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## Black Lives Matter, But Not Here: A Case Study

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## **Black Lives Matter, But Not Here: A Case Study**

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*Recently, the United States has experienced a wave of social movements that include protests and digital social justice movements through Facebook and Twitter. These movements have been sparked as a response to systematic racism within the university landscape and the police force. This case study looks into systematic racism at a large public university college campus. The setting is in a college town on a city street that connects the city jail to the campus. Readers will be introduced to several characters that are important to the story before reading an account of the tug of war treatment of Black students in this community. This work is important to shed light on the encounters of Black people within systems that perpetuate White privilege in order to prepare future practitioners to address these issues in real life scenarios. This case study relies on theories like critical race theory (CRT) and intersectionality to allow the reader to deconstruct the case study using some of the theories that are vital to becoming a change agent in higher education. After studying the story thoroughly, readers are tasked to use their critical thinking skills to plan a resolution for Normal Inequality College.*

*Keywords: Critical race theory, hegemony, intersectionality, racism, #blacklivesmatter, #alllivesmatter*

### **Contextualizing the Case**

Anti-Black racism continues to be a prevalent theme that regulates the lives of Black people in the United States (Alexander, 2010; Delgado & Stefancic 2012; Taylor, 2016). Whether through the killing of Black men, women, and transgender people, or the daily racial microaggressions (Sue, 2010a; Sue, 2010b) faced by people of color, Black people specifically, racism still has a large role in shaping current sociocultural conditions. As microcosms of the broader culture in which they are embedded, institutions of higher education are not immune from the effects of anti-Black racism. Patton (2016) and Wilder (2013), among others, have highlighted how the history of higher education is itself a history of racism and White supremacy. Furthermore, Black students continue to confront hostile college climates, including “stereotype-induced pressure [that] lead to anxiety, which ultimately leads to lower levels of performance on academic tests and tasks (Steele, 1997)” (Quaye, Griffin, & Museus, 2015, p.17). Such climates also affect Black student persistence on college campuses (Quaye, Griffin, & Museus, 2015).

Despite claims that we as a nation have entered a post-racial era, the research of Cabrera (2014), among others, suggests we most certainly have not (Cabrera, 2014).

Instead, as scholars have highlighted, racism remains but has taken on new, insidious forms, including what Bonilla-Silva (2009) termed color-blind racism, a racial ideology that is predicated on covert enactments of racism as well as the rationalizations to explain away those enactments. Again, college campuses are not immune from such racist ideologies. For example, Cabrera's (2014) exposure of White racial joking and how White students explain their investments in racist behavior and attitudes, only serves to deepen how such racist ideology, steeped in notions of color-blindness, further the reality of campus climates being hostile for Black students.

Ahmed (2012) used the metaphor of brick walls to describe the effect of institutional racism on college campuses (e.g. lack of faculty of color; institutional resistance; lack of adequate resources for diverse student groups; sanctions that punish Black students at a higher rate than non-Black students; policies with embedded racism). These brick walls are many, and are still present on college campuses, defying the notion that we as a nation have overcome our racist past. Moreover, the realities of racism, anti-Black racism specifically, have both material and emotional effects on Black students. For example, not only do Black students face continued physical threat and harm on college campuses (Yan & Ford, 2015), but racism as an ideology continues to construct college campuses as containers for psychological and emotional harm as well as hostile climates in which Black students learn.

## **Overview of Institution**

Normal Inequality College (NIC) is a public university located in the Midwest City of Bedor. The student enrollment is just above 20,000; the undergraduate population is 15,000; graduate 4,800; and 250 students enrolled in the Law School. The institution's largest racial population is White, with 57% of students identifying as such. Of the remaining students, 16% identify as Black, 15% as Hispanic or Latino, 5% Asian, 0.2% Native American, and 3.5% as multi-racial. The undergraduate student population is 51% male and 49% female, whereas the graduate student population is 47% male and 53% female (NIC does not track trans\* student enrollment). The school is centrally located near the big city Lake Winds, a major train station, and a national research laboratory. There is a new student organization formed on campus concerned with the violence against people of color. This organization is called the Black Protectors Group (BPG), which is advised by the Student Organization Growth and Governance (SOGG) Office and funded through the Student Cabinet (SC). NIC has a reputation amongst Black students for unfair treatment in policing, organizational policy, honors program admittance, and harsh grading. Due to the national movement around #BlackLivesMatter, student organizations have become more vocal about the plights of their experience at NIC. The BPG has become increasingly sensitive to the treatment of Black students by organizing programs geared around knowing ones' rights as a citizen, safe traffic stops, and how to dress to avoid racial profiling. White students in the honors program support the #AllLivesMatter movement, but they are not vocal about it. Instead, they talk amongst each other to organize a plan that would use their influence in the SC to strip funding from the BPG to put a stop to the complaining about injustice because they believe it is unfounded. The university offered one open mic forum to address racial

tensions after the death of Sandra Bland, and, despite the NIC administrators saying this would be an ongoing event, the upper administration has been quiet regarding campus racial tensions. The Campus Police department has been engaged with the community trying to build allies with the BPG.

### **Key Stakeholders for the Case**

**You** are the director of SOGG and you supervise all of the student organizations. In total, the office oversees 150 clubs, organizations, auxiliary groups, fraternities, and sororities; however, the primary responsibilities of this role are to make sure all student-run organizations adhere to university policy, settle disputes, and determine when allegations need to be escalated to the Judicial Sanctions Office. You are very interested in helping the BPG in their quest for fair treatment of Black students by police.

**Cain** is a Campus Police Officer that wants to build bonds with the student organizations. Cain is also an alumnus of NIC and believes the Campus Police Department is ultimately fair and balanced and, subsequently, has attended group meetings for the BPG and the SC to hear student concerns. Cain is eager to transition from the police force into the university administration and hopes to be the Director of the Judicial Sanctions Office one day.

**Jalen**, 20, a sophomore, is a Black student who grew up in the impoverished Lake Winds City who has seen gang violence, gun violence, and violence from the police. Jalen considers himself to be a survivor who rises above his life circumstances, and it is this belief that propelled Jalen to become the founder of the Black Protectors Group where he currently serves as President.

**Ebony**, 32, a first-year student, is a nontraditional student who grew up in a subsidized, section eight housing project that suffered from frequent gang violence in the 1980s. She was adopted by two parents, both of whom were members of the Black Panther Party. Although Ebony is biracial, she identifies as Black. Ebony is very critical of White privilege and serves as the Black Protectors Group Vice President.

**Tanner**, 21, a sophomore, is a White supremacist student who grew up in an all white town in the south and was raised by his grandparents who taught him not to be tolerant of other races, especially Black people. Although Tanner looks White, his grandparents never revealed that Tanner is actually biracial. Tanner, President of the Student Cabinet (SC), believes that Affirmative Action and non-discriminatory laws cause reverse racism against people who identify as or appear to be White.

**Bo Pitski**, 58, is a local citizen who has lived in Bedor all of his life. Bo believes that the quality of Bedor has gone down because too many students of color are allowed to attend NIC. Bo is member of a local White supremacy group, called Whites Only (WO).

### **Current Problem at NIC**

Recently, the local Bedor City Police Department and Jail opened up a new headquarters across the street from the Frederick Douglas Building at NIC, which is the Black Cultural Center. Students protested the location of the new jail, but it was not

made public knowledge until groundbreaking, so there was no way for the students to overcome this decision. Black students complain about inequality on campus and in town when dealing with the police. For instance, students perceive that they are more likely to see a young Black man pulled over by the police on campus or around town than to see someone who is White. Also, the Black campus organizations are required to have security and police approval for their events because they are considered dangerous; however, none of the White organizations have this same requirement. As a result, the Black Protectors Group (BPG) has planned some marches against the injustice to minorities by the police and unjust campus policies.

On December 7<sup>th</sup>, 2015, a group of Black students held a march on campus, highlighting frustration with their treatment at NIC and the treatment of Black people by police around the country. The protesters, led by Jalen and Ebony, carrying #BlackLivesMatter signs and signs with Sandra Bland's face, marched past the police station located near the Frederick Douglas Building. While they marched, Cain, a NIC police officer, who served as the escort to guide them peacefully across the street, followed them. Bo Pitski, who was in his car, had the green light, and started blowing his car horn for the protestors to get out of his way. The students, who felt they had the right to march, kept walking through the intersection. Pitski, who was now tired of waiting, inched forward and hit a pregnant Black woman in the intersection of the street. About 15 of the protestors rushed the vehicle as the driver turned into the police station. The local Bedor Police held the angry protestors back and let Pitski leave and go home. The two organizers of the march were arrested and charged with disturbing a peace officer and mob action. Coincidentally, these two organizers were the BPG President, Jalen, and Ebony, the BPG Vice President. The police officers that arrested Jalen and Ebony had just returned to duty after a 90-day suspension for beating two Black men who were handcuffed in their custody. Despite the 45 total complaints of racial profiling against the officers, and the successful lawsuit from the two men who were beaten, a jury of their peers within the Bedor judicial system declared the officers fit for duty. As Cain approached, the local Bedor police officers scolded Cain for not keeping the Black students from inciting violence against Pitski. After videos of the incident began to go viral, the local police station announced that they were charging Pitski with reckless driving and failure to yield to a pedestrian in a crosswalk. The pregnant student was treated at the local Bedor hospital and later had a miscarriage. As a result of the negative publicity about NIC, Tanner calls a special SC executive board meeting to vote on taking funding away from the BPG.

### **Tasks for Readers**

Below are prompts and questions for the reader based on the previous case study:

- (1) As the Director of SOGG, what are steps you would take to address this situation on individual, institutional, and systemic levels?
- (2) How does culture, diversity and equity play a role in your ability to understand this case? Why is this important to consider?

- (3) How might critical theoretical perspectives such as critical race theory and intersectionality inform your response as the director of SOGG?
- (4) How might you think about working not only across campus, but off campus with constituents to enhance the racial climate at NIC and in Bedor?

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