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A Seat at KSU's Table

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The African American/black student population makes up 18.8% of the Kennesaw State University student body. However, to many within the African American community, that percentage feels so much smaller. It is important for minority groups to feel and be represented at predominately white institutions also known as PWIs. There is a good chance that when a black high school senior is deciding where to apply, the decision of attending a PWI or an HBCU (historically black college or university) comes to mind at least once. Some black people's reasoning for choosing HBCUs over PWIs is due to the fact that their high school was majority white, and they want to experience college differently. Other students, like myself, decide to go to a PWI because their high school was already majority black and they want a different experience too. Nevertheless when attending a PWI, problems of representation, prejudice and inclusivity start to form.

On Saturday, October 15, 2016, KSU hosted rapper Lupe Fiasco for the homecoming concert. Like many of the campus-wide events, there was a lack of black students in attendance. For this specific event, few people showed up overall, which is somewhat understandable given that not many people listen to Lupe Fiasco anymore. At one point, that was my reason for not wanting to go, but eventually I changed my mind. Because it was a rap concert, I expected a bigger turnout from the black students at Kennesaw. There was a small section where I sat that had a good amount of black people, but overall the gym was filled with mostly white people. As a black person, imagine being surrounded by white people screaming and yelling the N-word dozens of times. This leads to a more in depth reason as to why black people may skip out on campus-wide events. Being in predominately white spaces can sometimes be uncomfortable.

There is an online essay by singer-songwriter Solange Knowles titled "And Do You Belong? I Do." In the essay, Knowles talks about her recent experience at a concert when she was harassed by a few white women because she was dancing and they could not see past her hair. The white women started throwing food items at her while calling her racial slurs. Although not as extreme, it is possible to connect Knowles' experience to one that a black student at a PWI might have. The situation Knowles wrote about was a racially charged incident that might have happened to me or one of my friends at the Lupe Fiasco concert.

Although it is 2016, racism is still a prominent issue, especially on PWI campuses. There have been many instances of racially charged acts on other campuses around the nation during this 2016 fall semester alone. For example, at The University of North Dakota, a group of white students posted a picture of themselves wearing blackface with the caption "Black Lives Matter." The white students were clearly mocking a groundbreaking civil rights movement. As a black student, I find that disconcerting. Who is to say something like that won't happen at my school? That is why black people at PWIs tend to form their own

communities and programs where their culture and presence is accepted and appreciated.

The second campus event I attended was a general meeting for KSU's NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People) chapter. This is the perfect example of inclusivity and community. At the meeting, attendees discussed the importance of the black community being positively portrayed at KSU. Racism and prejudice are alive and well. The truth is that no matter what, some people automatically see black people and assume the worst about them. It is important for black people at a PWI, such as KSU, to be portrayed in a positive light. The prejudice of the university was reflected by a discussion of Greek life organizations. One student shared that he had recently overheard several white people mocking the practices of some of the black sororities and fraternities. Hearing about instances like this can be disheartening for black students at PWIs. Plenty of black students already struggle with being a minority on campus. When they are also made fun of for participating in activities that pertain to their own culture, it can be hurtful. This also shows that even when black people on campus find sense of community, they can still have troublesome moments in predominately white spaces.

The issue of cultural appropriation was also discussed in great detail at the meeting. Cultural appropriation happens when a superior or dominant group takes elements from a group whose culture has been systematically oppressed by that same superior group. For example, a white woman may want to cornrow her hair down into two braids for a job interview. The interviewer may not necessarily see anything wrong with it. On the other hand, if a black woman were to walk into the same interview, she may instantly be judged because there is sometimes a negative connotation when it comes to black people with braids. To some non-black people on campus, these instances may seem distant and irrelevant, but these are real problems that people at KSU may experience or already have.

The Kennesaw Activities Board recently hosted a meeting to talk about why voting matters in the black community, especially in regards to millennials. There was a guest speaker named Dr. H. Benjamin Williams, President of the Cobb County chapter of Southern Christian Leadership Conference. This meeting was very important and informative. There is a long history in regard to black people being able to vote in this country. It is essential black people are aware of this history as well as their culture. Since KSU is not an HBCU, African American culture is not really a heavily discussed topic unless a student takes a course specifically about it. However, discussions such as why voting matters in the black community may be prominent in a political science or history class at an HBCU. Having a meeting like this at PWI like KSU can be very impactful and eye opening for black people on campus.

Sometimes, when people think of the culture of a university, they think of the broad aspects. KSU has a variety of different cultures, but it is vital to note that some of these cultures lack representation. This is why it is so impactful for KSU having to have an NAACP chapter, black sororities and fraternities, and other inclusive activities for students. Black people at PWIs should be able to have positive and comfortable experiences while submersing themselves in their culture.