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Conclusion

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Conclusion

Julius Amin

On the eve of the Emancipation Proclamation, President Abraham Lincoln informed Congress that America “cannot escape history.” It has been over 150 years since that proclamation was issued and America remains a nation deeply divided by race. Race, wrote Derick Bell, remains a “permanent” fixture on the national conscience, and few things in the country are more explosive than a race crisis. It is within this historical context that recent tragedies, including the deaths of Mike Brown, Eric Garner, Tamir Rice, and John Crawford III, should be understood. It was in such an unsettled social landscape that our Symposium of Race had its origins. Panelists and speakers at the symposium spoke passionately about the burden of being black on the University of Dayton campus and called for relentless effort to turn the tide. Repeatedly, they spoke of an unwillingness to turn UD’s mission into reality for all. Repeatedly, they took issue with an academic curriculum which, despite the innovative ideas of the Common Academic Program, still relegates racial diversity to a footnote. Repeatedly, speakers argued that UD needed racial equality and not racial tolerance. Repeatedly, they called on UD’s leadership to institute policies with “teeth” to address the race problem. At one point, a speaker at a session asked if there was a member in the senior

administration present and none was available. That said it all. Most within the senior leadership did not see this symposium as significant enough to attend—with the exception of the keynote address, which was delivered by the provost. Compared to other college campuses in the country, UD’s calmness, while encouraging, shouldn’t create the illusion of overall satisfaction. The symposium, indeed, raised a set of challenges, some of which attendees believed could be solved with a stroke of the leadership’s pen.

Perhaps the most recurring concern at the symposium dealt with the embarrassingly low number of blacks on the University of Dayton campus. There is a critical shortage of blacks at every level: students, staff, faculty, and senior-level administration. The real tragedy is that the low numbers of blacks at the University of Dayton have been accepted as routine; and as a result, there seemed to be no concrete short- or long-term strategy to reverse the trend. By failing to address the problem of recruitment and retention of blacks, UD and other universities across the country squander significant opportunities. As Tanya Washington has written, having blacks on campus should be much more than “a matter of optics.” “Faculty of color,” she continued, “can positively impact the campus climate by fostering inclusion and cross-cultural understanding.” Racially diverse faculty help students to examine stereotypical notions and “biases,” and challenge them to rethink their position and role in a multicultural global community. In his keynote address, Paul Benson denounced as “unjust” a race culture which presents “impediments to students’ educational achievements.” At the University of Dayton, the Marianist charism—which demands reading the “signs of the times”—supports that students be educated to think differently as they prepare for life in a new world.

The Symposium on Race was designed in part as a wakeup call. Given that it has been referenced by the University

leadership in speeches and documents, it seemed to have generated a new sense of urgency, even if temporary. Policies to address issues raised by the symposium must be result-oriented. And those responsible for providing solutions must be given clear mandates to produce results within specific time periods. Universities do this all the time. For example, when new faculty are brought in, they are given specific benchmarks as a precondition for tenure. It has been less than six months since the symposium took place, and as the storm quiets down and attention shifts to other things, it appears the University of Dayton, like the nation as a whole, has reverted back to the usual. While race remains on the to-do list, it is not a low-hanging fruit. The enthusiasm and recommendations made by this symposium must not be forgotten. Failure to act on them, in essence, makes the University an accomplice of “unjust” racial practices. Let Tiara Jackson, a student presenter, have the final word: there should be “Less Talk: More Action.”