

November 14, 2007

Dear President Levin:

We are a group of concerned Black Yale alumni and members of the Yale Black Alumni Network.

We have been alarmed, appalled, and angered by incidents of racial violence and insensitivity that have occurred on the Yale campus in recent weeks, specifically the racial epithet graffitied on Pierson College and the wearing of "blackface" on Halloween by some Yale students.

We are writing to ensure that the University understands our concerns about these incidents, and considers our views in determining how to respond to them.

Besides being mordantly offensive to us as Black alumni, these incidents slash at the spirit of community that the University strives to foster. Of paramount significance to us, these incidents and those like them poison the learning process of a broad spectrum of Yale students by causing or augmenting doubts among Yale's students of color that they are indeed welcome at Yale; by engendering the fear among these students that they are not physically safe while in the school's care; and by inspiring the fear among these students' schoolmates, of whatever race, that their colleagues of color might be at any time the victims of new acts of torment, or even of violence.

While we wholeheartedly commend Dean Salovey and his fellow University officers for their swift and unequivocal denunciations of the incidents which precipitated this letter, we believe that it is imperative that the University take equally swift action to implement policies and procedures to redress these acts of racial violence and insensitivity, and to prevent their recurrence.

We are concerned that any less vigorous a response than strong, focused action could allow the perception to form that on some level the University condones these acts of hatemongering. Although we have no doubt whatsoever that such a perception would be inaccurate, we also fear that if allowed to fester it could both encourage additional hateful acts, and send the message to both current and prospective Yale students of color that they might be better off studying elsewhere.

We believe that the most effective hedge against all of these unfortunate possibilities would be a firm, clear, and quick response from the University entailing commitments along two dimensions: 1) actively pursuing justice for the perpetrators, and 2) designing and implementing protocols intended to foster enduring respect for diversity among Yale undergraduates.

Pursuing justice

We acknowledge the possibility that the recent act of hatemongering in Pierson College was not perpetrated by Yale students. In fact, while we would still deplore this incident no less ardently, many of us would probably be relieved if this were the case. We call upon the University to commit all of the resources necessary to apprehend those who perpetrated this act.

If the perpetrators are Yale students, we demand that the University expel them immediately. Additionally, we call upon the University to sue these perpetrators civilly, and to have them prosecuted under local, state, and/or federal law for having committed a hate-crime. We also ask that the University pursue these two remedies -- civil suit and criminal prosecution -- against the perpetrators if they are not students anywhere. If the perpetrators are students at another school, we call upon Yale's

administration to formally ask that the home schools of these students discipline them academically to the fullest extent possible under their own Codes of Conduct. We further ask that Yale also call for and assist to the fullest extent practicable in the criminal and civil prosecution of these students, regardless of whether or how fully their home schools discipline them academically.

Preventing recurrence

In order to diminish the likelihood that these incidents and others like them will again occur on the Yale campus or be perpetrated by Yale students, we call upon the University to institute the following procedures, programs, and protocols at the earliest possible juncture:

1. Investigate the implementation of an ethical surveillance system that would both respect civil liberties and maximize student safety;
2. Make convictions stemming from acts of racial violence expellable offenses for all students, including those enrolled in Yale's graduate and professional schools;
3. Require, as part of the Distributional Requirements and as a requirement for graduation, that all undergraduate students take a seminar on inclusion and diversity; and,
4. Direct the Yale College Admissions Office to a) undertake a study to determine whether there are any reliable protocols or combinations of protocols for identifying which prospective students have a propensity for committing acts of racial violence, and, if such protocols exist or can be created, and b) incorporate them into the admissions process as soon as is practicable so that such students are not admitted to Yale.

We realize that some of these recommendations raise serious questions. We therefore suggest that the University work closely with its General Counsel to ensure that all preventive measures rest on sound legal footing, and that it engages appropriate educational counsel, whether from within or without the University, to ensure that the measures adopted are as easy to administer as they are efficacious.

We also acknowledge that some of the measures we call for are both potentially costly, far-reaching, and, arguably, controversial. As for the costs, we believe, simply, that the University has the means to afford the measures we believe are necessary. As for having the will to design and implement them, we perceive it in the University's pride as an institution that values inclusion and diversity, and one that aspires to groom leaders for a shrinking and an increasingly culturally-complex world.

We close by again applauding, as an indispensable step in the right direction, the University's several denunciations of the recent events of hatemongering on campus. We also offer our assistance to the University as it responds to these events by redoubling its efforts to create an environment in which all of its students feel as highly esteemed by their fellow students as by the University itself.

Respectfully,

Concerned Members of YBAN

cc: Dean Peter Salovey, Vice President and General Counsel
Dorothy K. Robinson