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Your Life as a Minority at Gettysburg College

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Your Life as a Minority at Gettysburg College

Author Bio

Margaret (Jenn) is a sophomore Health Sciences major and Women, Gender, and Sexuality minor from New York City. She is the president and director of the Gettysburg Gospel Choir and the secretary and pictorian for the Diversity Peer Educators. She strives to be a nurse practitioner that specializes in women's and children's health. She loves being involved on campus and getting to know students from various backgrounds. She is very excited to be going to Nicaragua and Kenya this year through the Center for Public Service. She loves fashion, photography, and life.

Your Life as a Minority at Gettysburg College

Margaret J. Johnson

You grow up in a city that is predominately people of color. You are happy in this place because you fit in and are not judged. Yet sometimes the fairer-skinned people of color are put on a pedestal. Even though your mother is also fair-skinned, you hear her saying that the Puerto Ricans are always rude to her at work. You hear her saying that the Dominicans never want to hire her, but are quick to hire another Dominican if he or she applies for that same job. You like where you live because you know that everyone knows what it feels like to be a minority.

You graduate from a high school that is also mostly people of color. You finally get accepted to a college and even though it was not your first choice, you are elated. You arrive on campus on a hot mid-August morning and all you see are white people. Talk about culture shock. Let's see how many dark faces you can count, 1...2...is that it?

After being at this school for a few weeks, you begin to think about transferring to a college that is more "diverse," whatever that means. Every weekend you hear the girls in your hall yelling about how they cannot wait to go fratting. They are excited to dress up, dance with guys, drink, and hook-up. You and a group of your friends (black friends, to be exact) decide to go fratting. You walk into the frat and the first comment a brother says to you is, "Oooo, we have some dancers in here today!" Apparently, all black people can dance. You are there for about an hour and still no guy has asked you or your friends to dance. You wonder why. Is it what you are wearing? Is it because you are black? Are they intimidated by you? If not, then why do they always dance with the white girls and not with you? You remember a friend telling you that they are intimidated and are not used to being around black people. You understand that many of them went to a boarding school and have not been around a lot of black people, but honestly, what is there to be afraid of? What could you possibly do to harm them? If the guys think you are not attracted to them, they are wrong. Skin color should not determine your interest in a person; and it doesn't.

You decide to go fratting again, to give it another try. You and your friends walk into a different frat and the first thing you hear is "Look, the black girls are here." Not again, you say in your head. Does someone always

have to make a comment every time you and your friends walk into a frat?! The music is not that good anyway. You like listening to all types of music, but you cannot dance to all types of music. All they play here is techno and hard rock. They play songs like “Around the World” by Daft Punk. How are you supposed to dance to this? All the drunk brothers are jumping up and down and spilling beer on you and your friends so you decide to leave.

You and your classmates are asked to write a group laboratory report in your Biology 112 lab. When it is time to work on the project, your group members do not want to hear what you have to say; instead, they talk over you. You make a suggestion about how to write the results section of the lab and they act like they do not hear you. You ask a question and they all look down or they say, “I don’t know.” You tell one of the girls that she wrote the works cited section the wrong way and she says, “What are you talking about? This is how I write it in my chemistry class.” But this is not a chemistry class, stupid, you say in your head. You ask her to send you the works cited section so that you can do it the right way and she says that there is no point. This girl is getting on your last nerve. You ask your roommate, who is also part of your group, to send you the section so that you can edit it. A few weeks later when the lab results come back, you get an A on the works cited section and a 91 on the lab. Do they think you are stupid because you are black? If yes, then how did you get into this school? If you speak up and defend yourself, they will say that you are “ghetto,” whatever that means. If you do not speak up, then this will happen again and again. You are in a double-bind and there is no way out.

You are in your room talking to friends on Facebook when one of your friends bangs on the door. You open it and see that she is infuriated. “What’s the matter?” you say. She tells you that she went upstairs to help a friend with his physics homework and his roommate said that she says “ask” like a Southern ducky. What the hell does that mean? You become angry, too. Your friend tells you that he said he has the right to say this because he is from Georgia. So being from the South gives him a good reason to be racist, right? You and your friend are from New York City and you have a New York accent. Most people from Britain have an English accent and most people from Africa have an African accent. You tell your friend not to be mad because, obviously, he is ignorant and does not know what he is talking about but she decides to bring it up at the next eRace meeting, which is a weekly discussion about race on campus. Sometimes you feel like there is no point in getting angry anymore because nothing will be done, especially in this school where the majority is Caucasian. This school, and other institutions, do things that favor the majority. For example, the music being played in the frat houses favor the majority of the school, which are the Caucasians. If most minorities on campus do not like

the music, then why will they go fratting?

A week later, you and your sophomore friend decide to have breakfast together. You ask her what her plans are for the weekend and she says she has nothing planned. You ask her about sophomore housing and she gives you some advice on the best housing and how to get in next year. She tells me that even though she likes living in the College Apartments she was called the “N-Word” twice by the people that lived near the campus. But she is not even dark-skinned! Unbelievable! Is everyone racist around here?

You experienced culture shock during your first semester. You are now in your second semester and learning to adjust. You decide to be more open-minded about getting to know new people; everyone here is not an ignorant racist. You have made some really good friends so far. You have three more years in this school, so you better make the best of it or it will be a miserable three years. It is your choice.