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Black Administrators and Black Student Activism: Social Media's Impact on Navigating Relationships and Transforming Learning

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Introduction

While working on a book entitled, "No Justice! No Peace! College Student Activism, Race Relations, and Media Cultures (Peter Lang, 2021) it became evident that an area of study that needs more attention in higher education is the relationship between Black students and Black administrators as it relates to free speech, social media, and activism. The choice to focus on race and social media in this discussion of student activism is made in part "due to the centrality and saliency of race in the contexts that are inspiring Black students to challenge colleges and universities to live their values related to equity and inclusion and the ways social media makes managing racial conversations and institutional responses to racial conflict a challenge" (Banks and Vasquez, forthcoming 2021). Important to this discussion is recognizing that for many administrators of color a significant part of the choice to take the role and the satisfaction experienced while in the role has been connected to the representation, support, and advocacy-justice work- they provide for students of color.

The relationship between Black administrators and Black students can signify a level of connection, loyalty, and trust that make many of the challenges Black administrators experience from other institutional sources, bearable. The relationships can create spaces of belonging, culture, and unspoken understandings.
It also became apparent that the current ways activism plays out requires new strategies, skill sets, attitudes, and culture shifts. The particular strain that activism has on relationships between Black students and Black administrators was presented to me in informal conversations as:

- A Black student placing a petition in the student newspaper asking a Black administrator NOT to participate in a Black graduation ceremony and how it felt to defy that request.
- A Black Chief Diversity Officer being cursed at while trying to speak to Black students during a protest and feelings of frustration and disrespect.
- A Black administrator being accused of supporting hate speech when defending free speech and not feeling well prepared to address the arguments because the administrator agreed with the students.

Anecdotes like these, and reactions to them, have always been part of the relationships between all administrators and students at colleges and universities. In each of these informal conversations the Black

administrator and I talked about changes in the work with Black student activists, frustration with the inability to resolve some of the conflicts in ways that students felt supported, and new approaches and strategies to try. We discussed the media and the ways once campus-based events and discussions are now picked up by national and international media outlets, especially social media platforms, means that activists and their stories and experiences have wide exposure and consequence and the challenges that presents. I wish I could say we solved these issues in the discussions but that is not the case. The conversations did make me want to learn more about ways Black administrators work with Black activist students so that I can better understand the challenges and opportunities. I also wanted to include a planning guide to help administrators prepare for collaborative work with Black student activists.

The Project

With support from the UC National Center for Free Speech and Engagement, I interviewed 10 college and university administrators about their experiences working with Black student activists and the impact and influence of race and social media in the work. Activism in this project refers to sit ins, marches, email blitzes, and other disruptions to the day to day work at colleges and universities that Black students utilize to bring acknowledgment to racial violence, racist incidents, structural racism and inequity, and that they use to call for institutional change and accountability. The purpose of this project was to:

- capture the ways Black administrators describe, make sense of, and reflect on their experiences working with Black student activists and the impacts of social media on that work
- identify challenges that create obstacles for Black administrators in their work with Black student activists
- present recommendations and strategies for effective leadership and supportive learning.

The participants were interviewed using Zoom. The interviews were recorded and I followed up with phone calls and emails when I needed more information or to ask participants to expand upon a comment or story.[1] I used elements of qualitative research methodology and analysis, including using an open ended interview protocol, coding and analyzing data for themes, and thinking about the phenomenon of the relationship of Black administrators, Black students, social media, and activism, "at it's essence" at this moment in time (Bhattacharya, 2017, pp. 98-100). Some of the questions I asked included: How do you describe your role as a Black administrator working with Black student activists? How has social media informed this work? What do you think Black student activists need to know? How do you navigate the challenges associated with this work?[2]

The Researcher

I am a Black, cisgender, heterosexual woman and a higher education administrator. In the tradition of Black feminist scholarship, it is important to me to name my place in any academic project that I am a part of (Giddings, 1984, Collins, 2000). I am not a neutral participant. As mentioned, the idea for this project came from conversations for an edited book on which I am working. I have had experiences with Black student

[1] I am grateful to the administrators who, already overworked by Covid-19 and other campus responsibilities, took the time to contribute to this project.
[2] I want to wholeheartedly thank my research assistant Lorri Riggs. Her work, support and ideas were invaluable to this project.

activists that made me worry that, after many years as a Dean, my tool set to support Black student activists had become rusty. Through numerous informal conversations, I have learned that other Black administrators, friends and colleagues from a range of institutions, were having the same experience. One particular experience I had several years ago with a Black undergraduate student activist continues to inform how I think about my place in this aspect of my work:

> "The President of the College who is white and I were meeting with a Black female undergraduate student leader who had organized a protest on campus. The protest was in response to a Black student being arrested. Some students were calling the arrest an act of racism. During the meeting, I was explaining the circumstances of the arrest and the support I provided the student involved when the young woman turned to me and said 'Just like I don't trust any Black person who would become a police officer, I don't trust you because you are an administrator at this College'. Her words were like a punch in the gut. Fortunately, the President spoke up and continued the conversation because I could not.
>
> Later, I invited the student to meet with me. I gave her my book about Black Women Undergraduates (Peter Lang, 2009) and explained to her why the topic was so important to me to research and write about. I wanted her to know that we shared values and that I cared about the issues she cared about and about her well-being. She took the book and thanked me. We did not bring up our previous discussion and outside of brief sightings on campus we did not stay in touch. I did hear from other students that she was never satisfied with the work the institution was doing to combat racism and It still makes me sad that she had that college experience. This protest and response occurred just before students began posting interactions with administrators on social media. I wonder what would have happened if that had not been the case? Would it have influenced my response?"

I have told this story many times and, in a recent reflection, I realized how much I wanted the student to take her words back. I had talked with friends and in public presentations about the pain the exchange caused me but not about how much I wanted her to change her mind about me. But that is MY NEED and it is poignant and personal. I am confident that HER NEED to express that sentiment, despite the power dynamics in the room, was just as poignant and personal and was necessary for her well-being (Minnich, 2016, p.80). I realized that my need was because I did not want my professional work to make me and my commitment to anti -racism invisible or deniable. I felt the same way when I found myself the subject of social media discussions and memes posted by students that questioned my support for them. Questions plague me: Am I no longer considered a champion of anti-racism? Why are students talking to me like I am not Black? Do they really believe that I have no sense of the struggle of Black people or of the virulent and insidious racism in the United States? Have I advanced my career in a way that I am no longer seen as an ally or useful in discussion of race and racism? And most importantly, what do I do if that is the case? I am not the focus of this article, but the article is a reflection of my own professional struggle with race, social media, and student activism.

The Participants

Stewart et al. (2020) explained that there is limited research about the relationships between students and administrators that takes into account the social identities of administrators. And that most often the discussion is "linked to the institutional roles rather than their dominant social identities" (Stewart et al, 2020).

For this study I asked participants how they identified racially and what other social identities were salient for them related to their work and this discussion. Eight of the individuals identified as Black or African American. One said he "sometimes identifies as biracial because of his Native American grandfather." One identified as Filipino. One Identified as Asian. Two identified as male. One identified as gay, all others identified as straight. Two identified as Christian. Participants shared the ways their ethnicities, genders, religious affiliations, and sexualities were critical in thinking about their paths into higher education, their current place at their institutions, and the expectations the institutions had for their roles.

This intersectional approach, that is, asking administrators to utilize a lens that allows them to think about their own race, class, sexuality, and gender as dominant and marginalized was critical. The participants were able to identify the ways their experiences were both similar and different from others and from students with whom they interact (Brewer, 1999). This article centers the administrators that identified as Black or African American. The participants who did not identify as Black presented a narrative about Black administrators and student activism which is worthy of discussion. Each of these intersectional conversations provide material for further study. The participants, the type and location of the colleges and universities where they work, and their current administrative titles, are listed below:

- **Ciara** is a Chief of Staff at a large public institution in the northeast.
- **Terrell** is a Vice President for Student Life and Dean of Students at a small private liberal arts college in the southeast.
- **Christine** is a Vice President for Student Affairs and Dean of Students at a small private liberal arts college in the northeast.
- **Pam** is the Associate Vice President and Chief Diversity Officer at a medium sized university in the northeast.
- **Domonique** is the Title IX Program Officer at a small private university in the northeast.
- **Drake** is the Vice President for Equity and Inclusion at a private medium sized university in the northeast.
- **Shawna** is the Vice President for Student Affairs and Dean of Students at a small private liberal arts college in the southwest.
- **Leslie** is the Vice President for Student Life and Dean of Students, at a small private liberal arts college in the midwest.
- **Helen** is the Vice President of Student Life and Dean of Students at a small private liberal arts college in the middle atlantic.
- **Jade** is the Sr. Vice President and Dean of Campus Life at a medium sized public institution in the southeast.

The institutions listed above are where the participants are currently employed. For this research participants were asked to think about the span of their administrative careers and their experiences at all of the colleges and universities where they have worked. Their reflections represent various types of institutions including, historically black colleges and universities, women's colleges, large, medium sized, and small public and private colleges and universities, and liberal arts institutions. This broad lens kept the focus of the interviews on the totality of their experiences with race, student activism, and social media and not individual institutions.

Black Administrators, Black Student Activists, and the Complexity of Blackness

Critical Race Theory posits that "racism is ordinary and that storytelling and counter- storytelling can and should be used to challenge the social construction of race and decenter whiteness" (Hartlep, 2009, Delgado and Stefancic, 2012, Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, Thomas, 1995). Race is always at play, professionally and personally, centrally and peripherally, consciously and subconsciously in the work of Black administrators and Black student activists. In the stories they told, participants described their roles in a variety of ways including: "advocate," "supporter," "educator," "voice," "mediator" and "bridge and broker" between their institutions and Black student activists. The Black administrators connected their descriptions to Black race identity. Jade describes her role as "chief steward of campus emotions" and stated:

> We [Black student affairs administrators] are not afraid of those emotions. We understand the college experience is [made up of] highs and lows for students. We tend to understand that and want to be with students in their highs and their lows. We don't generally have a preference for one over the other.

Shawna explained that "acknowledging the whole student" is critical and that "we can't look beyond how one's racial or ethnic background impacts and influences the choices made and the experiences had." She went on to say that her Blackness "reminds me daily of the opportunities and challenges that I have because of how I look. I bring that lens to much of what I do because of those experiences."

For Christine, moving from a historically Black college to a predominately white institution during the height of the Black Lives Matter movement was "culture shock" because she had "never been around that many white folks." It was at the new school that " Black student activism showed up for her" and she realized quickly that her role would be one of advocacy:

> "You know, being an advocate for the Black students and helping them think through how they can be activists and helping them understand that activism shows up not just in the streets but also in the classroom….I have a very unique opportunity to be a voice for the students…and to help be a bridge and a broker between constituencies who are oftentimes saying the same thing in different ways so they can't hear each other."

Other participants also made specific references to contexts that informed their work with Black student activists including: the Civil Rights Movement, the murders of George Floyd, Breanna Taylor, and Sandra Bland, and the call for predominantly white colleges and universities to reckon with their racist pasts evident in

yearbooks and statues. Jade connected these movements to institutional accountability and student activist responses. She explained:

> "It's weird because like I said we are a school built in the south before the Civil war. We have a deep history of being complicit. We haven't always been on the right side of the equation when it comes to racial justice in America…most of the founders of our campus owned human beings and for a long time until like 15 years ago [the university] was deeply ashamed of that history and there were no public conversations about it…there are a lot more active conversations post George Floyd…When students are demonstrating, a whole lot has happened for students to get to that level."

For Jade, knowing that the historical and modern-day contexts scaffold Black student activism and using her own "lens" of Blackness allows her to translate for other administrators on behalf of the students when they are asked, "why they are demonstrating now?." Christine discussed the impact of these events on her and her work with Black student activists:

> "I left [my former institution] partially because of racial battle fatigue. I was the highest-ranking person in my division. I couldn't look at students anymore and say, you know, it's going to get better because I didn't believe that. I was tired and so… racial battle fatigue can impact you, particularly when you're dealing with activism issues that are directly related to you. Like you look at these things on TV, and you're like, oh, it could be my cousin, that could be my uncle that could be, you know, my daughter's father like Sandra Bland, like that could be me, right? Like all of these very real things and that is heavy."

Leslie agreed that her identity as a Black woman comes into play in her work whether she wants it to or not:

> "As a Black woman I think about what services and programs we should do. But the best way I can describe it is that identity shows up all of the time and even when I don't want it to show up in my work it does because even if my decision has nothing to do with me being a Black woman, right? People are going to attach that identity to my decision making process…and I tell them that the path I am taking has nothing to do with me being a Black woman…so I really sort of flipped that statement back to them…"

Leslie's "flipping back", or managing the conversation so others have to participate, is an act of self-preservation and holding colleagues and students accountable for conversations about activism and race. She continued:

> "I hear it even more from students and from colleagues. If we are talking about diversity issues everybody is quiet until I speak and then everybody has an opinion and wants to weigh in. So that initial sort of flipping it back ..is my approach to waiting out the uncomfortable silence so I am not always the first one talking …well not only do you end up doing all of the talking you also even end up doing all of the work."

Drake was clear that his lived experiences as a Black man did not give him special expertise:

> "One of the things that I have seen is that people assume that just because you are a person of color that you have expertise to be able to be able to do this and that, and that is not the case…The things I do here are not because I was born Black but because I did training and research to get to this point. I feel the effects of these events too. My Blackness doesn't give me any expertise in the area. It gives me expertise with my own lived experience."

The expectation that Drake is equipped to resolve the issues related to Black student activism because of his Blackness, in ways white colleagues are not, is a burden Drake felt compelled to clarify. He identified the labor, often unseen, namely "training and research" that it takes to build his knowledge and skill set. This information from the participants gives important insight into the complex ways racist social and political events and expectations around their own racial identity impact Black administrators as they try to work with Black student activists and their institutions. All of the participants said the work of supporting Black student activists was central to their administrative role and work that they know is important for social change.

Black Administrators, Black Student Activism, and Social Media

Social Media

The phenomenon of social media in the United States has a far reach and infiltrates all social, economic, political, and educational systems at the highest levels. Tanskley (2016) posited:

> "President Obama has come to understand the crucial connections among education, identity, and the American media. His recognition of the immense power of popular media, including social media, to sculpt our collective consciousness as Americans is pertinent particularly giving the recent groundswell in youth media consumption rates…when it comes to adolescent media consumption rates are soaring marking it as a primary agenda of socialized action among today's youth" (p. 243).

Social media is a communication strategy and a creator of knowledge. It reinforces what is proper, powerful, normal, economically beneficial, and what is not. It often aligns itself with dominance. For example, the prevalent use of hate speech, racial slurs, and racist memes, gifs, and videos are examples of ways social media is used to reinforce white privilege and white supremacy. That said, social media has also "been useful in efforts to raise awareness and continues transforming college and university campuses on issues of systemic and interpersonal racism" (Davis, 2019, p. 112-113). Pew research has shown that:

> "Black social media users are especially likely to use these sites for some form of political activism…they are also likely to express positive views about the impact of these platforms for holding powerful people accountable for their actions and giving a voice to underrepresented groups. Social media engagement for causes or issues also varies by age. Just over half of social media users ages 18 to 29 (54%) say they have used these sites in the past month to look for information about rallies or protests happening in their area, compared with 36% of those ages 30 to 49, 26% of those 50 to 64 and

> 20% of those 65 and older. Racial differences are also present within younger groups, with younger Black social media users being particularly likely to post hashtags or encourage others to be politically engaged" (Auxier, 2020).

Black student activists are using platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Tik Tok, and Instagram to bring attention to causes, to learn about, organize, or participate in protests, and to call out racist moments on college and university campuses and beyond. Their use of social media has had significant influence on the work of Black administrators:

> "Social media has changed everything about how we interact with student activists, manage student activism, or even understand the dimensions of student activism on so many fronts. I just think as a student affairs practitioner now you have to have some competence on how social media is used by student activists. So you know, understanding the platform, and understanding how the platforms can be used to coalesce around certain issues."
>
> -Jade

> "You know that they [Black student activists] are so inclined to post something on social media than they are to pick up the phone and just ask you…"
>
> -Leslie

> I think like everything else; everything can be made to be a bad thing right? I think social media is good. I think it connects us to students in ways that we've not ever been able to before."
>
> -Ciara

The Good Parts

Participants outlined how "the good parts" of social media support student activists in useful ways:

> "Social media is also the way many student groups and student activists really build consensus around their priorities. It is how they democratize and flatten the consensus building process for how they engage broadly not just with the campus but a movement in general. So just understanding that and understanding social media's role in the world of student activists is really critical and one that you have to have some competence around it."
>
> "Also, I think understanding how social media amplifies some activism on your campus that might not have been amplified, and only appeared in your student media, social media gives it tremendous platform to, in some instances, have global coverage and so realizing the platform student groups are looking for especially when they are looking to achieve particular goals that platform doesn't just exist

> in the university context. It also exists, they have access to it by building really effective social media campaigns. I have seen students create SPECTACULAR around, especially around environmental justice and racial justice. Spectacular online platforms that really galvanize not just the campus community but in some instances the city and town that you are living in and folks who are concerned about the same issues nationally. So absolutely social media is an important component of our work now."
>
> -Jade

> "It's the worst thing ever but sometimes it's, the best thing ever, right? The good part about social media is it does bring light to issues that normally students wouldn't feel comfortable discussing with each other. We know students who just don't know how to verbally talk with each other, right? But they find confidence in social media…. I mean I'll never forget this example of a Black student that I was meeting with a couple years ago, who couldn't hold like three sentences together in my office when she was trying to tell me what was wrong with her, right? But then about a week later she put it all online…so there's power in social media for folks to one, find a voice and two, to use their voice."
>
> -Leslie

The Black administrators I interviewed understood that social media has changed Black student activism and that there is a need for them to have competency around its use. They saw the mediated space as empowering for students. The ability to "amplify" their causes and approaches builds confidence as students engage multiple communities in their efforts. When Black administrators have established good relationships with Black student activists, they will often give Black administrators access to social media posts providing valuable information about student concerns, student protests, and other plans before the events occur. It can transform the relationship between Black administrators and students and facilitate learning as an outcome of the activist moment. The participants understood that part of the support that facilitates learning comes with meeting students where they are and participating in spaces where they communicate. It also involves paying attention to their own learning and skill set using social media:

> "I try to get training on it as often as I can and I try to stay in touch with the platforms students are using and how they are being used. I also go to social media pretty regularly to understand what's on the minds of students that sometimes don't engage with administrative structures regularly, but go to social media to really think through the experiences they are having at the university. Maybe find community around some of the experiences that they are having. It's like this third dimension for feedback. This portal that you have to step into to really understand how some students that feel more comfortable in that environment are telling stories and really just finding common points to build community around on your campus."
>
> -Jade

This work requires media literacy, discussions about truth and facts versus opinions and fabrications, and support from the highest levels of leadership at colleges and universities.

Black Administrators Helping Black Student Activists Use Social Media Wisely

> "I don't think they know how to use it wisely. And I think, in particular, with Black students and movements I think that they're more inclined to put stuff on social media to get so many other people involved in things that aren't often factually accurate, right? So it's good but it's bad as well."
> -Leslie

Leslie acknowledged that social media can present challenges in the work with Black student activists. Black administrators should expect that materials sent to students during a controversial moment, including confidential information, documents, and email will likely be posted on a social media site. The posting might also include a narrative that does not tell the whole story, leaving Black administrators with no way to address the inaccuracies with the social media audiences but knowing they must with Black student activists. Leslie further explained that social media postings are often home to "cookie cutter demands" that are based in misinformation or do not reflect the specific needs and changes the institution should make to improve the experience for Black students:

> "So I wish that our students were, let's say, more selective about their activism. But also, that they did their homework. So you know all of us have had protests on our campus, you know, in the last decade or so. So you know it comes with these lists of demands, and all this other stuff and they're kind of cookie cutter demands and it's kind of like I can go to the same website that you go to where they told me to download this template. Their activism is not original. It's not organized and a part of it is the absence of dialogue right on the on the front-end. Right? ….It's a short-term solution to a longer-term problem."

> "I'll give an example; we've engaged with a group of Black student activists over the last year or so primarily that evolved out of the George Floyd killing. One of their demands was we need more tenure track faculty in Africana Studies and so it's about 18 of them [Black student activists]. Right? Only two of them are Africana Studies majors. Great. And then, if you ask them if they've taken courses in Africana Studies, the number is a single, so my thing is, you know, I'm not going to question your selection, but what I am going to say is we've never had a Black faculty member in psychology. And that's the most popular major for Black students and so can we do a little bit of homework ? I mean and there's a part of me that, you know, frankly, I am I going to help you, with your activism. As not really an administrator but as a Black administrator, where's the teachable moments. Where I would want it to be different is I would want them to be more informed. I want them to do more of their homework. Don't tell me that you know stuff like that our multicultural office doesn't have enough

> budget if you haven't talked with the director who's like we're good like we can't even spend all the money we get. So I just wanted them to be more informed."

Conversations between Black administrators and Black student activists about inaccurate social media postings should happen in person, whenever possible, in order not to feed the unwieldy patterns of posts and comments on the subject. Goals of the conversation include:

- helping students learn and understand the accurate information and think critically about what was posted
- helping students comprehend the repercussions that may come when revealing confidential information, especially inaccurate information about other students, staff, and faculty, and the possible legal situations they may face personally
- helping students respond and correct inaccuracies with their peers and online.

These steps will assist students as they "do better" and become more effective in their activism. It will make it more difficult for the salient issues related to race and their experience to be ignored because of misinformation and the appearance of not knowing what they are doing. Leslie sees helping students learn in this way as part of her role not just as an administrator but in particular as a "Black administrator" who knows that mockery and dismissal of the Black student activists and their messages can be a result of their promulgating misinformation.

The Echo Chamber

> "I believe that the access to media and social media means that our students are hearing from lots of different voices to inform their thinking and activism. However, the concern is that in most cases they are in an echo chamber and may not be hearing from a diverse set of voices. The lack of diverse input can cause the students to be on heightened alert and passionate about their own perspective without opportunity to think thoughtfully about a different point of view."
>
> -Shawna

Black student activists are not immune to the claims that college students are 'snowflakes' who are unable to hear ideas, opinions, or ideologies that challenge their own. Shawna understands that helping students "think thoughtfully about different points of view" is necessary for them to be successful as activists and for institutions to take them seriously. Black students' passionate activism at times demands the calling out, dismissal, and cancellation of others (Ross, 2019). This shows up as calling for college and university staff and faculty to be fired over issues of free speech, generalized, public accusations of racist motives assigned to missteps, and snatching the Black card away from Black administrators and Black students that do not agree with their stance or action claiming they are not Black or woke enough. Don explained that he often asks himself "Am I not a Black administrator?" when Black student activists get angry and dismissive when he

doesn't agree with their reading of an event or their stated expectation for the outcome for the accused offenders. Black student activists, Domonique, explained "often expect wholesale agreement from Black administrators. They need to understand that part of the support and learning means listening to and acknowledging other viewpoints." Shawna pointed out that Black student activists also need to be able to engage with students around challenging ideas and that part of their support for them is helping them realize the importance of being open:

> "And you know let's talk about what those experiences might look like and let's think about how some of your classmates have had similar experiences that may not be your experience, but this is what their experience is and there needs to be an openness to hearing that."

Institutions must incorporate media literacy and skills related to free speech including clear campus policies, created with input from student activists. There also needs to be opportunities in and outside of the classroom for students to practice listening and responding to notions similar and different from their own. Utilizing controversial social media posts and comments and having students present a range responses to the posts and comments, is one way they can practice this. The goal is for students to build the skills of communication and engagement and to be able to incorporate other viewpoints even when being passionate and solidifying their own. This will counteract the impact of the "echo chamber" and facilitate critical thinking and proficient, informed, debate.

Social Media and Decision Making

> "Social media has given students a broader stage to talk about issues without a lot of depth that a broader audience can buy into. It has put everyone on guard and ill at ease so the type of support students need around their activism isn't happening the same way because no one wants to end up on social media."
>
> -Domonique

Good decision making is necessary for good leadership. When working with Black student activists around issues of racial discord and resulting protests, Black administrators must balance expectations connected to their Blackness, holding the students and their needs at the forefront, keeping the students safe, helping students understand messages that might be hard, and the expectations of the institution. This is demonstrated by Shawna's story:

> "At my previous institution in the midst of the early stages of Black Lives Matter, the Campus Safety director contacted me and said that they had seen some traffic on Facebook, that there was going to be an occupy event on our campus. They weren't initially clear whether this was, you know, occupy Wall Street kind of stuff or if this was Black Lives Matter kind of stuff, but they were expecting this to

> take place on our campus that evening. I was in a major metropolitan area at that time, and you know Campus Safety said, this kind of traffic that we're seeing on Facebook is opening it up to, you know, everybody in the city and we really feel it's important to call the police because this could be much bigger than what we can manage on our campus. I had to really pause in that moment to balance the various issues. What does calling the police mean for me as a woman of color? What does calling the police mean for me as dean of students and with parents who expect me to keep their children, safe? What does "I'm calling the police" mean in the face of our Campus Safety Director?..."
>
> "So I made the decision to call the police. Our campus safety had good relationships with the police, and so it was very clear that he wanted the police outside of campus. They were not welcome on campus unless invited in that moment. And I left to go get dinner and came back and the police cars were lined up on the street. And it was one of those moments, where you think about all of your identities and all of your responsibilities, and all of the ways that this will be viewed. No matter what happens and I'm, you know, I'm grateful that it did not become violent and the police left pretty quickly. It was manageable, you know, in typical student activism kind of way, you know, a little craziness, a little chaos, but nothing, you know, nothing for police to be involved in."

Sometimes the decision making also pushes up against the values of Black administrators and supporting students means giving them hard messages:

> "And later students said to me, "you called the police." And you know, I I didn't feel like it was, it wasn't a time of passing the buck, blaming Campus Safety. It was a time for me to say, let me remind everyone that one of my responsibilities is your safety. And when you don't include me in planning, I don't know what you're going to do...and it may have gotten out of your hands. You may not even have planned for something to happen, but if all the city gets involved, that's a very different situation then, you know, 100 students in a club. So I share that to just say it's, it's how we make decisions. It's having to always live in our various identities, even when they feel in conflict with each other. In responding to them I am always mindful that I am not just speaking to the students on my campus but potentially the world as quotes can be tweeted, videos posted on Facebook and other outlets, and change .org petitions will take an issue around the world. In this context my response tends to be less clear as we try to navigate nuances and address all possible considerations. Gone are the days when you could speak frankly to a student and many educators are fearful of retaliation and therefore, allow issues to brew longer than they should."

The considerations, conflicts, and worry about consequences take a personal toll on Shawna:

> "You know it hurt. It hurt in my in my stomach, my heart, in my head. I think the pain in my stomach was really out of concern for what could go very wrong. And who are the various people I would be accountable to if it went very wrong. It hurt in my heart because, on one hand because of the lack of

> communication I just thought if I had confidence that this was a student issue and not a city issue, I could manage it a particular way. And, as a student leader who's now a student affairs administrator, there's a tug there because I remember being that student and wanting to see change in my four year timeline. So it hurt in my heart. It also hurt in my heart for the fact that the historical experiences of people of color and the police make me hesitant. While I know in my head some things, I also have had some hard experiences. That causes a struggle that might not be the same for somebody else."

Struggle and balancing racialized knowledge and experiences, possible outcomes, and expectations was a common theme among the participants. The pain at times was described, like Shawna's, as physical when working with Black student activists struggling to understand why Black administrators made decisions that seemed unsupportive. The participants talked about the need for collaboration and shared labor from their institutional colleagues to assuage some of the struggle.

Support for Black Administrators working with Black Student Activists

Institutions must pay attention to the ways they support Black administrators in their work with Black student activists. White administrators and faculty, particularly those who study race and justice, often think they are helping when they discourage students from working with Black administrators or encourage Black student activists to challenge the hard messages Black administrators have to give at times. It is also challenging when white colleagues choose to believe social media posts about Black administrators and contribute to the posts in support of Black activist students without full details and accurate information. These moments undermine the work Black administrators know they must do with Black student activists around race and call their expertise into question. White colleagues do have a place in the work and colleges and universities need all faculty, staff, and administrators, to be engaged with Black student activists. What I am suggesting is that white colleagues practice reaching out to Black administrators, to ask questions, get accurate information, and suggest collaborative ways forward to support transformative student learning and facilitate institutional change for equity and justice. It's also helpful to just check in and acknowledge the impact of racist moments on Black administrators and acknowledge their humanity.

Black administrators talked about their work as rewarding and necessary and also about the personal toll this work takes at times. They used words like, frustrating, exhaustion, worry, and as Terrell stated "spreading ourselves too thin wanting to be everything but we can't." Each participant explained that support from the "highest level of the institution," namely the President, was most important to their success.

Black Administrators Advice for Black Student Activists

The Black administrators I interviewed acknowledged that this is a challenging moment in time for Black student activists. Students are often making decisions and carrying out activism with cell phones recording their every move and those moves being posted on social media for all users to see. This makes their protest

moments and ideological stances fodder for outside influencers with their own agendas, and media outlets, especially social media, representing them in one-sided ways. It opens students up to individual and group critique and harassment from outside influencers. The scrutiny and disparagement leads to fear, stress, and anxiety. The participants had messages for the students to help them with these challenges:

1. **Think before you post anything on social media.**
   What is your goal? Know that social media postings have far reach and will create opportunities for hateful comments and doxxing that Black administrators can support you through but cannot protect you from. Remember, as Drake said, that "activism is more than people liking your posts and comments. Many of those people are not actually doing anything with you." Diversify approaches to activism while still using social media to organize and update others.
2. **Truth and facts are important for effective activism.**
   Think critically about what you read, hear, and write and always operate with integrity. Be open to a range of ideas and approaches.
3. **Be kind.**
   People use social media in hurtful ways. Ciara described a staff colleague who was demoralized and maligned when a student "went on social media and called her every name in the book" because he didn't like a decision made. Terrell described a group of students who "were sending vulgar and hateful things to each other" that they wanted him to address. While it is necessary to use strong language when fighting racism, use your intellect and experience to rise above name calling and other hurtful speech, even if you are on the side of right, and present thoughtful, accurate, and meaningful positions for debate.
4. **The Black administrators interviewed want Black student activists to see them as allies even if both groups do not agree on every point.**
   Support comes in both sharing ideals and providing factual information and hard messages even if Black student activists are resistant to the information. Leslie wants students to "realize that not everything that you advocate for is informed just because of your advocacy. Some things are not discriminatory against Black students and that sometimes there are greater issues and more information that students need to know." The more Black student activists and Black administrators communicate the better their relationships, and the better the support that can be provided for student activists.

Black administrators encouraged Black student activists to continue to utilize social media in the fight for justice but do so responsibly. They advised students to seek support while challenging racism. Black administrators believe in the change Black student activists can bring to colleges and universities and want to scaffold their learning while they protest and disrupt.

Conclusions

The commitment of Black administrators to Black student activism is evident in this discussion. What is also evident is the need for the leadership colleagues at colleges and universities, especially the President or Chancellor to recognize the humanity of Black administrators and the ways the impact of racial discord and racial violence, viewed over and over again through media, has on that humanity. Colleagues need to be prepared to support Black administrators working with Black student activists and to work directly with Black student activists themselves. Faculty, and white faculty allies in particular, need to understand that not everything they read on social media is an accurate depiction of a response to an activism moment related to race. Reach out to Black administrators to ask questions when questionable content about their work with Black student activists is posted on social media. Support their efforts to give Black student activists the hard messages they need to hear at times to prepare them for the world beyond college. Black administrators' lived experiences provide a real life, real world, knowledge base that Black administrators use daily to support students. During their protests, Black students often demand colleges and universities hire more Black administrators. This research and resulting materials and dialogues can support the recruitment, retention, and thriving of Black administrators and provide strategies for managing social media's impact. It adds to student development and activism literature and furthers efforts to teach media literacy, a critical component of civic engagement and transformative learning.

We know, as the world continues to be interconnected, with critical ideological and social issues related to race played out in mediated venues like social media, that the challenges to show support and educate students to be media literate critical thinkers, will continue to require dynamic leadership, knowledge production, education, skills and strategy development, and tenacity. Black administrators recognized the usefulness of social media and its challenges. They recognized that the mediation of activists' moments will continue and that they need to embrace and educate themselves, students, and their colleges and universities about this phenomenon and facilitate planning for activist events they know will occur.

This planning and preparation has to occur regularly and before crisis strikes; it must be built into the fabric of the work at colleges and universities. The planning guide that accompanies this article is meant to help administrators at all levels think through their knowledge needs as well as set plans to address some of the challenges of this work and enable their staff to do so also. One of the things the participants in this project all agreed on is that the work is worthy of this time and attention, for it is student activism, and in this case, Black student activism that has, over time, changed the world for the better. And despite all of the challenges, as Terrell stated, "It is an honor to be a part of that."

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