

Reflecting on my years of student activism here at Lehigh, I wrote these pieces from a place of pain, protest, and love. This is my welcome home. The following poems are my open letters to those who have arrived at this archive. This note is for you.

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The Lehigh Experience

The Lehigh experience
is trying to teach white peers to stop saying racist shit
is failing to do so.
is spending hours arguing
in Rathbone about the existence of racism,
explaining why
we dont deserve to be killed
Or why
a “higher medium income for Asians’
does not equate to the laziness of ‘Blacks’

is meeting this aryan guy on tinder
and him telling me I was pretty
“especially for a black girl”
and that he liked
the way I dress
it was “like ghetto but... nice”.

is observing the hierarchy
that is physically materialized along the mountain,
where the wealthy white greeks sit
at the top
and overlook ‘sketchlehem’.

is viewing poverty as danger
or motive.
is blissfully subscribing
to the fallacies of bootstraps.

is navigating this campus
as a spectacle
is holding the weight of representation.
Hyper visibility and invisibility
can both be quite silencing.

is wondering
what east fifth party
you learned that white kids
will casually sing the n word
when they’re drunk?

is imagining
the type of things
that might roll off their tongues
when they’re all alone.
is getting denied entry
to a party

because of
race,
associated group ratio,
clothing,
or body type.

is seeing
empty emails
from university admin
about the latest hate crime,

is learning
to maneuver this culture
and slowly understanding
what it means to attend a PWI,
One that proudly plays
the longest college football rivalry.

is having a professor tell you
poverty has nothing to do with race,
is being profiled—again, and again, and again

is getting lost
in the highly segregated party scene.
is moving
between these different realms at Lehigh

is being harassed
while you walk down the street
is not having to wear school colors
because our brown and white skins are already divided.

is a gryphon perceiving two black students as
uncompliant, suspect, and threatening
is learning to stop counting the number of times
they don't think you belong here.
is the 'nigger get out of here'
written under the desk
is the chalked up paved streets
is the skinned deer head on the UHouse stoop
and the egged walls years later
is the surprise in their voice
when they discover you're a Lehigh student ...
without a legacy to lean on
But still finding a way through

racism,
sexism,
heteropatriarchy
be everywhere,
in the harmful subtleties.
it's everywhere.
framed on walls;
it's everywhere.
in classroom syllabi;
it's everywhere.
in the reactions
the administration has to our pain;
it's everywhere.
in the claims of isolated incidents;
it's everywhere.
in the investigations that failed
before they even started,
Look around.
it's Everywhere.

But the Lehigh experience
is also this
this "activism"
being a part of my being,
never solely a choice
like Audre said,
this "*poetry is not a luxury
but a vital necessity for our existence*"

So,
my radical poetics
is not an option
But rather integral
to standing
and building together
for
our survival of
'the Lehigh experience'

The Flagpole

These flagpole rallies are getting stale
We consistently stand
Still,
in the middle of campus
watching peers and prospective student tours walk by
Lehigh look away
as Lehigh still looks away
but
we rally
we speak out
we march
and
--nothing changes

Like deja vu
we can predict
the responses and
administration deflections

as the flagpole repetition continues
on a loop
we wave our blankets of security in the wind
and dangle in space
ready and willing
to organize
to lead

we protest
to resist
yet always,
are stuck asking ourselves
just about how much has (the flagpole) really changed?

The Arrival

I come to you as a recent lehigh student, as one of the founders of the Institute on Critical Race & Ethnic Studies (ICRES), as the first grad assistant at the Institute, as a queer person of color. as a “scholar”. as an artist. as an activist.

i create this. as a counter story, as an institutional rupture, as a mark of our existence, despite the forces that prey on our downfall-as we pray to make it to the finish line, despite the attempts to silence us or gaslight us, we are still here. we will not shut up.

I write this after graduating from Lehigh University, recognizing that I stand on the shoulders of giants, follow the footsteps of those who walked before, and am guided by voices of our elders: Marsha, Kimberle, James, Angela, and Malcolm.

I write this to begin the cipher, so we may begin to decipher, knowledge to be recovered retrospectively, allowing us to partake in a more powerful, cross-generational conversation. they will no longer be able to try and erase the ‘troublemakers’ because we have forged for ourselves a radical space that recognizes our continued resistance, where knowledge can be made born, making something, out of seemingly nothing. we all have a hand in this magic.

we are transforming this institution, weather-willing or not; whether they’re ready or not, change is coming. and you will no longer be able to disregard the weight of all the loose change congregated in the depths of your pockets because there’s power in numbers, but we’re also so much more than some numbers, statistics, tokens, or diversity hires.

so I create this, although it may only currently exist in cyberspace, the radical nature is foundational and transformational; i share my story so that others might see themselves reflected, understood, or perhaps seen and validated. may this be a rift in attempted institutional isolation, the compartmentalization of mundane violent tendencies; may this alleviate the claimed institutional amnesia. don’t worry, for we will not allow you to forget any longer. i spit this so it may speak to and through many previous voices, student activists united.

I write this a response to our oppression, as a reflection of our inevitable resistance. this is where my years of ‘student activism’, resistance, organization, radical imagination, the chase to find where theory and praxis meet, such growth and collaboration...This is where all that has led me. thus far.

the arrival
to our archive.

Where This Leaves Us

where does this leave us?
well, here, i am
a little older,
and stronger,
and wiser
than when it all started
now, I stand
having overcome a PWI in Trump's America

I stand
armed with generational knowledge and active reflection
having heard many voices and stories of those who came before
still trying to recover the lessons the past can teach us
archiving our collective memories
hoping we realize that we are not alone
as they work to isolate us so
that it may be easier to cycle us out
a rotation of every four years
admin must say 'we just have to wait until they graduate'
continuously ignored and treated as a problem
divise and irrational

over the years they've perfected the damage control
quick to resuscitate the institution's appearance out
of necessity
lacking the desire to adequately listen
to those on the margins
and commit to fundamental change

and no,
we are not overreacting
or wrong
find comfort and power
in the fact
it's a constant inevitable fight
demands for change

so may this be
a **radical space**
a **vault of stories**
 knowledge,
 and **strength**
a **living and growing** thing
to stop us from being written out of history
to learn
to organize
to teach

moving wiser
past the mere symbols or words
to into **actions that propels us forward together...**