



Graduate & Professional Student Senate

March 15, 2021

To the Graduate and Professional Student Body of Iowa State,

Last year, the 2020-2021 GPSS Executive Council published a statement about our commitment against intolerance, racism, and bigotry. Per our commitment to being actively anti-racist; it is important to make it clear that the statement issued by the Iowa State Student Body President and Vice President on 10 March 2021, unfortunately, upheld white supremacy in its content and delivery. As the GPSS Executive Council, we offer the following context, education, and call for anti-racist action.

Context

The student organization known as the Young Americans for Freedom (YAF) found tweets from Dr. Rita Mookerjee's personal Twitter account that remarked on white privilege and her life as a woman of color (WOC). These remarks were condemned as 'racist' by the YAF and brought to the attention of the ISU Student Government (StuGov), because Dr. Rita Mookerjee was a speaker on their Women's Diversity and Inclusion Panel. Despite the recommendation made by ISU StuGov Diversity and Inclusion Committee to not issue a response statement, President Fritz and Vice President Schrader did so, saying that they disagreed with the "disparaging comments [made] about people on the basis of race" and that "no one should be reduced to the color of their skin". The StuGov administration had not previously released statements regarding racist remarks made by their own Senators or other affiliated individuals and, thus, the controversy of the content and intent of their letter emerged.

Dr. Mookerjee's sentiments expressed on Twitter were not racist despite the implication made in the President's and Vice President's statement. Their statement also invalidated the discrimination and racism that Black, Indigenous, or other people of color and WOC experience throughout their lifetime. Marginalized people speaking out about their oppression is not racism. As an Assistant Professor of Sociology, Dr. Mookerjee is highly qualified to share reflections on race and gender. Furthermore, ISU StuGov's lack of transparency created undue confusion, making it appear that they were willing to give racism a platform within the Diversity and Inclusion panel, further harming the members of the university community.

Education

Racism is a systemic issue that affects every aspect of people of color's lives: education rates, distribution of wealth, incarceration rates and police presence, health outcomes, and political representation are some. Additionally, whiteness is depicted as the default race for American culture through commercials, main TV show characters, history curriculums, skin care products, etc. We are conditioned to expect a certain narrative that fortifies implicit bias. These biases can not only cross multiple lines of power and privilege, not just race, but gender, health status, wealth status, language, and disability.

Discussions involving race and racism require an understanding of terminology that is so often misused, or used interchangeably in common dialogue. Prejudice is a negative bias against a group of people, unfounded in nature. This prejudice can lead to discrimination, which is acting on those prejudices or ignoring/disengaging with those groups. Our society, created by and upheld by imperfect people, is filled

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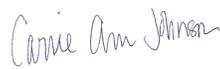
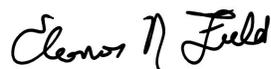
with prejudices and has resulted in discriminatory power differentials that facilitate racism and sexism. This power differential results in certain groups holding power over others, affecting their rights, livelihoods, and access to services in an unequal fashion. When marginalized groups are still fighting for a spot at the decision-making table, it is fallacious to think then that these groups are exerting a reversed systemic, oppressive power equivalent to racism. This is a distinction that must be made and understood for unlearning and unpacking the misconception of reverse racism. Similarly, many can take the approach of cultural erasure (“being color blind”) and fail to acknowledge that aspects of our identity (sex, gender, skin color) have very real effects on our lives through society’s structural prejudices. The importance of diversity is shared platforms, and holding their lived experiences as equally valid and powerful.

Call to Action

It is vital to understand that people of color face struggles not faced by their white peers, and we must continue to confront internal biases, and refuse to fall back on guilt or shame. Silence is not an option, and being actively anti-racist is the only way to combat centuries of systemic white supremacy. The GPSS Executive leaders are intolerant of racism and other forms of bigotry, and are committed to continue to educate others as we educate and unlearn racism ourselves.

As student leaders, it is important to call out problematic behavior for the sake of accountability - with the focus of demanding better in the future. This correction is not offered as a form of condemnation. Instead, it is a call for engagement and attention to the issue at hand. We call upon both graduate and undergraduate student leaders to engage in learning about racism from diverse populations thereby better promoting the full meaning of the Iowa State’s Principles of Community. The discomfort felt in these discussions is a sign to keep engaging.

In solidarity,



President Eleanor Field, Vice President Carrie Ann Johnson, Treasurer Chuck Wongus, Senate Engagement Officer Chelsea Iennarella-Servantez, Senate Information Officer Kate Alucard, Conference Officer Abigail Kropf, Wellness Officer Madelyne Losby