost certainly racist. It is not a crime to tell white students to do better. I'd argue that it is "fundamental" to educating white students. No, we don't "all" need to do better at making sure this is

an inclusive community. Racist white students need to do better at not being racist. Those of us who hear their slurs and see their minstrel shows need to do better at self-care, so we can go on to get our degrees, and join the throng of Black alumni who cringe when asked about Princeton.

It is not "fundamental" to any academic setting to have "debates" that make its students of color feel threatened at a time when white on Black (unpunished) violence is so prevalent that a Black student may have a legitimate fear of what a white student who defends racism in a "debate" may well do when Public Safety is not around. Aside from the threat of physical violence, it is not part of scholarly thought or discourse to assert superiority (as many white students do, in person and online) on a student of color. It is wrong. I'd argue that saying it is okay for some students to be hurt by racism had the same impact that it would have had had you sent us all hate speech.

At the meeting on Sunday, I should hope that you listen genuinely and critically. Students are not coming to argue with you. Many of us are coming with the intent to explain oppression (that we should not have to explain, as information

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9:58 PM about race and privilege is available for anyone who cares to know).

I'm willing to meet with you in person before or after the meeting if anything I said in this email seemed unclear.

Best always, Destiny Crockett

[Quoted text hidden] -- **Destiny Crockett Princeton University 2017**

Wilglory Tanjong <wtanjong@princeton.edu> Thu, Apr 9, 2015 at 8:22 PM To: "Nshira A. Turkson" <nturkson@princeton.edu>

Wilglory Tanjong

[Quoted text hidden]

Brandon Holt <bholt@princeton.edu> Thu, Apr 9, 2015 at 9:00 PM To: "Christopher L. Eisgruber" <eisgruber@princeton.edu>

President Eisgruber,

My name is Brandon Holt and I am a senior in the History Department and African-American Studies. I write to you to express my continued disappointment in this University, particularly in light of your e-mail concerning racism on campus. I have a lot of thoughts right now, but I am going to focus on one piece of your e-mail regarding academic freedom and the "fundamentals" of the University. Many black students awaited a statement from you, as president of this "community," in response to recent incidents of racism and violence on campus. To say it most frankly, many of us were left extraordinarily unimpressed and disappointed. First, you labeled instances of racism under the blanket term of "controversies." When marginalized students ask their University to respond to their oppression, the University has a responsibility to first identify those experiences. Name racism exactly what it is: racism. When you identify and name our oppression, you not only recognize that you see and hear us but that you also recognize, as a problem, the unique experiences that we have as students of color on this campus. You can't begin to fix a problem unless you first identify it. But then there is the ultimate issue: do you not see the state of campus as a problem? Have you not heard and truly taken to heart the experiences of oppression students of color have been experiencing since they stepped foot on this campus? Experiences that they have frankly articulated to you in "conversation" after "conversation" since December? Have we not "convinced you," as you asked us to on December 2, 2014 after Russ Nieli violently dismissed every black student as too dumb to be a

student here? I digress.

Second, the way that you defended racist activity under the guise of academic freedom is offensive at best, but more accurately an act of violence against every student of color, and for that matter every marginalized student on this campus. You need to be clear that there are limits to free speech and freedom of expression. People don't just get to go around doing and saying whatever they please. Hate speech exists. You said to students who are hurting and feeling unsafe and most certainly unwelcome:

"Comedy, satire, and stage performances inevitably transgress boundaries. The controversies they provoke may be genuinely painful, but they are also fundamental to the life of any great University." Let me be clear how that was read: racism, although "genuinely painful," is "fundamental to the life of [Princeton]." I had a very difficult time suppressing feelings of absolute anger. The guise of academic freedom is an example of

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9:58 PM institutional tradition that perpetuates and bleeds oppression. It allows people to say and do what they please and frame it as a contribution to academic and scholarly discussion. As a University with over 200 years of history that only catered to a white male student, the University has to think critically, and albeit revolutionarily, if it wishes to deconstruct the oppressive structures and traditions on which this school was built and continues to stand. The thing this University should consider "fundamental," is the safety of its students. When you tell me that my experiences of pain and oppression are necessary so that this University can function, you confirm that my presence (not that I needed you to tell me) is not welcome here. You tell me that I need to shut up, take it, and be thankful that Janet Rapelye let me into this school. When you frame oppression under the guise of academic freedom, you blame the oppressed for their own oppression. You tell them that they must debate and defend their personhood and humanity, and that if they don't engage in "scholarly" debate that oppressive thoughts will perpetuate. No. That is not how this works. You don't get to make excuses for oppressors and criticize and blame the oppressed.

At this point this is not about me. I am a senior who has turned in his thesis and is awaiting the day that I am able to skip out of FitzRandolph Gate, never to return to these hollowed walls of racism, oppression, and white supremacy. This is about the students below me and the future students who will come to this University. They should not have to endure the hell I have endured just to get an education. Especially because the University is so set in its racist traditions, unwilling to truly acknowledge and structurally accommodate their presence.

I haven't decided if I'll be attending this "community meeting" on Sunday. But if I do attend, and if other marginalized students do attend, it is to do the unpaid work of articulating our oppression to you (even though Google is readily available and it is **not** our responsibility). It is not an opportunity for you to debate or tell us that are experiences are not what we, in fact, experienced them to be.

Stressed and tired, Brandon

Brandon Holt Princeton University '15 Department of History Program in African American Studies

On Thu, Apr 9, 2015 at 6:00 PM, Christopher L. Eisgruber <eisgruber@princeton.edu> wrote: [Quoted text hidden]

Asanni York <aayork@princeton.edu> Thu, Apr 9, 2015 at 9:06 PM To: "Joanna C. Anyanwu" <janyanwu@princeton.edu>, "Martina V. Fouquet" <mfouquet@princeton.edu>, "Cameron A. Maple" <cmapple@princeton.edu>, Paul Riley <priley@princeton.edu>, Brandon Holt <bholt@princeton.edu>, "Dashaya J. Foreman" <dforeman@princeton.edu>, Malachi Byrd <mbyrd@princeton.edu>, Destiny

Crockett <atc@princeton.edu>, "John S. Wilson III" <jswilson@princeton.edu>, "Joaquin E. Garcia" <joaquing@princeton.edu>, Khallid Love <klove@princeton.edu>, Naimah Hakim <nhakim@princeton.edu>, "Nshira A. Turkson" <nturkson@princeton.edu>, Ozi Obi-Onuoha <oao@princeton.edu>, Rana Ibrahim <ribrahim@princeton.edu>, Tejumade Adewole <tadewole@princeton.edu>, Yoselin Gramajo <mgramajo@princeton.edu>, Sol Taubin <staubin@princeton.edu>, Wilglory Tanjong <wtanjong@princeton.edu>

My response to Eisgruber. --Asanni York | Princeton University | Class of 2017 Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs Program in African American Studies 678-308-0364 | aayork@princeton.edu

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9:58 PM **From:** Asanni York <aayork@princeton.edu> **Subject:** Re: An Invitation **Date:** April 9, 2015 at 9:01:26 PM EDT **To:** "Christopher L. Eisgruber" <eisgruber@princeton.edu>

Eisgruber,

For part of this email, I was rooting for you. You started out talking about a "now-defunct Urban Congo," and how you thought the performance was "inexcusably offensive." I was so excited to finally be hearing from the University president, who for so long has remained silent or stood against many things that could make black students feel safe on this campus.

Then, you weren't completely left. You so kindly stated that "comedy, satire, and stage performances inevitably transgress boundaries. The controversies they provoke may be genuinely painful, but they are also fundamental to the life of any great University. As the faculty of this University affirmed in a statement that it adopted earlier this week, 'The University's fundamental commitment is to the principle that debate or deliberation may not be suppressed because the ideas put forth are thought by some or even by most members of the University community to engage in such debate and deliberation in an effective and responsible manner is an essential part of the University's educational mission.'"

Controversies are essential to the University? How so? Since when was the marginalization of select communities fundamental to the life of any University? Since when was the marginalization of select communities fundamental to the life of the University where those communities attend to actively pursue an education? Since when were they necessary to generate debate around the topics of racism? Have you not seen the threats that your black students have faced at the hands of your white students as a result of this "fundamental controversy?" Is this also inevitable? Do I (or any other person in any other marginalized group, for that matter) have to walk around feeling unsafe so that your white students can talk about these issues? Because I'm pretty sure I didn't sign up for that. In fact, I'm pretty sure the "Right's, Rules, and Responsibilities" handout says that I have a right not to feel like this. But wait, I guess that's not important, as the "Freedom of Speech" statement your oh-so-intelligent, world-renowned faculty released also directly contradicted sections in this, and yet, you approved of it.

Then you go into police brutality and sexual assault, and connect it back to the actions taking place on campus. And that's where my confusion began to run deeper. Maybe you don't understand the idea of violence extending beyond physicality. How can you throw in this paragraph acknowledging and detesting the physical violence against black people and women (of all races) into an email where you just gave your acceptance to verbal and non-intentional violence aimed at those same

groups? Do you not understand that there are more than 1 type of violence? Further, do you not understand that these different types of violence are connected more often than not? Again, I must reference Yik-Yak, where your black students have been threatened with physical violence as a result of protesting privileged white men making a mockery and bastardization of African culture and identity. Again, I must reference Yik-Yak, where jokes about sexual assault have been made. I must reference every day conversation, where black students can walk through this campus and have insults hurled at them because they were associated with speaking out against racism. Again, I must reference everyday social settings where your female student body faces the possibility of sexual assault (or sexual harassment) in everyday settings. Did it ever occur to you that perhaps the social/verbal violence you and your University professors condone under the guise of freedom of speech was at all connected to the physical violence

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9:58 PM experienced by women or the discomfort your black students feel at the threats they've experience recently? Nope? Cool.

The inherent contradictions and disrespect in this email are confounding at this point. But wait, there are two paragraphs left. You charge your student body with "doing better, being better, and embracing all the members of our community and respect and with genuine appreciation." Did they do that before you made it explicitly clear that they have the right to say whatever offensive things they think? Did Urban Congo do that? Did Professor Neili do that? Did Harvey Rosen do that? Did they? Do you, Eisgruber? Because I'm pretty sure they didn't. I'm pretty sure these aren't isolated events. So, now that you have made explicit the right to speak as one wishes, you want them to not utilize this right, and to instead be respectful to groups that are susceptible to marginalization? When they weren't capable of doing this before?

And lastly, you invite all the students to come together to discuss the happenings of late? I remember talking to you at a personal dinner about the ideology of self-selection, in which offers extended to general audiences are normally taken up by people remotely interested in the issue. I guess that conversation didn't stick, and thus I'll reiterate it here: The only people that will show up to that meeting are the people affected by recent occurrences and those interested in the topic. The ones that need to be there - the one's on Yik-Yak, the one's that like statuses that condone speaking out about oppression and marginalization, the ones actively partaking in oppression and marginalization - will not. So what do you hope to accomplish? Obviously not much. At all.

It's a sad day, when your own University president will not address the dehumanization his black students face because he's afraid of losing donations. At this point, if this is what your statements are going to look like, please keep them. I'm so incredibly tired of being enrolled at a University whose administration holds no punches in showing that they don't care enough to even understand fundamental issues surrounding members of the community who don't look like them. It's a shame when your University can release all these diversity and inclusion measures, and you realize that none of them were done to actually address issues, but to place bandages over them or to avoid them completely. Do not look at this as another ungrateful black student, dissatisfied with whatever measures you've taken to address the University. Hidden in this email is disrespect, contradiction, and utter lack of care.

With disappointment and great concern, --Asanni York | Princeton University | Class of 2017
Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs [Program in African American Studies](#)

678-308-0364 | aayork@princeton.edu

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9:58 PM now-defunct student group "Urban Congo," a group whose performances were described by its own president as "inexcusably offensive." The group has apologized and disbanded. The second debate addresses the Undergraduate Student Government's invitation to Big Sean, a rapper whose songs include lyrics that are vile and demeaning to women and LGBT individuals.

Comedy, satire, and stage performances inevitably transgress boundaries. The controversies they provoke may be genuinely painful, but they are also fundamental to the life of any great University. As the faculty of this University affirmed in a statement that it adopted earlier this week, "the University's fundamental commitment is to the principle that debate or deliberation may not be suppressed because the ideas put forth are thought by some or even by most members of the University community to be offensive, unwise, immoral, or wrong-headed. . . . Indeed, fostering the ability of members of the University community to engage in such debate and deliberation in an effective and responsible manner is an essential part of the University's educational mission."

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I also invite you to come together in a fuller, more human, and more personal way by joining me this Sunday, April 12, at 2:00 p.m. for a gathering of our campus community in the University Chapel that will provide us all with an opportunity to recognize the obligations we have to understand and care for each other, to affirm the ties that bind us together, and to strengthen the community that we share.

We hope that this gathering will also lay the groundwork for further constructive engagement in the weeks to come, including a faculty panel to be held next week.

! ! Chris Eisgruber

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10/2/15, Princeton University Google Apps Mail - An Invitation 9:58 PM **Joanna Anyanwu** <janyanwu@princeton.edu> Thu, Apr 9, 2015 at 11:54 PM To: "Christopher L. Eisgruber" <eisgruber@princeton.edu> Cc: allug@princeton.edu

Dear President Eisgruber,

I hope this email finds you well. You may not remember me but we've met and spoken several times, particularly about matters addressed in this email. In any case, my name is Joanna Anyanwu, I'm a senior in the Wilson School and I'm writing you to express my misgivings and grave disappointment about various aspects of your email.

First of all, I believe it is wholly inappropriate and irresponsible to conflate the two "controversies" currently capturing the campus' attention as they are regarding distinct issues that demand separate attention. As such, they lose nuance once you address them in the blanket manner that you did. It also suggests to me that you do not fully understand the gravity of the issues at hand. Moreover, while I appreciate the need to contextualize issues, I do not appreciate the intimation that the concerns brought up would be less valid were it not for the larger national conversation occurring around similar topics.

More importantly, some of my grievances are particularly in relation to the second paragraph of your email in which you say, "The controversies they provoke may be genuinely painful, but they are fundamental to the life of any great University." What those words demonstrate are a fundamental disregard for Black life and Black experiences. They are yet another example in a long history of how the experiences of Black people and Black bodies become cultural spectacle, objects for white consumption, profit and power. What is intimated by your words is that the marginalization of Black individuals is justified, even "fundamental", as you put it, in order for this (predominantly white) University to profit and thrive. And so, we see, as it has since America's inception, how capitalism works in concert with racism, demanding the commodification of the Black experience and the Black body in order to generate profit. As such, by suggesting that the oppressive experiences of Black students are "fundamental", your words condone and uphold oppressive systems that serve to benefit members of the dominant group.

On a personal note, when you say that painful controversies are fundamental to the life of any great University, I hear that racism and the subsequent pain it inflicts are excusable, even necessary; what I hear is the devaluation of a bastardized, Western stereotypic understanding of "African" culture is essential; what I hear is that the targeted attacks to which I was subject to on social media platforms such as YikYak and which made me feel genuinely physically unsafe on this campus are justified. This suggests to me that this University does not value my safety and well-being and as such, I am not welcome here.

What's more, your words demand that the experiences of the marginalized act as "teaching moments" for their oppressors, which further compounds marginalization. Black people are not consumable goods and to treat us and our experiences as such is dehumanizing. This also brings me to your latter points on the need for "constructive engagement" and your invitation to gather at the chapel. Although this has been articulated time and time again, it bears repeating: the oppressed do **not** have a responsibility to educate their oppressors. Black people do not solely exist for the service of white people, even if that service, as defined by white people, is supposed to make them "better people" and "less racist". The onus is on them to take the initiative and educate themselves and improve. The demand that Black people perform this unpaid labor on top of the burden of daily harassment and marginalization is unacceptable, particularly when white individuals have access to a plethora of resources here at what is supposed to be a world-class institution. Barring that, Google is always a welcome resource. What it all boils down to however, is that racism is **not** a Black problem. As primary beneficiaries and perpetrators of the system of white supremacy, the onus is on white individuals who genuinely aim to dismantle these systems of oppression to seek out the means to do so on their own. Moreover, the assumption behind "constructive engagement" is that such engagement is just that,

"constructive"; however, my experiences over the past several months, in which I have been in "conversation" with myriad faculty and administration have been less than fruitful, leading me not only to doubt the usefulness of said conversations but to conclude that they are a tool of delay, appease, and silence, which ultimately serves to maintain the status quo of oppression.

Finally, and perhaps most troubling has been your consistent conflation of hate speech with free speech. You cited the

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9:58 PM recent faculty statement on freedom of expression and I cannot help but be reminded of the recent "religious freedom" bills that have been passed in various states and have been--in my opinion, rightfully--condemned as thinly veiled attempts to justify discriminatory acts/speech under the guise of protecting "freedom of expression". As we have seen throughout this University's history (Shockley and Nieli come to mind), bigoted speech comes at little, if any, cost here and if anything, is vigorously protected. Meanwhile, as an article in the Atlantic so eloquently put it (on the limits of free speech), "those targeted by the speech are forced to speak out, yet again, to reassert their right to be treated equally, to be free to learn or work or live in an environment that does not threaten them with violence...Counterspeech is exhausting and distracting, but if you are the target of hatred you have little choice. "Speak up! Remind us why you should not be lynched." You can stay silent but that internalizes the taunt." And so, students are made to choose between staying silent or speaking up, and those who speak up are eventually silenced once they realize that their actions are ultimately futile given the University's refusal to act appropriately. Thus, we see how a tool that is ostensibly supposed to protect speech silences the already marginalized and gives oppressors free reign. Not only is there an inherent contradiction in asking that we "do better" and treat each other with dignity while endorsing all forms of speech as acceptable, there seems to be a failure to recognize that hate speech is not only **not** free speech but is definitely not of scholarly merit. Moreover, as described above, it again places the burden on the oppressed to continuously attempt to reassert their humanity, prove they are worthy of equal treatment rather on the University to foster a safe environment in which all of its students can thrive free of harassment and incessant attacks on their identity. Personally, had I known that this was the stance taken by the University on such issues, I would not have come here and frankly, I cannot in good conscience, advise other students of color to attend this institution.

I did not come to this University to debate or prove my humanity or to educate my peers. I came here to learn just like everyone else. And yet it seems that I am demanded to do just that every single day,--on top of the burden of academic, athletic, and social life. It is exhausting, it is draining, and especially after the experiences of the past several days in which I was specifically targeted on YikYak, it has brought me to tears. These are not the experiences I want future students of color at this University to undergo. This is not a plea for you to recognize my humanity. My self-worth does not rely on you or anyone else. This is me fulfilling a duty I believe I have to myself and to those who come after me to hold this institution accountable. I sincerely hope these words make a difference to you and make a difference for the students of color who come after me.

Best, Joanna Anyanwu

[Quoted text hidden] -- Joanna Anyanwu [Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs](#)

Princeton University | 2015 janyanwu@princeton.edu

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