



THE ASSOCIATION OF BLACK PSYCHOLOGISTS, INC.

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Marriott Oakland City Center
Oakland, California
July 30-August 6, 2008

October 18, 2007

To: Susan Fuhrman, Ph.D., President
Columbia University

From: Dorothy Holmes, Ph.D., President and
Benson Cooke, Ed. D., President-Elect
The Association of Black Psychologists

Re: Racial Intimidation Incident

The purpose of this communication from The Association of Black Psychologists (ABPsi) is to extend our support to Madonna Constantine, Ph. D., of Teachers College, Columbia University, in light of the traumatic event that has occurred, and to express our willingness to help the University improve its racial climate, and assist in resolving these kinds of problems.

It is obvious with the recent incident that occurred at Columbia University when someone or some individuals placed a noose on Dr. Constantine's door that the mere passage of time does not equate to a healthy change in racial attitudes and behavior. While legislation has limited impact on behavior, it has little or none on an individual's attitude. These behaviors and attitudes primarily originate in our families and are reinforced when others in the larger social context fail to speak out against such horrific acts. There is the false belief that venues such as institutions of higher education are exempt from acts of blatant racist terrorism. However, it is apparent with the rise of blatant acts of racism across the country the mere passage of does not sustain healthy change in attitudes and behavior. Unless we engage in constructive dialogue, education, and activities to address this deeply systemic and racial loathing, the fear, which is the basis of hatred, and the mindset behind this behavior will continue.

It is critical that the faculty, staff and students of Columbia University, as well as people nation wide understand the full ramifications of the culturally traumatizing message in the symbol of the noose even in the 21st Century. This is especially foreboding to African Americans given the brutal and psychologically destructive history of enslavement,

dehumanization, Jim Crow, institutional and personal racism, and cultural discrimination in America. The message conveyed with the use of this symbol is the same influencing the other acts of racial bias and disregard we see in all aspects of our current social policies and practices.

Symbols have been used as a means by which societies have been able to concisely convey an idea or to tell a story to their people. Nations, religions, organizations, and families for example have historically adopted symbols to convey an affirmative mark of distinction, to inform of important allegiances and/or educate others to a body of knowledge related to a set of personal or collective identities. Conversely, symbols historically have been used to forewarn, terrify and convey to certain populations a message provoking alarm, intimidation, violence with the ultimate ambition of silencing. We believe that such is the case of the noose tied to the door of Professor Constantine, and we find it as unacceptable, as we are sure you do.

Therefore, The Association of Black Psychologists (ABPsi) urges the administration at Columbia University to thoroughly investigate this matter and take the necessary steps to ensure that faculty, students and staff learn from this incident another way of being that is anti-racist, appreciative of the contributions of all racial groups, and creates a safe and healthy environment for all. As such, ABPsi extends this offer to work with you and your staff to increase the sensitivity, self-knowledge, and value for diversity required to help develop an emotionally and physically safe, morally and ethically sound, healthy environment for all connected to Columbia University, which can become a model for the nation.

Respectfully,

Dorothy A. Holmes, Ph. D.
President

Benson G. Cooke, Ed. D.
President-Elect

Board of Directors of The Association of Black Psychologists

Cc: Madonna G. Constantine, Ph. D.