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I Will Not Wear a Muzzle

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I Will Not Wear a Muzzle

Abstract

Students are sent abroad to “become sensitive leaders in our changing world,” states the Gettysburg College Center for Global Education’s mission statement. We are asked to “foster global thinking and to instill a compassionate respect for others and our world.” Many students use this time to explore their true selves with hopes of not having to think too deeply about the life that they’ve left behind. [*excerpt*]

Keywords

Surge, Surge Gettysburg, Gettysburg College, Center for Public Service, Gettysburg College Center for Global Education, Study Abroad Program, African American, Black Lives Matter Movement, social inequality

Disciplines

African American Studies | Latin American Languages and Societies | Race and Ethnicity | Race, Ethnicity and Post-Colonial Studies

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

I WILL NOT WEAR A MUZZLE

November 16, 2015



Students are sent abroad to “become sensitive leaders in our changing world,” states the Gettysburg College Center for Global Education’s mission statement. We are asked to “foster global thinking and to instill a compassionate respect for others and our world.” Many students use this time to explore their true selves with hopes of not having to think too deeply about the life that they’ve left behind.

Unfortunately, as a black woman, I am not blessed with that privilege while abroad in Buenos Aires,

Argentina. Argentina, a large country on the eastern coast of South America, was not exempt from the many countries that supported the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade from the 15th century to the 19th century. According to the article, [“Blackout: How Argentina ‘Eliminated’ Africans from its History and Conscience”](#), the author, Palash Ghosh states, “Hundreds of thousands of Africans were brought there... yet, the black presence in Argentina has virtually vanished from the country’s records and consciousness.”

My black presence in the city of Buenos Aires has been violated countless times, as people shamelessly attempt to touch my face, pet my hair, or sneakily take pictures of me as if I am a rare species that has, for the first time, made an appearance on Argentine land. Although I am treated in such a way, in recent decades the consciousness of the black presence has emerged, as Argentine citizens began to reclaim their African identity that has been washed away by cultural stigmas that indicate “blackness” as an impediment to society.

While I do experience racism here on a daily basis, I cannot help but to think deeply about the horrendous news of yet another situation of injustice inflicted upon people of color in the U.S., such as the silencing of black students on college campuses who advocate for visibility and social change (which recently gained publicity from black students of the Concerned Student 1950 group at the University of Missouri, but has also been fervently acknowledged by students of color on college campuses all across the country). I cannot escape the reality of racism because every time I tune into any social media website, I see that my

people are mourning another death of a strong black soul (#SandraBland, #MichaelBrown, #Eric Garner, #WalterScott, #FreddieGray, to name a few). They are mourning another irrational and insensitive act against children of color (#AssaultAtSpringValleyHigh). They restlessly lay awake attempting to define a life without fear of acts of terrorism against marginalized groups in our country that go unacknowledged (#BlackLivesMatter).

The truth is, I don't want to escape these problems.

I would like to be there to confront them head on, but I've found myself in a situation of stagnancy. While abroad, I am constantly seeking out conversations that address racial injustice in the States. However, as much as I try to gain an enlightened "global" perspective about the struggle, my thoughts continue to circulate in a whirlpool of obscurity, as Argentines try to project their disdain and shame for black culture onto me with their condemning words of undervalued cultural sensitivity. Most people with whom I have conversed fail to recognize the gravity of racially charged hardships inhibiting the guaranteed "pursuits of happiness" and the fact that some people of color are losing hope for cultural consciousness.

My words in a foreign land are silenced by those who believe I, as a black person, should only acknowledge the "privilege it is to be a United States citizen," which presumptuously suggests that I lose consciousness of my reality of discrimination and invisibility. While I do notice and embrace the privileges that I have come across throughout my life, I still feel a sudden explosion of emptiness when I explain the imperfections of the systems in the U.S., and receive responses that shrug away and unconsciously (or consciously) impair the social movement for justice.

Being black and being in Argentina is one of the toughest challenges I've ever had to face. Nobody wants to hold my hand to help me process my disappointment because they look at the States as such a "sacred piece of land" and overlook the seriousness of my concerns due to their own nation's unwillingness to address the legacy and reality of present day racism. I do not want my life experiences to be pre-defined simply because I am a U.S. citizen. Similarly to other students who have joined an educational journey, I, too, am seeking out a way to redefine my story. However, due to the falsified image of the United States, I am forced to receive the same backlash globally as I do in my own country.

Facebook posts attempt to discredit the validity of the Black Lives Matter Movement: "Hey #BlackLivesMatter. This is your cue to STFU [shut the **** up] and realize that you're lucky to live here," and "Now maybe the whining adolescents at our universities can concentrate on something other than their need for 'safe' spaces." Making references to the terrorist attacks in Paris on November 13th, both attempt to misguide the movement. The attacks in Paris need to be condemned. We all mourn those who were killed, wounded and lost loved ones in France. But the presence of other atrocities around the world does not invalidate the struggles and oppression of marginalized groups in the United States and should not be used as an excuse to avoid confronting this oppression.

When people attempt to eradicate the cry of frustration and the song of empowerment, they also promote a deceptive "incomparable" nature of U.S. culture that has been extended to foreigners' perception of an idealized America. "Oh, it can't be that bad...You're living in America, the 'land of the free.'"

Free you say? Well if free means to be terrorized for having rich melanin and targeted for publicizing political and social inequities, then I guess you're right, I am living in 'America, the land of the free.'

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