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Dmitri C. Westbrook

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Opinion Editorial: Why is it that so Many White People Fear Black Men?

Dmitri Westbrook

Why is it that so many White people fear Black men? The United States is my country of birth and the country that I call home. Nevertheless, my country has a history of violence and oppression against people that identify with me—Black men. People think that racism is not an issue in the United States, but based on my lived experiences, that is not true. Slavery was the beginning of hatred towards Black people, and Black men in particular. Black men and people were viewed as not “fully human.” White slave owners devalued the humanity of Black people and considered us property. The legacy of the treatment of Black men during that time has carried on throughout history and into current times. Emmett Till, Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown, James Craig Anderson, Eric Garner, and countless other Black men and boys have been the victims of brutality because of the White supremacist society we live in.

Why is it that so many White people fear Black men? Whenever I learn about another Black man dying and no one is held accountable, I cannot help but to feel angry. I am furious about Black men being devalued in the United States—our lives are just as valuable as anyone else’s. I constantly have to stay on alert because I do not know when police officers will pull me over, or start following me around in a particular location. I have firsthand experience with White people thinking I am a criminal or that I am in a gang. If I do not walk around with a smile on my face, it often changes the dynamics of my day. I am no longer the “sweet, young man” who always smiles—I am looked at as if I am hostile or angry for no reason.

Why is it that so many White people fear Black men? Issues surrounding race and racism affect Black men who work in higher education contexts. The same stereotypes and beliefs about Black men that exist in the United States are embedded within many of our educational settings. As a future higher education professional, I often wonder how White staff members view me. Black men who work as student affairs and higher education professionals often have to portray

themselves as “not being the stereotype.” We always have to be aware of how we speak, how we react in certain situations and how we display ourselves in public.

One way to improve this issue is to continually increase cultural competence training in educational and professional settings. Cultural competence should be established as early as K-12, but it is crucial that we continue building multicultural competence through higher education and employment. It may include offering and requiring more culturally diverse classes for students. For staff and faculty, it may include requiring more cultural competence trainings delivered by certified professionals. Cultural competence is beneficial for staff, faculty and students as they learn about multi- and –interculturalism, and how to embrace our differences while understanding our similarities.

Another solution to improve justice for Black men is to simply break the misconceptions about who Black men are. Not all Black men are criminals, aggressive, loud or unprofessional; Black men are intelligent, polite, professional and hardworking. As long as the United States maintains a fear of Black men, we will never progress as far as we can as country. U.S. society must counteract racist power structures by more intentionally developing cultural competence and good moral character among its citizens. By doing this, I will no longer have to ask, “Why is it that so many White people fear Black men?”

Correspondence regarding this article should be addressed to Dmitri Westbrook at westbrod@mail.gvsu.edu.