

# Chapter 44

## Men and Women Against the Other

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The purpose of this chapter is to discern the oppressive and prejudicial treatment inflicted on Black students at John Carroll University, a private white institution. This chapter will outline instances of oppression, culturally and racially insensitive behavior, and lack of solidarity that one student of color in particular experienced throughout her four years of attendance. The goal of this chapter is not only to inform others of the treatment of this student, but to encourage students of color to advocate for themselves and pursue their education regardless of the obstacles they may encounter.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

As stated by human rights activist Malcolm X, “The most disrespected woman in America, is the Black Woman. The most un-protected person in America is the Black Woman. The most neglected person in America, is the Black Woman” (X, 1962). This was a distinguished quote from a speech given by Malcolm X. It is a statement with which I agree and have lived experiences. Through many aspects of everyday life, such as career, education, and social life, black women are constantly reminded that they are “third class citizens” and that even though they do everything right, it is still not enough (Cooper, 2018). As a woman of color, I did not realize how little my existence meant to others until I attended college. My college years should have been a pleasant and exciting time in my life, however it only proved to be discouraging and negatively revealing. Throughout this chapter, I want to describe how as a woman of color I persevered through my struggles, tribulations and anguish at a private religious white institution.

I was primarily raised by my mother, and my grandparents in Cleveland, Ohio. I have always been very grateful that I have a family who continuously stressed the importance of school and having an education. Growing up, I was always told that an education is something that cannot be taken away from you. It is something that you have earned and it will always carry merit. With that in mind, I strove to

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excel in academics. I have always found academics and the idea of learning riveting as I read endlessly in hopes of learning something new each day. When it was time for me to apply for college, I began choosing between my *reach* schools, schools that were highly likely of getting into, and schools that I knew for sure I would be accepted into. The *reach* schools were schools that I did not feel were likely to accept me due to admissions expectations. John Carroll University in University Heights, Ohio fell into my “likely” category. Although John Carroll was not a “goal” school, it was still on my radar and I would have been happy to be accepted. Prior to being accepted to John Carroll, I had very little knowledge of the campus culture. I prioritized time to research the majors and programs that the university offered, yet I knew nothing about the culture of the school itself. I did not know much about Catholicism to begin with and I did not know anything at all about the Jesuits.

John Carroll is a Catholic university centered on the principles of Jesuit education. One of the primary principles of a Jesuit education is the frequently stated motto of being, *men and women in solidarity with others*. That principle grew in part from the 29th Superior General of the Society of Jesus, Fr. Hans Kolvenbach’s assertion:

*When the heart is touched by direct experience, the mind may be challenged to change. Personal involvement with innocent suffering, with the injustice others suffer, is the catalyst for solidarity which then gives rise to intellectual inquiry and moral reflection. (Inspiring Quotes, n.d.)*

The experience of personally being involved with others, who have suffered and continue to suffer injustices, can bring about solidarity with the other—*creating men and women for others*. Throughout my undergraduate experience at John Carroll University, I did not experience solidarity from my white peers, but more so faculty and staff. I was fortunate to have professors who were understanding of injustices I face as a black woman.

During my college search process, my mom and I scheduled a tour of John Carroll University (JCU). I was asked to fill out a form prior to coming to campus which asked me a series of questions such as my current school, major of interest and where I was from. When I arrived on campus, I was introduced to my tour guide who was currently a senior at JCU. This young lady was also a woman of color. She seemed very happy to be a student there and had nothing but great things to say about the institution. I was also very intrigued when she told me all of the clubs and activities that she was involved in such as Greek Life, for example. She gave my mom and me a tour around campus for about twenty minutes and when it was time for lunch, she guided us to the cafeteria where she said I would meet a few other students who could tell me more about the school. The student I spoke with in the cafeteria was also another young woman of color. She was at the time a sophomore and delighted in giving me pointers for my freshman year. As she was talking, I caught my eyes wandering around the cafeteria looking at the other college students.

I remember seeing many students with tall plates of food and that definitely grabbed my attention, but I did not see many black people in the cafeteria. It was not until I got in the car with my mom that I realized I did not see anyone in that cafeteria, other than my tour guide, who looked like me. At eighteen years old I did not find that problematic, but more so strange because I had always attended school with black students. I convinced myself that there must be black people at the school and that modern-day segregation could not possibly exist. In a sense I was right. Obviously, there were not any Jim Crow laws or blatant segregation laws in effect at JCU. What I did not know is there is a thriving racist culture at the institution and how much of a plague it actually is to the institution and its students.

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