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When Protest Doesn't Quite Fit the Mold

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When Protest Doesn't Quite Fit the Mold

Abstract

White people protesting is powerful. It is a privilege to be guaranteed that someone will listen to us, **as pointed out by Jerome Clarke** in a piece about last year's "Won't Stand For Hate" protest. With that privilege comes a responsibility that has been neglected on this campus.

I agree with the students who protested on the steps of Penn Hall and spoke out during the Student Senate meeting about the way our administration is handling the mold situation in Hanson Hall. The response was insufficient and it directly contradicts the College's verbal commitment to promoting a healthy living and learning environment. However, as I walked by the students protesting on Friday, I was hit with irony and felt ashamed of the way many of us have responded to this issue. Perhaps I wouldn't feel that way if every issue facing the students of this campus, specifically those most marginalized, were met with similar outcry from the majority population here. [*excerpt*]

Keywords

Black Lives Matter, Black Student Union, college, DACA, Gettysburg College, protest, White Privilege

Disciplines

Civic and Community Engagement

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

WHEN PROTEST DOESN'T QUTIE FIT THE MOLD

March 5, 2018



White people protesting is powerful. It is a privilege to be guaranteed that someone will listen to us, as pointed out by Jerome Clarke in a piece about last year's "Won't Stand For Hate" protest. With that privilege comes a responsibility that has been neglected on this campus.

I agree with the students who protested on the steps of Penn Hall and spoke out during the Student Senate meeting about the way our administration is handling the mold situation in Hanson Hall. The response was insufficient and it directly contradicts the College's verbal commitment to promoting a healthy living and learning environment. However, as I walked by the students protesting on Friday, I was hit with irony and felt ashamed of the way many of us have responded to this issue. Perhaps I wouldn't feel that way if every issue facing the students of this campus, specifically those most marginalized, were met with similar outcry from the majority population here.

The steps of Penn Hall are a symbol of this institution, yes, but they are also only one piece of the larger tradition of protests at institutions of higher education across the United States. Every college has a "steps of Penn Hall"

that are evoked when injustice is faced and fought. Two years ago, the Black Student Union of Gettysburg met on those steps to protest the police killings of black men across the nation and support the truth, the movement, that Black Lives Matter. To me, those steps hold a power, a seriousness, that wasn't being considered by the students standing on them Friday. Why were they empty days after yet another mass shooting? Why were they empty days after our fellow students, those who are recipients of DACA, had their living conditions, their rights to live here at all, threatened? Today was the deadline for Congress to act on DACA. Activists across the country occupied the front of federal buildings, but the steps of Penn Hall were empty.

I, too, believe the college should value its commitment to housing students in safe residences. But I am also struck with a wave of privilege when I hear students suggest that these conditions are horrible. There is a false perception that higher education is a commodity, and that by (some of us) paying a lot of money to be here we are owed perfect resources. That entitlement neglects the complexities of how an institution functions and it does not put the value of an education on student learning. It places a value on material items rather than the experience of being a part of a campus community and contributing to an intellectual climate. Students frequently destroy facilities or leave huge messes, but still hold the expectation that the facilities should be perfect all the time. Many of them treat this community poorly, learn little from their neighbors, and expect to have their every beck and call answered within the hour.

Old buildings get moldy, that's what they do. Is it the responsibility of the college to remedy that the first time it is reported? Yes. Am I happy to see upperclass students involved and defending the rights of first-year students? Yes. I agree that \$250 is laughable considering the sacrifices some students and families make to pay for housing. However, this argument does not acknowledge the adverse ways low-income students experience displacement as compared to their peers who can afford to have a parent drive or fly to help them move or replace items easily. Those are the students who have lost the most, but no one is talking about that disparity.

It is also ignorant to assume that, all facilities being pristine, every student at Gettysburg felt at home here. There are students who face issues with this administration and more systemically that are much more pervasive than fungus. Gettysburg College is a hard place to call home when people here use slurs against you in the hallway, deny you use of bathrooms, throw mixers themed to insult your culture or identity, or sexually assault you at parties. Those are not the characteristics of a healthy home. When we make signs that ask: "Since when did the biology department move into Hanson basement?" we may also want to ask: "Since when did our bias incidents outnumber our resources for students?" When we create an uproar on College social media accounts at the celebration of meeting our Gettysburgives Challenge goal, we might not simply ask whether the mold has been eradicated, but also ask why students incurring massive debts to go here are challenged to *give*.

If you want to see change take place in the way our administration responds to facilities issues, get off the steps and write a letter to our board of trustees. If you want to see change take place, start asking the community, in its entirety, what it needs and listening when they tell you that this campus isn't a healthy place for them. If you want to see change take place, be responsible in how you prioritize your protests and acknowledge your privilege, your whiteness.

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