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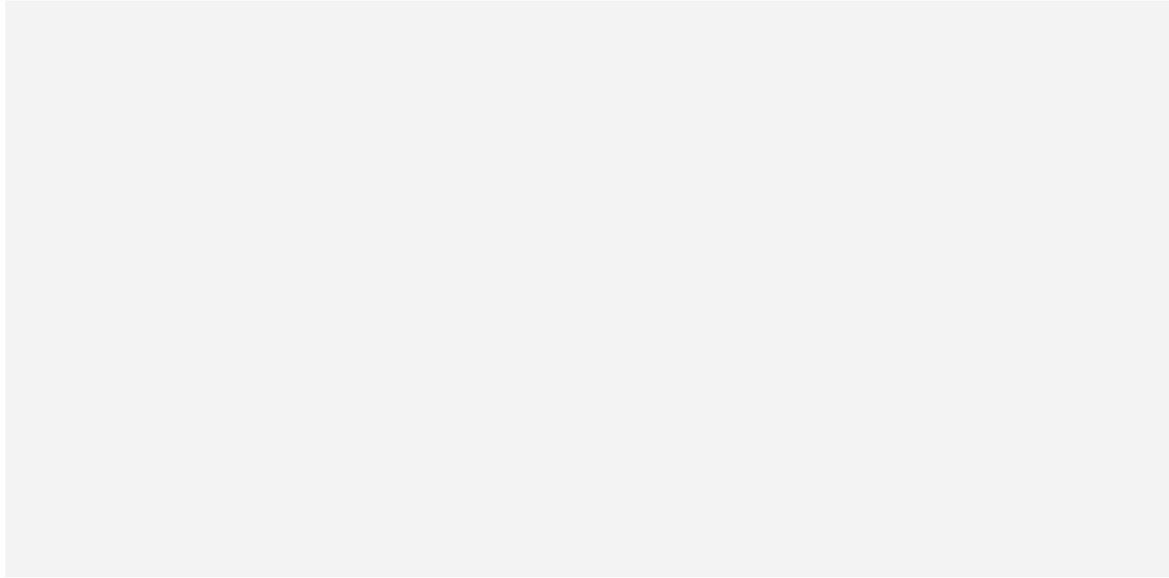


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Grad School Is Trash for Students of Color and We Should Talk About That

Stop theorizing Black people like we do not exist.

Currently, I am a Master of Divinity Student at Harvard University. I study divinity because I care about people at their core. I am concerned with, as Cornel West would say, “soulcraft”, how one’s internal conceptions come to be. And in turn, how our internal understandings influence our interactions with the world. I desire to help people by calling them into themselves and as result, hopefully, nudging them towards developing what is meaningful for them, career wise, interpersonally, aesthetically, spiritually—a better holistic self.

Like many of you, I conceptualized Harvard as the pinnacle of educational attainment. I envisioned walking through the pearly gates of campus while opportunities magically presented themselves to me. My classmates would analyze theory from an intersectional framework, one that took into consideration the ways in which race, class, sex, gender, and more interact with various social phenomena. Even if they did not understand the former, they would have the basic wherewithal to not say racist things.

Before departing for Cambridge from California, my brother, who is a PhD student, prepared me for academia to fall way short of my aforementioned expectations. *Way way* short. Through our extensive conversations, my bubble was at a healthy level of deflated, my eyes were open, but my heart was optimistic that something of value would present itself to me.

Though I knew through my brother's honest guidance that academic structures would fail me, a Queer Black Woman, I still believed that my classmates, like me, would see through the analytical predisposition of the academy and concern themselves with real people. I truly thought that they would understand that behind every article we read and every book we digest sits *real* communities, *real* people who are affected by the scholarship that top universities produce.

During my undergraduate career at UC Berkeley, there was only one class in which I had to defend the basic humanity of Black people. You can read about that experience [here](#). However, in every class at Harvard, I must implore my colleagues to acknowledge that Blackness extends beyond theory, that Blackness is a living breathing human experience full of multiplicity and dynamic intersections.

My classmates talk about Black people like we are some amorphous concept that they read about in that one Black studies course they had to take to satisfy their undergraduate degree. When I say, "uh, this article is racist," my colleagues respond with "but we can't just throw the baby out with the bath water." Which is code for, yes this is racist, but I will still use this article to further my own research and maximize my personal scholastic gain. Personally, I think we should throw out the whole tub.

For me, I grew irreparably disheartened during a wildly racist incident in one of my classes wherein a student presented a project that blatantly suggested that Black people become human once we are educated and earn money. After the project was presented, myself and other Black students in the class expressed our deep discomfort, pain, and anger at the project presented. Following the assertion of our pain, we spent two class sessions debriefing the incident. The below paragraph is what I learned during these discussions.

Higher learning is intentionally structured to preclude white people from truly interacting with Black people and people of color. Mas-

ter's and PhD programs alike enable white people to sit behind a desk in order to read about and theorize Blackness without actually shaking a Black person's hand or looking us in our eyes. This practice of collecting knowledge about Black people is like reading a book about soccer and then trying out for the olympic team: just because you can dribble a ball in your mind doesn't mean you don't still suck at playing soccer.

Like sports, allyship is something one must practice over and over and over, you can't learn it from a book.

As a result, when racism is palpably happening like in the above story, white students freeze and become fearful because they can theorize us, they can write about us, they can work on us, they can work upon us, but they cannot work with us.

From a divinity school I expected better, I expect better, and I will continue to expect better. Our job as students-with-a-moral-call is to use our knowledge to stand in the gap for those who are marginalized, subjugated, and unseen. This call should inform our scholarship, and if it is not, then we need to take a long look in our collective mirror and ask why.

To my classmates, I am calling y'all in, because we need to do better.