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## Message from the President (of BSU)

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## Message from the President (of BSU)

### **Abstract**

Last night as a couple of my friends scrambled to find a classroom to do work in, they came across a poster that has been plastered all around campus for weeks now. This poster, however, was different. This poster was vandalized. The face of this year's 10th Annual Derrick K. Gondwe Memorial Lecture, Opal Tometi, had been ripped off and the word "Black" was crossed out and replaced with the word "All." This changed the quote from "Black Lives Matter" to "All Lives Matter." [*excerpt*]

### **Keywords**

Surge, Surge Gettysburg, Gettysburg College, Center for Public Service, Black Lives Matter Movement, All Lives Matter, vandilization, Gettysburg College YAF, culture, diversity, race and ethnicity

### **Disciplines**

African American Studies | Community-Based Learning | Race and Ethnicity | Race, Ethnicity and Post-Colonial Studies | Sociology of Culture

### **Comments**

Surge is a student blog at [Gettysburg College](#) where systemic issues of justice matter. Posts are originally published at [surgegettysburg.wordpress.com](https://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

## MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT (OF BSU)

October 8, 2015

Last night as a couple of my friends scrambled to find a classroom to do work in, they came across a poster that has been plastered all around campus for weeks now. This poster, however, was different. This poster was vandalized. The face of this year's 10th Annual Derrick K. Gondwe Memorial Lecture, Opal Tometi, had been ripped off and the word "Black" was crossed out and replaced with the word "All." This changed the quote from "Black Lives Matter" to "All Lives Matter."



I think most people can agree that the defacing of Opal Tometi is completely disrespectful for obvious reasons. Stripping away the very identity of someone who is so pivotal in giving a voice to a group of people who are constantly silenced is a direct attack on those who are affected by the Black Lives Matter movement.

The All Lives Matter vs. Black Lives Matter debate is one that is being argued far beyond our campus. Yes, it is a fact that ALL lives indeed matter. However, in saying all lives matter you are assuming that all lives are weighed equally and you are neglecting the fact that the lives of minorities are the ones that are

being targeted and taken by the people who are supposed to protect us. "All Lives Matter" nullifies and silences a movement that is helping to shine a light on a historically oppressed group.



When I first arrived here at Gettysburg I was hit with the ultimate culture shock. To be honest, I had never been forced to navigate through an environment in which I was the minority. It was made evident from the start that the elephant in the room would sit on my shoulders, and the shoulders of every other student of color, whenever a discussion involving race should arise. From unpacking the invisible backpack to conversations around stereotypes and race expectations, there is always discourse around diversity, equity and inclusion here at Gettysburg.

But standing as a spokesperson can get overwhelming at times for students of color. It's especially overwhelming when we are also burdened by the constant knowledge and feeling that our lives

are not valued in this country or on this campus.

Students of color report bias incidents and attacks on campus regularly. Yet, these reports don't stop the onslaught of daily micro-aggressions and attacks. We are discriminated against at fraternity doors. We are forced to simplify our cultures to help classmates easily identify with us and we are accused of being too aggressive by professors who are afraid to engage in confrontational discussion. Those of us who report rarely, if ever, receive any follow-up on the outcomes of these concerns. Students who are in poor judicial standing get more attention from the administration than those who are bold enough to report bias incidents.

These negative experiences have become normalized to such a degree that the stories of students of color just fade into the background. We are taught how to tolerate, accept and live under the stress of racism. Students like myself have been asked to constantly reflect on our experience as minorities while the discussion around privilege is often sugar-coated in order to shy away from making white students uncomfortable. White students have the ability to directly disown this issue, to not have to think about race every day. Not only does this privilege enable them to separate themselves from issues of race at Gettysburg, it also gives them power to have their concerns heard.

An example is the recent controversy of YAF on campus. After students reported acts of bias and personal attacks, the administration responded directly and specifically, urging students to restrain from attacking this specific group of students. My question is why were there no direct references to Tometi and the Black Lives Matter movement in yesterday's letter from President Riggs responding to the defacement of the poster? Why didn't the letter urge students to stop directly attacking students of color by minimizing their worth? Lastly, why didn't the letter give the time, date and location of the Gondwe lecture (5:30pm today in Mara Auditorium) if the point was to encourage students to engage in conversations around race and other social constructions?

The defacing of Opal Tometi and this limited response are illustrations of the lack of value that students of color feel on this campus. Many minorities are constantly uncomfortable here, uncomfortable to the point that this place never becomes home for them. Yet our negative experiences do not become an urgent priority of the College and therefore our ability to be heard fades as well.

It is not a coincidence that alumni of color rarely return. The constant feeling of rejection clouded their experiences.

Now don't get me wrong, Gettysburg has helped me find my voice by putting me in a position that forces me to think critically about my role as an African American woman. I now know that I am a reflection of my ancestors and their resilience is the reason I am able to walk with my head held high in a world that says that my life is not valued. My voice was not developed through the campus community's ability to foster productive discourse; it was developed as a result of the College's struggle to build a community that practices what it preaches.

**If students of color are central to the strategic objective of making Gettysburg more inclusive, equitable and diverse, why are our voices and experiences not given the weight that they deserve?**

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