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To My Peers Dismayed by the Looting

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To My Peers Dismayed by the Looting

Abstract

“...Violent acts of protesters.”

“...destruction of properties.”

“...looting stores.”

I tried to hide my frustration as I listened to the class discussion taking place. How can people be so easily influenced by mainstream media and focus on the acts of a few individuals instead of thousands of peaceful protesters? [*excerpt*]

Keywords

Surge, Surge Gettysburg, Gettysburg College, Center for Public Service, protests, violence, African American advancement

Disciplines

African American Studies | Race, Ethnicity and Post-Colonial Studies

Comments

Surge is a student blog at [Gettysburg College](http://www.gettysburg.edu) 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

TO MY PEERS DISMAYED BY THE LOOTING

December 8, 2014

“...Violent acts of protesters.”

“...destruction of properties.”

“...looting stores.”



I tried to hide my frustration as I listened to the class discussion taking place. How can people be so easily influenced by mainstream media and focus on the acts of a few individuals instead of thousands of peaceful protesters?

Don't get me wrong; I do not condone violence in any form and for any reason. I spent the first half of my life living in a country ravaged by an 11-year civil war. I know from firsthand experience that violence is never the answer.

I also know that focusing on looting, denying police brutality, instinctively defending our legal system and diverting the focus to delegitimize the dead is not the answer either.

We cannot afford linear thinking. We cannot afford to sit in silence or denial, choosing to let years of white supremacist ideology blind us from naming how that same ideology maintains injustice in our lives.

As students of the liberal arts, we pride ourselves in our ability to engage in multiple perspectives. The [Gettysburg College mission statement](#) focuses on developing students who have the ability to think critically with a broad vision, to understand the inter-relatedness of issues and to be sensitive to the human condition.

Yet listening to the conversation in my class (and the deafening silence of business-as-usual in most other places), these values are clearly absent.

As students, we should be able to challenge the [single story](#), narratives that, as that Chimamanda Adichie warns, are used to “dispossess and to malign...to break the dignity of a people.”

Our sensitivity to the human condition should enable us to look at the events in Ferguson or Staten Island and not dismiss them as a mob of “angry black people complaining about something yet again.”

As students who understand the inter-relatedness of issues, we must not view the deaths of Michael Brown, Eric Garner, Tamir Rice and countless others as isolated incidents.

As students with the ability to think critically with a broad vision we should understand the distraction that occurs when we focus our discussions on the consequential anger, and not the wider systemic issues at play.

We should be using the privilege of education to its fullest potential to understand Ferguson as the spark that set off America’s “racial powder keg.” We should understand that systemic and institutional injustices have been entrenched into our legal and political systems, our economy and our culture for over 400 years. We should uncover the subtle (and even more [dangerous](#)) forms of racism and oppression that we allow our systems to uphold, injustices that have finally become too much to bear.

But that is where the problem lies.

To my classmates dismayed by the looting, let’s be cautious of how we process the information we receive so as not to put limitations on the scope and complexity of the crisis and on ourselves as critical thinkers.

Let’s connect the dots between looting and the larger issues. Precincts are being redrawn and restrictions implemented to dilute the voting strength of people of color. Government payrolls that have long served as sources of black employment are being slashed. The criminal justice system disproportionately incarcerates men of color with the prison population growing by 700% in the last 40 years. Federal laws governing immigrant economic and political power limit the availability, accessibility and use of health services. And that is just a few of the dots.

We should also take a deeper look into this country’s history and ask ourselves: why is there always a backlash after every period of [African American advancement](#)?

We are in Gettysburg after all, a place rich in history. The place where Lincoln said, “It is for us the living to be dedicated to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced.”

As liberal arts students, let’s dedicate ourselves to advancing the whole truth – to telling a story that analyzes and critically takes into consideration all the factors.

Let’s actually [#DoGreatWork](#).

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