

University of Washington
Black Student Union
Room 92 - Husky Union Bldg.
May 6, 1968

President Charles Odegaard
University of Washington
Seattle, Washington

Dear President Odegaard:

The University of Washington has been, and is a racist institution. Its function has been, and is to preserve and extend a racist status quo.

Through its administration, faculty, curriculum, and admission policies, the University has sent white and black students into society with the racist notion that white, middle-class, Western ideals and practices are superior.

The average white student leaves the University with the absurd notion that he is superior. The average black student leaves the University with an equally absurd notion that he is inferior.

The phenomenon in the last paragraph can be understood by taking a look at key aspects of the University.

First, the administration. Psychologists talk about the need for youth to have adult models. At this point, a non-white student has no model at a high administrative level to imitate and relate to. This is important because non-whites need models they can identify with. They need a non-white administrator who has had similar problems and conflicts.

A second point about the present administration must be made. When a non-white youth comes into contact with administration officials, he is subtly told that he is inferior. He sees white people giving orders and running the school.

From this realization, comes the mistaken idea that there are no non-white people who can run institutions, who can successfully carry out large assignments.

The overall effect of this idea is the stifling of initiative, the decrease and bringing to a halt of positive dreams and desires. The same effect comes from the non-white student's contact with the faculty. A non-white sitting under a 99% white faculty is subtly being told that only white people can teach him the things he needs to know.

A third point must also be made. The faculty are products of a racist society. Faculty trained in the twenties and thirties came up through an educational system based on the assumption of non-white inferiority. Consciously and/or unconsciously the faculty transmits their racism to black and white students.

One way in which they transmit racism is their ignorance. A professor in Classics, enthused over the wonders of Rome, in many cases is unaware of the great achievements of African Universities such as the University of Timbuktu. This university was a magnet for scholars and philosophers while Europeans were running around in caves.

A professor in Contemporary Literature praising the works of Hemingway or Faulkner, would do well to consider the beauty and power of a Richard Wright or a Claude McKay.

Omissions, distortions, and out-right lies produce students that feel that all the great ideas came from whites, and came from the West. As we indicated earlier, the white student believes in the lie of his superiority, and the black student in the lie of his inferiority.

A fourth aspect the Black Student Union feels strongly about is the University admission policies. We've been told that the University does not "discriminate" and that they take all students who are qualified. We realize that standards are necessary if the University is to produce well-trained people, but we also realize that the present elementary and secondary educational system stifles the desire and creativity necessary for achievement.

The majority of non-white students who pass through the present educational system do not:

- (1) gain a knowledge of their past
- (2) get encouragement from the faculty and administration.

For example, a non-white student is taught only the achievements of white, he learns about Lincoln (a racist), George Washington (a slaveowner), etc.

When we see these things clearly, we realize that the educational system from kindergarten to graduate school must be changed.

The Black Student Union feels that a good starting place for change is at the university level.

Although the administration, faculty, and admission policies have been racist in effect, the Black Student Union feels the University should be given a chance to change, to prove its "good intentions." As long as we feel the University is making an honest effort to change, the Black Student Union will cooperate and work closely with the University.

However, when the University begins to make phony excuses and resist needed changes, we will be forced to look at the University as an enemy to black people, and act accordingly. In short there will be political consequences for political mistakes.

With this last point in mind, the Black Student Union submits the following demands:

(1) All decisions, plans, and programs affecting the lives of black students, must be made in consultation with the Black Student Union. This demand reflects our feeling that whites for too long have controlled the lives of non-whites.

We reject this control, instead we will define what our best interests are, and act accordingly.

(2) The Black Student Union should be given the financial resources and aids necessary to recruit and tutor non-white students. Specifically, the Black Student Union wants to recruit: (1) 300 Afro-American, (2) 200 American Indian, and (3) 100 Mexican students ~~in~~ by September.

Quality education is possible through an interaction of diverse groups, classes, and races. Out of a student population of 30,000, there are about 200 Afro-Americans, about 20 American Indians, and about 10 Mexican-Americans.

The present admission policies are slanted toward white, middle-class, Western ideals, and the Black Student Union feels that the University should take these other ideals into consideration in their admission procedures.

(3) We demand that a Black Studies Planning Committee be set up under the direction and control of the Black Student Union. The function of this Committee would be to develop a Black Studies Curriculum that objectively studies the culture and life-style of non-white Americans.

We make this demand because we feel that a white, middle-class education cannot and has not met the needs of non-white students.

At this point, an American Indian interested in studying the lives of great Indians like Sitting Bull and Crazy-Horse has to go outside the school structure to get an objective view. Afro-American members of the Black Student Union have had to go outside the school structure to learn about black heroes like Frederick Douglass, W. E. B. DuBois, and Malcolm X.

One effect of going outside the normal educational channels at the University has been to place an extra strain on black students interested in learning more about their culture. We feel that it is up to the University to re-examine its curriculum and provide courses that meet the needs of non-white students.

(4) We want to work closely with the administration and faculty to recruit black teachers and administrators. One positive effect from recruiting black teachers and administrators is that we will have models to imitate, and learn from.

(5) We want black representatives on the music faculty. Specifically, we would like to see Joe Brazil and Byron Polls hired. The black man has made significant contributions to music (i.e. jazz and spirituals), yet there are no black teachers on the music faculty.

The five demands above are legitimate and worthwhile, and we hope you will consider them carefully. In view of the seriousness of these demands, and the need for the University to change, we have set a five day deadline for a reply from you.

We have set this time limit because the University in the past has moved too slowly, has avoided facing key issues squarely.

Very sincerely yours,

Black Student Union