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Justice over Diversity
Fighting Structural Racism in the University Teach-In
March 9, 2015

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I. Thank you and disclaimer

I'd like to thank you all for coming tonight to talk about fighting structural racism in the university. I'd like to thank the organizers of this session—Monique and Laura and the rest of the Teach-in committee.

As some of you already know. We lost another brother to police violence over the weekend. On Friday night, Madison police shot and killed Tony Robinson, who was unarmed. Once every 28 hours. Let's take a **28 second** moment of silence to remember all the black and brown people killed by police.

Tonight, I plan to talk about two issues: the meaning of the decline in black enrollment and the development of the racial diversity concept. I also hope to take a stab at thinking about racial justice. Last year, many of us in UCRJ developed critiques of the diversity model of addressing racism on campus, but we spent less time talking about justice. #BBUM did a great job of doing that, however.

So, my presentation will go as follows: I'm going to start in the present. I'd like to talk about black enrollment today, then I will talk about the historical development of diversity as a concept. I will end by talking a little bit about the meaning of justice.

Before I get started, I want to issue a disclaimer: It is true that many racial and ethnic groups of color experience structural racism here at UM differently. I focus on black students because anti-black racism was at the center of last year's racial justice protests. It is true that we need to allow more space and prominence for other racialized experiences on campus. It would be useful to learn how the university racializes other students of color differently than black folk.

Also, bear with me. I wrote this up yesterday, so I'm sure there are some interpretative gaps and contradictions.

II. The meaning of declining black enrollment

I'd like to start by talking about some numbers:

1966—1.2%
1970—3.5%
Fall 1970—5%
1972—6.6%
1984—5.1%

1996—9%
2007—6.8%
2010—5%
2014—4.6%

So what do these numbers mean? [Next slide]

As you can see—the rate of black student enrollment generally increased between 1966 and 1995. Racial progress did not run in a straight line, however. The period was characterized by black student protest during the 1970s and 1980s to make sure that UM would fulfill its promise to acquire and maintain a 10% black student population on campus.

So, why focus on these numbers? Black enrollment is a crucial metric for predicting activism and unrest. Increasing black Americans' experiences of racism correlate with declining enrollment. Higher education scholar James D. Anderson stated in his expert report submitted in the Gratz v. Bollinger case: "What is clear from the historical record is that Black students on campus were stigmatized and isolated as their enrollment declined sharply from 1975 to 1983…It is apparent that the racial climate on campus has improved by increasing student of color enrollments and by the University's commitment to nourish a climate conducive to ethnic and cultural diversity" (4).

Now, let's think about how Anderson's insight's relates to #Being Black at the University of Michigan (#BBUM). One way to look at #BBUM in historical context is that, like the protests in the 1960s and 1980s, the movement punctuated a steep decline in black enrollment and the lack of a mass black presence on campus. It's like what Lester Spence, an activist alum, said during the Taking Back the X talk a couple of weeks ago, many alums were watching and waiting. They knew black students would eventually rise and challenge UM's lack of action around the decline in the black student population. So, as I will hopefully address in my discussion of diversity, numbers and enrollment doesn't capture everything, especially when it comes to thinking about structural racism on campus. The rate of black enrollment, however, symbolizes how black students represent, as Lani Guiner and Gerald Torres said, the canary in the mine. You can look to black students and the numbers to predict activism.

III. The historical context—the rise and fall of diversity, 1968-2006

The rise and fall of the diversity regime [synopsis]

Diversity really took hold during the 1970s after a series of political and economic developments—the restructuring of corporate capitalism on a global scale, the Bakke Supreme Court decision, the corporatization of the university, and further black student protest. UM's diversity regime was institutionalized in James Duderstadt's Michigan Mandate in 1988. The mandate was established in response to BAM III and UCAR protest. This regime was challenged in the 2003 Supreme Court case and later overturned by Proposal 2. Proposal 2 represented the triumph of what sociologist Eduardo Bonilla-Silva calls colorblind racism. The supreme court of the US upheld the colorblind racist stance in last year's case, leaving us to ponder what racial justice can mean after Prop 2 and in the midst of Black Lives Matter.

What are my problems with the diversity concept?

Diversity is superficial—it is about increasing numbers of students of color. Now, on the surface, that appears to be okay, especially if we think about how lower numbers of black students correlate with black student protest. However, diversity initiatives does little to challenge institutional racism or the norms of white supremacy. As we have experienced, students of color are still vulnerable to isolation, marginalization, and microaggressions, even as they live on a superficially diverse campus.

Diversity can be too individualistic—There are studies that suggest the concept of affirmative action for black Americans developed in policy debates during the 1950s and 1960s and through executive proclamations and orders. The concept of racial diversity, especially in universities and corporations, is a post-civil rights phenomenon. It really signifies the post-civil rights promise of class-based integration of black individuals, which means diversity often benefit few black individuals who were in better position, in comparison to poorer black folks, to take advantage.

Diversity often centers whiteness—this is one distinction between diversity and justice. Diversity becomes a way for whites "to learn" how to interact with different groups of people. This is important since whites are expected to govern in both the public and private sector since they represent the political majority.

Diversity, like most ideas (right?), became an instrument to implement globalized corporate capitalism. It's not really a coincidence that diversity emerged as international corporations began to transform into multinational corporations. As I will discuss, corporate leaders sought to enlist non-American managers to maintain their foreign firms. The restructuring of the global economy, deindustrialization, and neoliberal governance helped generate a discourse that connected the benefits of diversity to competing in the "global marketplace."

IV. Black Action Movement & and the End of the Civil Rights Movement

Taken from an article I co-wrote with Garrett Felber for the Michigan Daily, "Student Protest and Affirmative Action":

"After Martin Luther King Jr.'s assassination in 1968, 100 Black students locked themselves in an administrative building to address low Black enrollment. Their demands included the appointment of Black administrators and the establishment of a U-M Martin Luther King Jr. Scholarship. The lock-in resulted in the establishment of the scholarship and the institution of the Center of Afroamerican and African Studies (CAAS, now the department of Afroamerican and African Studies) in 1970.

This takeover initiated student movements that mobilized coalitions, articulated explicit demands and utilized direct-action protest strategies to create a more inclusive campus for students of color. In 1970, the student-led Black Action Movement organized a massive protest to draw attention to racial disparities on campus. Students fought for a Black Student Center, tuition waivers, additional funding for the MLK scholarship, and most importantly, a

University commitment to a 10-percent goal of Black enrollment within three years. The administration initially agreed to only the enrollment goal. BAM responded by taking hundreds of books off the shelves in the library, interrupting classes, picketing parking garages and blocking State Street. These disruptive tactics caused LSA attendance to drop by 75 percent. The strikers gained more power by enlisting white students and organized labor. The University agreed to devote more resources to achieving the 10-percent goal by the 1973 academic year and increase financial support to CAAS."

V. Restructuring of global capitalism, the emergence of neoliberalism, affirmative action, and diversity

Between the 1950s and the early 1970s, businesses in the world market underwent a transformation from international corporations based in a single nation-state to what many observers and activists at the time called multinational corporations (MNCs). What we do not often talk about is how corporate leaders' and university presidents' aims converged around the concept of diversity as a core economic value.

Multinationals like General Electric and General Motors sought to take advantage of technological, political, and economic developments to consolidate production and disparate markets into a single global economic unit. They exploited new forms of communication and transportation. U.S.-based MNC's exploited the U.S. tax code that allowed them to move more factories (capital) out of the country. They began exchanging currencies in international money markets and transfer resources across national borders more seamlessly.

As they sought to do this, corporate managers began talking about the importance of recruiting indigenous managers and managing a diverse workforce. In their 1973 report on multinationals, the AFL-CIO quote a top executive of the Caterpillar Tractor Corporation:

"We will one day become a…multinational business managed and owned by people of different nationalities—through current programs aimed at developing more top managers of different national origins and greater ownership by investors outside of the U.S." (AFL-CIO, The Dimming of America, 12).

Of course, this was evident of an emerging mode of neoliberal governance where corporations would work in concert with other nation-states and global financial institutions like the World Bank to create foreign markets, especially in Latin America, the continent of Africa, and the Middle East, and colonize them. The values governing global corporate restructuring during the 1970s helped lay the foundation for the development of the discourse around having to educate American students to prepare them for the "competitive global marketplace."

VI. Affirmative Action is Challenged: Bakke

So, as corporate managers sought to remake corporations into multinational entities, Americans continued to debate the meanings of affirmative action. The concept and emphasis on diversity emerged out of political debates about affirmative action and "quotas" and an important legal challenge—the Regents of University of California v. Bakke in 1978.

Allan Bakke challenged UC Davis's medical school's admissions policies after he was denied entry. The school reserved a specific number of seats for particular racial groups (16 out of 100 for racial minorities). Bakke argued that UC Davis Medical School practiced a quota policy that unfairly discriminated against him based upon race. The case eventually reached the Supreme Court in 1978. The court ruled in favor of Bakke 5-4, but Justice Lewis Powell argued against strict colorblind policies in the decision. Instead, the ruling established a school's use of race as one of an array of factors in its pursuit of diversity as an acceptable strategy. Justice Powell also maintained the role that racial diversity played in pedagogy and in training workers.

As legal scholar Jeffrey S. Lehman quotes Powell's decision in the chapter, "The Evolving Language of Diversity and Integration in Discussions of Affirmative Action from Bakke to Grutter":

"Physicians serve a heterogeneous population. An otherwise qualified medical student with a particular background—whether it be ethnic, geographic, culturally advantaged or disadvantaged—may bring to a professional school of medicine experiences, outlooks, and ideas that enrich the training of its student body and better equip its graduates to render with understanding their vital service to humanity" (65).

Powell's comments not only reflects what we would now consider a statement of the obvious—that all students can benefit from working in diverse classrooms—they imply that white students continued to gain since they represent the numerical majority inside classrooms and possess greater privilege and access to opportunity outside. Powell doesn't talk about the relationship between diversity and globalization. Yet, it is not that much of a stretch to suggest that his comments about physicians serving a heterogeneous population point us in that direction that suggest that future corporate leaders from the U.S. would need to learn how to manage a multiethnic, -racial, and –national workforce.

Discourses connecting diversity to competing in the "global marketplace" have also emerged since the 1970s.

For example. Take this quote from former UM President Mary Sue Coleman in her 2003 address to the American Council on Education.

On the eve of the Gratz v. Bollinger decision, she said:

"In fact, the excellence and the breadth of higher education is one of America's greatest competitive advantages in a global marketplace. That's what over 60 of our nation's leading companies filing an amicus brief tomorrow tell us. Companies like General Motors. Boeing. Merck. Bank One. Microsoft. Shell Oil. American Express. […] We educate a well-prepared, diverse workforce. The country relies on it to power our economic engine. Students who learn in diverse classrooms know how to take that cross-cultural understanding into America's industries. The corporations supporting our position recruit thousands of their employees from the University of Michigan and other major universities. They have a vested interest in our ability to attract and retain a highly-qualified and richly diverse student body who will become leaders in

our global economy." (http://141.211.13.176/new/releases/4914-president-mary-sue-coleman-university-of-michigan-address-to-the-american-council-on-education)

Look at how Coleman's comment captured the convergence of UM and corporate capitalism around diversity. The restructuring of corporations and production on a global scale and the development of diversity are connected. What emerges out of this context, at least in terms of explaining the importance of pursuing education, is the benefits of having a diverse student body—we're preparing them to compete in a "global market place."

VII. Black Student Protest and Institution of Michigan Mandate as affirmation of diversity at UM

The Black Action Movement III and the United Coalition Against Racism (UCAR) were formed between 1985 and 1987 in response to a series of racist incidents at UM. These movements also developed on the heels on another decline in black enrollment—from 6.6% in 1972 to 5.1% in 1984. Both organizations challenged the administration to condemn racist actions by the university's white students. Students blocked Fleming Hall and issued 12 demands. They focused on raising black enrollment, anti-racist education and highlighting low numbers of Black faculty. UCAR also demanded the University close in recognition of MLK Day. BAM III was able to negotiate concessions from the administration. Some included establishing a vice provost for an Office of Minority Affairs, institutionalizing affirmative action goals in reviews of all deans and department chairs, and an annual budget of $35,000 for the Black Student Union (Anderson, 71; Felber and McCoy, "Affirmative Action and Black Student Protest").

These concessions formed part of the core of the Michigan Mandate that President James Duderstadt drafted and released in 1988. The plan aimed for people of color to represent at least a third of the student body by 2000. It also outlined plans to hire and retain more faculty and administrators of color.

The Mandate represented UM's first attempt at institutionalizing a diversity regime throughout the University. Departments were now responsible for fulfilling the Mandate and all administrators were accountable to the President and the rest of the central administration. Black enrollment almost reached the coveted 10% threshold during the mid-1990s.

VIII. Prop 2 as triumph of colorblind racism

In 1997, black enrollment began its long descent. Between 1997 and 2006, the black enrollment declined from 9% to 7.1%. Many of us in UCRJ believe that this suggested that changed before the implementation of Proposal 2 caused the drop. We hypothesized that UM administrators were busy preparing the university for a legal challenge. They got the legal challenge in 2003 and won. Yet, UM could do little to stop the popular challenge to race-based admissions in 2006. Jennifer Gratz and Ward Connerly of the Michigan Civil Rights Initiative led the challenge. The

organization led a movement to amend the state constitution to ban the use of race, color, sex, or religion in college admissions.

Of course, this type of law sounds admirable on the surface, yet it was grounded in very superficial understandings of affirmative action. Instead of affirmative action's intent to address historical racism, Prop 2 was grounded in the assumption that race-based affirmative action policies represented a form of "reverse racism" intended to hurt whites. Ultimately, Prop 2 made any form of redress on the basis of race and ethnicity illegal. Actually, the assumptions embedded in Prop 2 stood in direct contrast to Justice Powell's decision in Bakke.

UM administrators greeted Prop. 2's passage with consternation. Mary Sue Coleman addressed protesters on the Diag, assuring them that they had her support. The problem was that Coleman and other UM administrators began to use it as a crutch as they watched black enrollment decline and the university's racial climate worsen. They claimed to be powerless even as they continued to brag about UM's tradition of leading the nation's universities in the fight to defend affirmative action.

The passage of Prop. 2 ushered the second phase of the decline in black enrollment, eventually setting up the conditions for the establishment of #BBUM and UCRJ last year.

XI. A few thoughts on racial justice

So what could racial justice look like? Racial justice signifies a commitment and ability to redress stubborn patterns of racial inequality. A campus grounded in racial justice needs to be able to deliver redress to people of color for instances of racism, sometimes historical, mostly contemporary. Redress, not progress or greater numbers, should become the metric for assessing climate. A campus built upon racial justice would ensure an environment where students, faculty, and staff of color are empowered to make substantive change from the bottom up. A campus built upon racial justice would ensure an environment where white supremacist and corporate values are decentered, at the very least, in pedagogy, research, in hiring and retention of faculty.

The problem that remains, at least in terms of addressing the enrollment issue, is Proposal 2. But in that problem lays opportunity to innovate our politics and instruments for delivering racial justice. We have to get creative.

I would look to #BBUM's 7 demands and then build from there.