

## Exhaustion: Reality as a student of color at Davidson College

FABIAN LARA

I am a senior. I am a sociology major. I am from Chicago. I am Latino. I am a second-generation citizen. I am a first-generation college student. I am here at Davidson. I am Fabian Lara, and I am tired.



It is that time of the semester when work is piling up, and finals are looming. Papers need to be written, projects need to be in full swing, and survival mode has been activated. However, the last ten days have been exceptionally exhausting. The uproar on campuses around my country caught my attention at various points throughout last week. I was in the library at 1:00 a.m. last Wednesday morning (yeah it was one of those nights) when a friend informed me of the violent threats towards black students on Mizzou's campus. It was a tipping point. In that moment, every part of my body was filled with fear. I was filled with anger. I was filled with sadness and pain. For the next seven hours, into the early morning, all I could think about was why this had happened. The community, including faculty, dared to oppose a system and a leader that they felt was letting them down, and as a result, their well-being and their lives were threatened.

But why am I exhausted? Why should I

bother stressing over another campus? Why should I care about someone else's complaint, someone who I most likely will never meet? I am exhausted of hearing about these issues

at other places and then realizing that I am experiencing the same problems here as a student at Davidson. I am fatigued from long conversations about race and how to deal with it on campus. I am annoyed by people telling me to just leave campus if I don't feel comfortable here. I am tired of people saying I have enough space and resources on campus as a student of color when in fact I constantly am limited in my options. I am insulted by those who do their best to make me feel unwelcomed. This scenario is not new to me, it is not new to my friends, and it is definitely not new to those who tell us to shut up, get over it, and face reality.

What some fail to realize is that I am fully aware of my reality. In fact, it is this very reality that is exhausting for students of color.



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Not only are we students, but we are students of color who have to deal with the inevitable realities of being non-white. We have a choice every time a cop kills another black person,

or a threat is made on a campus, or there is another attack on a person's humanity. We have the choice to pay attention to it, and address the issues that are affecting our communities back home and at school. We also have the choice to ignore what happens and pretend that it does not matter to us. We can save our time and energy for being students, athletes, and active members of other parts of campus life. Either direction we choose, the heavy weight of the consequences drowns us. To engage means to exert copious amounts of energy and emotion in solidarity and support of those around us. To ignore means to feel the

guilt while watching our people hurt without support with full awareness that the next generation of students will inevitably feel the same pain because of our negligence.

Some may ask what pain? What sadness? How can living at Davidson be hurting you? The pain comes from everything I see on campus. The pain comes from loneliness and isolation. I walk into most classrooms and I am the only Latino in the room. I look through my Webtree, and there are minimal Latino professors to teach me anything let alone the subjects I want to learn about. I walk around and I see more Latino men and women working in service jobs than anywhere else on campus. As a student and aspiring professional, what I see everyday is the reality I will soon be a part of. I will soon be part of a world where people like me, and people like my black friends, lack power, autonomy, and even safety in every industry we might desire to work in. I will likely be a token racial minority once again after May 15, 2016 is long gone. The reality I know as the fatigue that has buried me for the last three years and three months at Davidson has a sequel right around the corner. The reality I know is that I will feel the fatigue from the choices of addressing issues or watching them pass by. The reality I know is that the fatigue never ends. This is why it matters. This is why I care. These are the battles I must choose to pick daily. This is why I am tired.

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## An open letter of hope to black students at University of Missouri

This letter was written by the leaders of the historically black sororities and fraternities at Davidson College as part of a nationwide action to show support for our fellow Black peers at University of Missouri.

We, student leaders of historically black organizations at Davidson College, stand in solidarity with the Black community at the University of Missouri. We heard your stories and we empathize with your pain. Most importantly, we applaud your composure, faith and resilience in the face of racism, oppression, and threats against your lives.

We know that #ConcernedStudent1950 began weeks ago in efforts to shed light on the university's failure to provide a safe space and home for you. As students of color, we cannot condone microaggressions, lack of representation, and death threats of Black lives that have taken place at your school. As human beings, we cannot condone the violence that dehumanizes your existence. Even though we are miles away, we are your community and we resonate with you.

We understand your struggle. We know the awkward glances from your peers. The sidebar comments from people against our rallies. The constant fear that there's always more at stake because of your complexion. The debilitating fear that comes from threats issued on anony-

mous social media apps, because those threats could have been issued by anyone in our community. The fear that takes away our time and efforts to study. Standing in solidarity with you is not just a moment of unity, but a call to action to actually take a stand. Our efforts may be long and the battle may be rough, but we are conscious that without struggle there is no progress. We will spark the flame that lights our future.

Initiated by the Tau Omicron Chapter of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc., the students of color and allies on campus organized a demonstration on November 12, 2015. Our organizations played an active role to show our support for your cause and bring attention to it at Davidson. At the demonstration, we stood with locked arms in solidarity by the flagpole outside the campus' primary academic building to sing, chant, and share testimonials of our personal experiences with racism at our predominantly white institution. To see successful students of color deal with many of the very issues we have all long-fought is disheartening, but students like yourselves who fight back are an inspiration to us all.

So, now that we have put down our bull horn, unlocked OUR arms, and left the flagpole, one question still hangs above us: *what do we do next?* The protest held at Davidson, as well as the protests held at campuses across the country, have exposed a deep rift between

students of color/allies and the remainder of our communities. The tedious and often bitter debates that bubble to the surface on our social media, at our lunch tables, and maybe even in our classrooms flare up and then fizzle out following moments of urgent activism such as the one you saw last week. After some time, perhaps, we get social justice fatigue on both fronts. Students of color and their allies feel as though they are shouting into a cavernous vacuum where their ideas, thought processes, and experiences are invalidated at every turn. Eventually we tire of screaming our lives are the primary sources that substantiate the academic claims made for systemic racism and the debilitating effects of racial microaggressions. Those who feel adamantly that the protests are unnecessary hide behind anonymous social media apps out of the fear they will be labeled racist.

But in order for us to even begin to heal the rift, we cannot give in to that fatigue. We challenge students of color and allies to keep talking and demonstrating and asserting our humanity. And, perhaps most importantly, we challenge those who would oppose us to lean into the discomfort. Be willing to actively engage. For those who don't agree with actions taken, say so. Change starts with a discussion, and we must be willing to do the work to have it.

To the Black students at University of Mis-

souri, thank you for challenging campuses all across the nation to participate in this critical movement. Thank you for your activism and we stand in solidarity with you in propelling this movement forward.

Sincerely,

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