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Porch Culture: The Stoop of Entitlement

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Porch Culture: The Stoop of Entitlement

Abstract

To the class of 2017:

Welcome to Gettysburg. Welcome to the next four years of your life. Welcome to the school where you spend vast amounts of time at or trying to get into a Fraternity House. Welcome to the school plagued by porch culture. [*excerpt*]

Keywords

Surge, Surge Gettysburg, Gettysburg College, Center for Public Service, college, college culture, fraternity parties, Greek Life, entitlement, prejudice, humiliation

Disciplines

Community-Based Research | Domestic and Intimate Partner Violence | Educational Sociology | Gender and Sexuality | Politics and Social Change | Social Psychology and Interaction | Sociology

Comments

Surge is a student blog at [Gettysburg College](#) where systemic issues of justice matter. Posts are originally published at surgegettysburg.wordpress.com Through stories and reflection, these blog entries relate personal experiences to larger issues of equity, demonstrating that –isms are structural problems, not actions defined by individual prejudice. We intend to popularize justice, helping each other to recognize our biases and unlearn the untruths.

SURGE

[VERB] : to move suddenly or powerfully forward or upward

PORCH CULTURE: THE STOOP OF ENTITLEMENT

August 26, 2013

To the class of 2017:

Welcome to Gettysburg. Welcome to the next four years of your life. Welcome to the school where you spend vast amounts of time at or trying to get into a Fraternity House. Welcome to the school plagued by porch culture.



The first time I went to a fraternity house was a terrifying experience. My friends and I didn't even make it to the porch before a brother shouted, "No way! Go home freshmen!"

When we tried again another weekend, we still didn't know the unwritten-unsaid rules: I didn't check to see if my group of friends had the correct girl-to-guy ratio; I didn't dress in a short skirt or a low-cut top; and I didn't check to see if anyone knew any brothers working the door that night. My heart pounded as I approached the house and looked up the steps at the guys standing on the porch chatting and laughing with each other. With each step I climbed, my mouth grew drier, and I kept fiddling with my hair because I worried about how it looked. The guy standing there shouted, "None of you can come in, we're full!" He pointed at me and said, "Except you, honey, the blonde, you can come in!" He asked me my name and told me I looked like his "next girlfriend." The leering way he tried to stare down my shirt and the way his friends laughed as he called out to me made me feel like I was on display. Since then, I have been teased and joked around with on porch steps and even in those moments of "fun" and "jest," I shivered to myself waiting to be hit on, judged, stared at and denied access. The feelings I had approaching the house that first night never went away in all the time I was a student at Gettysburg.

It would be one thing for someone to say, "Hey, sorry, we can't let you in tonight, we're filled to capacity..." or, "We don't know you that well so we're not comfortable letting you in..." Instead, they say, "get the fuck off my porch! I don't want to see you here" or "who the hell do you think you are, coming up my porch like that?" Yes, these things were actually shouted at my friends – especially my male friends, for whom it was harder to get into a frat. I quickly discovered one thing: it was easier to get in if you were a girl, especially in a large group of girls. Bonus points if you looked hot.

As a member of Alpha Delta Pi, I have witnessed the positive impact that Greek Life can have on an individual and a community. In the three years that I was a member of Greek life at Gettysburg, I learned how to communicate with many different types of people, both student and faculty; I learned how to share my opinion

without disrespecting someone else's; and I gained confidence to take on leadership positions with many responsibilities. I also found a group of women who became some of my best friends, who like to laugh as much as I do, and who believe in supporting one another and the community through philanthropic events and volunteering.

Even after becoming a member of Greek life and getting to know more people in the Greek system, though, I still got nervous approaching the porch. It didn't matter that I was friends with all the brothers and knew most of the people standing on the porch; I still felt subjected to judgment and rejection.

In many other spheres of campus life, I knew these men as friends and equals. What was it that always gave them this power over me and invoked this fear in me when I stepped up to their porch on a Friday night?

In some ways, this question about the porch reminds me of riding the bus when I was young. I knew that the back of the bus was where the older kids sat. Through intimidation, they let others know that if you were young (or not "cool"), you were not allowed to sit back there. The backseat bullies were once younger and excluded from the back; they learned to use the power of intimidation gained from their seniority simply by riding on the bus and learning the culture.

The difference between the bus and the porch is that these men live in these spaces. I can empathize with the brothers in being selective about who they allow into the place where they pay to live, sleep, eat, study and hang out. However, this is no excuse to act like 8th grade bullies on the bus, using appearance to quickly judge whether or not a person is worthy of being trusted, especially if that means using factors like beauty, wealth, or race to make such judgments.

In my experience, it's not the Greek system itself and it's not the Greek men. The issue with porch culture arises from the power that we give to those men in those organizations on those porches. Greek life has historically been a supreme force in the social scene at Gettysburg, which leads fraternity members to feel entitled to use and abuse that power. It doesn't help that the porch literally gives those who stand upon it a step-up above everyone else. In America, the porch has historically been [a place where people can gather](#), a place [where connections are built](#), and a [symbol of community and security](#). It is not meant to be a place where people stand divided. This sense of having privilege over our peers is not healthy and not right.

To the men and women who stand on porches: standing on the porch, like sitting on the back of the bus, gives you power. You can use that power to change the porch culture on our campus. I will respect your right to decide who enters your house; in exchange, will you respect us by dropping the humiliating and intimidating tactics used in the past?

To all of my fellow Gettysburgians, and the newest class to attend Gettysburg College, I leave you with this: These four years here will be filled with your choices – and they are exactly that. Yours. Many of us didn't have a choice of riding the bus or not. Every day, when we let the big kids yell intimidating things at us and we responded with fear, we unwittingly enabled their power. But we don't have to enable porch culture. If it does not change, we can accept that there are alternative activities to take part in, and we can refuse to let others treat us with disrespect. Only when we finally tire of putting up with the porch culture can we say "see ya" to entitlement, prejudice, and humiliation. All you have to do is step off the stoop.

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