

“Black Intellectual Lives Matter”

Before responding to the disappointing news about my tenure case, let me say thank you for all of the supportive calls, emails, and texts from my colleagues in History and in AAAS, as well as the friends that I have made in my short time here at Dartmouth. These notes have been a positive reminder that this rejection comes from a small, but influential part of the Dartmouth College community.

I am disappointed, but I am not necessarily surprised. I was hopeful, (perhaps naively) that Dartmouth was ready to transform its history regarding Black faculty and diversity. This decision is a step in the wrong direction. My reflections on the situation led me to revisit Vincent Harding's "The Vocation of the Black Scholar." This essay has functioned as a North Star while I have navigated the academy. Harding writes that, "the walls the academy are, on the whole, merely more tastefully, delicately wrought extensions of the walls of government, industry, and the military. . . ." Thus, I understand the broader implications, ideas, and ideologies that undergird the decision.

Several colleagues have mentioned that they are shocked by the decision; asking "How and why did this happen?" Some have noted, what Annelise so eloquently stated, my "equanimity and resilience." The circumstance has reminded me of Mari Evans poem "Speak the Truth to the People (1970)." She writes:

**Speak the truth to the People**

**Talk sense to the people**

**Free them with reason**

**Free them with honesty**

**Free the people with Love and Courage and Care for their Being**

**Speak the truth to the people**

**It is not necessary to green the heart**

**Only to the identify the enemy**

**It is not necessary to blow the mind**

**Only to free the mind**

**To identify the enemy is to free the mind**

**A free mind has no need to scream**

**A free mind is ready for other things**

"A free mind has no need to scream" says so much about my temperament.

I realized that in accepting a position here at Dartmouth I was taking a calculated risk. In this elite space the stakes are high. Dartmouth and other elite institutions are at the cutting edge of defining/shaping reality as the supreme source(s) of legitimacy in Western thought and civilization or what **J.G.A. Pocock** calls the "**paradigms of power and authority**." We should remember that the Dunning School of Reconstruction, which legitimated Jim Crow laws, emerged from Columbia and the broken windows policing policy that has fueled the recent rise in mass incarceration was a product of Harvard scholars. Many people have paid an exorbitant price for the ideas of America's best and brightest. Thus the failure to "meet the standards for tenure" is about more than my individual case, but rather larger questions about ideas of Blackness in a space where traditional definitions of excellence have often meant anti-Blackness. The personal, political, and professional effects on people trying reconcile these tensions is evidenced by the stories of Black and Brown scholarly bodies (student, staff, and professorial) churned up by Dartmouth and other elite spaces. A source of Dartmouth's legitimacy is tied to its ability to reproduce simultaneously the ideologies of power and to delegitimize criticism. Thus, I see that behind the phrase, "standards for tenure," was an unspoken ideology in which the study of Blackness is relegated to deprivation, disadvantage, and social pathology. My work is not this.

I am a product of the utopian, but incomplete, intellectual moment that was the original thrust of Black Studies. Activists, writers, singers, and scholars had the audacity to declare that Black is beautiful, worthy of study, and deserving of life. (It is no coincidence that #Blacklivesmatters echoes many of these same themes in the face of modern policing.) Moreover, Black Studies identified that ostensibly "universal" standards was synonymous with Whiteness or at least anti-Blackness. My work on the Institute of the Black World and on Black college football does not presume deficiency or pathology, but rather seeks to understand how these black institutions organized and conceptualize their critique of "standards."

Despite knowing the history and the ideologies at work, I still believe that Dartmouth is an important space from which to launch a Black Studies critique. The College's 1968 McLane Report notes "The black student at Dartmouth does not want to be treated as 'just another student.' As a black student he has particular interests and needs which he feels warrant consideration." The call for black particularity exposes the falseness of a universal Dartmouth experience. The claims made by students in 1968 and my counterclaim against the "standards for tenure" are rooted in an understanding that these supposedly universal claims are rooted in a larger epistemology.

When you as colleagues ask why? I am reminded of Charles Mills' claim that racism was not a "deviation from ostensibly raceless ideas, but rather a central shaping constituent of those ideals." My work on and in support of Black History and Black Studies reflects an epistemological alternative. This work will never meet the "universal" standard, because at its best it is designed to expose the systemic functioning of these standards that structure massive racial, gender, and class inequality. One can speculate that an unspoken reason for my tenure denial is a recognition of The Challenge of Blackness. My work in Black History and Black Studies understands this, thus I "have no need to scream."

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