

Justice For All: Multiethnic Student Collaboration for Civil Rights

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Cultural Diversity at the University of Notre Dame

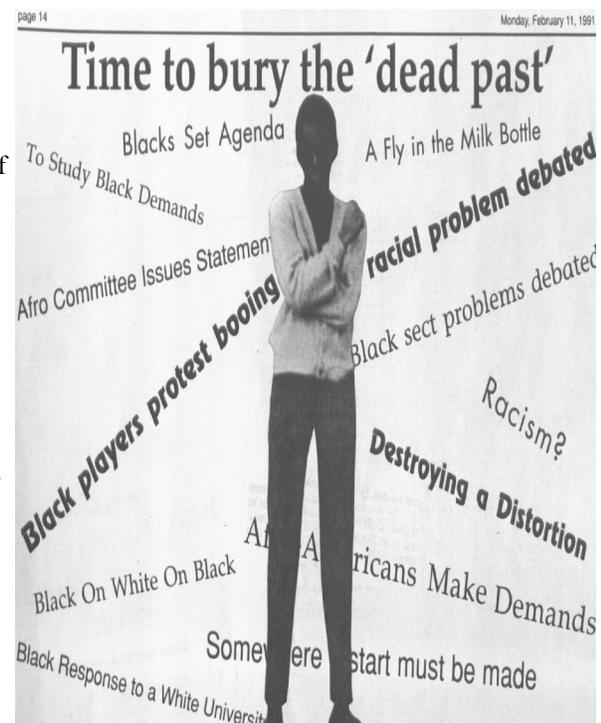
The University of Notre Dame has a rich history of student activism and collaboration between diverse ethnic groups to increase the acceptance and celebration of cultural diversity in the Notre Dame community. Since 1969, African-American, Latino, and Asian students have expressed the difficulties of being of an ethnic minority at Notre Dame by publishing articles in the student newspaper, *The Observer*, and in other newspapers like *Nuestra Voz* in the nineties. In the past, students wrote about the racism, the prejudice, and the stereotypes directed towards students of color, obstacles that still exist today. What lessons can we learn of how to work together to build a community free of discrimination?

For a large part of the history of student movements to improve civil rights at Notre Dame, ethnic student groups have worked within their own communities. Notwithstanding, there are key periods in the history of Notre Dame when students collaborated across ethnic and racial lines: from 1990 to 1992, during the movement of SUFR (Students United For Respect) and from 2010 to 2012 through the combined efforts of MEChA (el Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán), BSA (the Black Student Association), and the Diversity Council of Student Government.

Students Unite

In November, 1990, nine student organizations formed a coalition against racism, to request that the University adopt an official policy on discriminatory harassment. The coalition included ethnic groups such as the Notre Dame chapter of the NAACP, BCAC (Black Cultural Arts Council), and political student groups, like the Democratic Socialists of America. The students demanded that the University create a mechanism for reporting discriminatory harassment. Alicia Sierra, member of the Democratic Socialists, stated: "We want (the University) to recognize that racial discrimination and harassment exist on this campus."

This coalition transformed into Student United For Respect (SUFR), comprised of students of diverse ethnic backgrounds. They focused their efforts on calling attention to what they considered a lack of commitment on the part of the University towards cultural diversity and lack of support for students of ethnic minorities. SUFR sought to work alongside the administration by organizing meetings with Patricia O'Hara, Vice-president of Student Activities. When those meetings yielded little response, SUFR organized a demonstration during a meeting of the Board of Trustees. At the demonstration, they chanted, "We want cultural diversity," and held signs that said, "ND really means No Diversity." The administration made a step towards meeting SUFR's demands by establishing a policy on discriminatory harassment on April 16, 1991.

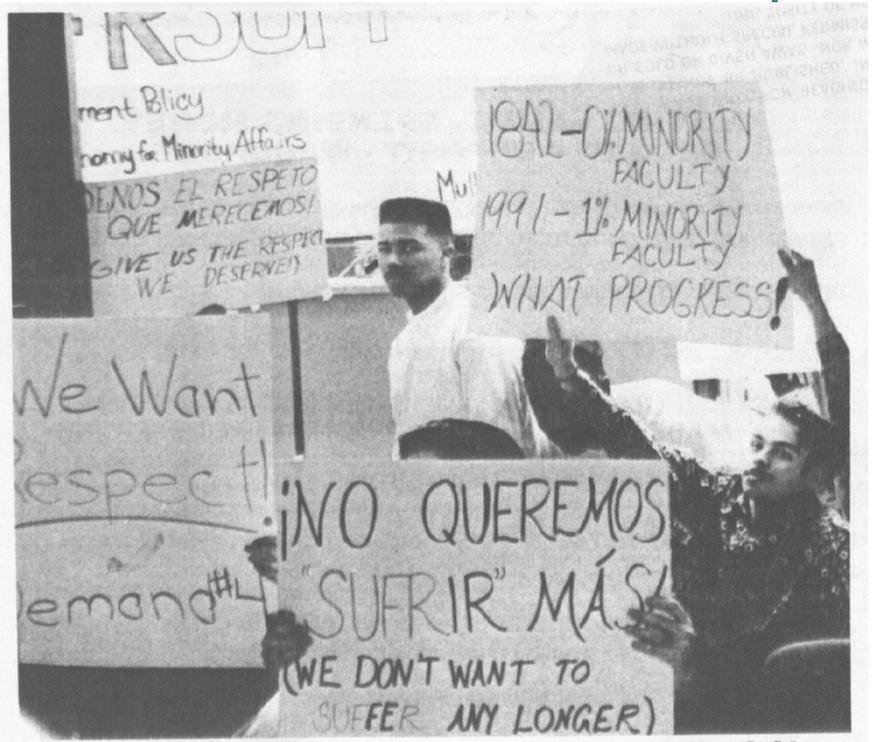


The SUFR Movement, 1990-1992

Two days after the establishment of a discriminatory harassment policy, SUFR organized a sit-in at the Office of the Registrar with the goal of obtaining a meeting with the President of the University, Father Malloy, CSC. They chanted, "What do we want? ...Respect. When do we want it? ...Now." Others carried signs that said, "God is not colorblind." Twelve hours later, SUFR left the main building with plans for future negotiations with the administration. Yolanda Knight, one of the leaders of SUFR, said that the sit-in was important to "increase a sense of community among ethnic students on campus."

SUFR created a list of demands that they believed were the most appropriate methods to improve cultural diversity at Notre Dame, which included: an effective policy on discriminatory harassment, an increase in cultural diversity, a building for a multicultural center for students, modifications to the financial aid program geared towards increasing the ability of minority students to attend the University, and the creation of a required course on ethnic diversity for all students.

How did the University respond? The day after the sit-in, Father Malloy established a Taskforce On Cultural Diversity – comprised of African-American, Latino, Asian, and White administrators, faculty, and students – to develop recommendations to the administration.



The Observer/Eric Bailey
Members of Students United for Respect (SUFR) hold up signs during their sit-in at the Administration Building on Wednesday. Their demands of talking with Father Malloy at this time were not fulfilled.

In May, 1992, a year after SUFR's demonstrations, the Taskforce On Cultural Diversity published its first report, which recommended: a revision of the mission statement of the University of Notre Dame, a revision of the policy on discriminatory harassment, the establishment of a seminar for the First-Year of Studies that integrated the theme of cultural diversity, a fund to hire more professors of ethnic minority status, the creation of a selection of courses pertinent to cultural diversity across all departments. They called for workshops to train administrators how to be aware of cultural diversity. In regards to dorm life, they called for the University to maintain statistics on the retention rates of ethnic minority students in dorms, to make a commitment to recruit ethnic minority students to become residence hall staff, and to implement programs and activities that would help create an environment in the dorms that promoted cultural diversity among students and staff. These recommendations, among many others, were presented to Father Malloy on September 1, 1992.

SUFR maintained a low profile during the fall of 1991 and the spring of 1992. The members of the movement decided to shift their focus towards their own communities.



The Observer/ Eric Bailey
Students united for respect eat lunch in the Registrar's office of the Administration Building Wednesday during the sit-in of Students United for Respect. The sit-in lasted a total of eleven hours.

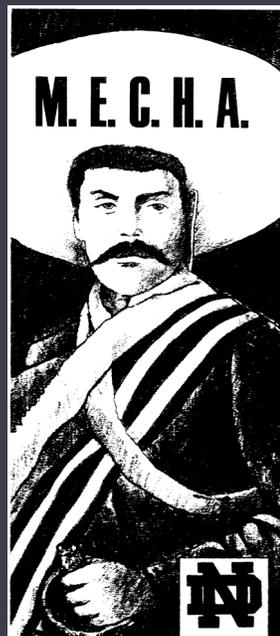
Twenty years after the movement of SUFR, MEChA (el Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán) has been a leader in the debate over cultural diversity at Notre Dame. Stephanie Pérez, a member of MEChA, organized a panel on Diversity that included Dr. Don Pope-Davis (African-American), Vice-president and Associate Provost for Faculty Affairs, Mirella Riley (Latina), Assessor from the Office of the President, and Tobias Blake (White), Assistant Director of the Office for Multicultural Students Programs and Services (MSPS). A Mexican-American student and a Native American student gave testimonials about suffering they had endured because of their ethnicity. Pérez said that there were more than 100 people present, "there were Whites, Asians, Latinos, Blacks, and Native Americans present at this event and I think it was therapeutic for them to tell their stories to these administrators and to their peers... It was empowering for them." MEChA won the prize for "Best Club of the Year" thanks to the efforts of Pérez.

On November 9, 2011 and March 22, 2012, as the Diversity Representative for MEChA in the Diversity

Council, Maya Younes organized two workshops dedicated to Race Relations in Housing. She wished to continue the work that Pérez started in 2010 but with the focus on racism in dorm life. The first workshop centered on discussing the ways to improve the acceptance of multiculturalism in dorm life and eliminate discrimination through increased cultural awareness. The second workshop focused on developing student-based solutions to making a more inclusive community and presentations given by the administrators directly in charge of the policy on discriminatory harassment, Kathleen O'Leary, Director of the Office of Residence Life, and Jannifer Crittendon, Director of the Office of Institutional Equity. After the hate crimes committed against BSA and ASA, which will be discussed below, Younes contacted Brittany Suggs with the idea of uniting forces for the second workshop on Race Relations in Housing. The second workshop, led by Younes and Michael Savage, the Diversity Representative of BSA, was the first time that MEChA and BSA collaborated to organize a student-based discussion on race and racism. Both workshops included students of every ethnic group at Notre Dame,

although the majority were African-American and Latino.

The results of the investigations Younes conducted after the first Race Relations in Housing workshop revealed that the majority of the cases of racism are not reported to the administration at Notre Dame. "Unreported cases are bad for the victim as well as for the perpetrator, because (a lack of reporting) can have longstanding consequences in the minds of both parties," said Younes. Younes formed a coalition between MEChA and the Student Government Committee on Residence Life, to write a resolution that called for increased attention and revision of the policy on discriminatory harassment. Specifically, the resolution called for more transparency in the reporting mechanism for incidences of racial harassment in dorms, a revision of the training programs that residence hall staff receive, and an enumeration of the responsibilities of residence hall staff for responding to incidences of discriminatory harassment. On February 29, 2012, Student Senate unanimously approved the resolution, however, the administration has yet to create concrete response to their demands.



The week after the Student Senate vote in favor of MEChA's resolution, on February 14 and 20, 2012, two incidents of racial harassment were committed against black student groups in the Lafortune student center – pieces of fried chicken were placed in the mailboxes of the Black Student Association (BSA) and the African Student Association (ASA). These incidents occurred during African History Month, and the president of BSA, Brittany Suggs, said she was concerned these hate crimes perpetuated dangerous stereotypes about African-Americans. The African-American stereotype that is associated with fried chicken originated in the time of slavery before the American

Civil War. The Office of Student Affairs and the Notre Dame Security Police (NDSP) are still working with both BSA and ASA to investigate the incidents.

In response to these hate crimes, BSA and ASA convened a Townhall meeting to discuss the incident and other related cases of racism, and also to formulate a plan of action. The night of March 5, 2012, almost 300 people came together – students, faculty, and administrators, of all ethnic groups – to share their experiences on racism and present solutions for combating racism. "The plans of action proposed will require a great deal of revi-

sion, time and patience in the interest of bringing about effective implementation that will make for a sustainable modification in the campus climate and culture of Our Lady's University," said Suggs. "With campus-wide interest, action and support, we can work, jointly, to bring about these changes that are long overdue and have been swept under the rug too many times before." As this document is written, a coalition of African-American, Latino, and White students, faculty, and administrators, are using the solutions developed at the Townhall meeting to form a list of recommendations for the University.

How do you solve racism?

The use of art to improve race relations

Extract from an article in *The Observer*, written by the students who organized *Show Some Skin: The Race Monologues* –

“Hello, our name is Asiatic Gaze”

By Asiatic Gaze

08.29.2011

These are stories that we of Asiatic Gaze have experienced at a university that is committed to diversity ... because it is a moral and intellectual necessity.”

— It was a night like any other night, until my thoughts were suddenly and rudely interrupted by the cacophonous sounds of a poorly-mocked Asian language. Each thing'und thong” scraped at my eardrums and provoked my heart. I guess they had nothing better to do. With a desire for confrontation, I longed to pursue the two laughing boys stalking away. My friend stopped me, though, so all I could do was furiously watch the receding backs of the ignorant perpetrators, passing up the opportunity to set something right. Regardless of how many times this has occurred, nothing can prepare or protect me from an insult directed at something so fundamental to my being as my identity.

— I often wonder whether our academic community truly values diversity. Being bilingual, I struggle to separate the two spheres in my verbal and written communication; idioms from one culture pop out of my mouth and I realize that I made no sense whatsoever to those around me. I forgive myself for silly mistakes in social settings; it's different when an authority with a red pen labels your style as unacceptable. I was told that my persuasive style, my use of prepositions and my way of making the words flow together, was all wrong.

How long will we go rejecting any style other than the rigid American way — up front and aggressive? How much weight is our university putting on its own statement, We come to appreciate how the gifts of each individual enrich the lives of every individual and the community as a whole”?

History of the Diversity Council

The Diversity Council is comprised of 24 student ethnic minority groups under the direction of the Multicultural Students Programs and Services, a division of the Office of Student Affairs. It began in 1992 (at this time, known as the Coalition Council) with the objective of providing a networking system for student groups. This year was the first year that the Diversity Council had voting rights in Student Government. The role of the Diversity Council has transformed from being not only a resource for student groups but also a safe space for individuals and groups to find support for how to improve cultural awareness. When the hate crimes were committed against BSA and ASA, the president Brittany Suggs, spoke at Diversity Council to spread knowledge of the incident.

Alexa Arastoo, the president of Diversity Council from 2011 to 2012, expressed a common concern among the representatives in DC of ND: there is a lack of interest on the part of the white student majority in multicultural events. When there are events like the Show Some Skin: Race Monologues, “students who are not involved with Multicultural Student Programs and Services think that ‘It’s not for me,’” said Arastoo. The Diversity Council sponsored Show Some Skin: The Race Monologues since December 2011. The objective of the Race Monologues was “to provide a platform for sharing experiences on ethnicity and race to enhance our ongoing conversation on diversity for Notre dame students, faculty, and staff,” said Edithstein Cho, one of the directors.

Students want their voices heard and art and literature provide an avenue for expression. Many of the student groups that are members of the Diversity Council are performance based (as well as cultural and political) and students of diverse ethnicities participate in and attend their performances. For example, at the performance called Asian Allure, organized by the Asian American Association (AAA) to celebrate Asian cultures, Ally Jeter, an African-American, recited her poetry which is included in this report.

Timeless by Allison L. Jeter

Time is numerical, discrete, succinct,
 Characterized and immortalized by brevity,
 Depravity-- in the way it steals in the night.
 Time is relative and universal,
 Impartial,
 Wasted by the youth and wanted by the greedy
 Bitter to the elders and fleeting from the needy,
 Never enough,
 The stuff of which remorse is made.
 Think of an instance in which it gave.....
 You can't,
 It always takes,
 It was made that way.
 From the cradle to the grave
 People will beg for it,
 Be enslaved by it-
 By it and in it
 We are all lost,
 Preoccupied.
 But dignified is the person who finally decides
 To let it go.
 When you do,
 You realize who
 And what
 is timeless---
 Unrestrained,
 Unmarred,
 Undrained by the fangs of the minute...
 Timelessness exists in the realm of nonexistence
 Where resistance and compliance
 Form alliance
 Where lions lay with lambs
 And never ever sometimes can.....
 Because
 to "not be" is to be something
 in a place where limits only go as far as nothing will
 let them,
 and our memories
 are our personal movie collections.
 Timeless,
 Are the people right here, right now.
 With traditions all our own, but shared by vow
 With those who bow from age.
 Timeless, were the people back then,
 Who I recognize my own eyes on their faces
 In a photo that took place
 Years ago
 But in this very space....
 Timeless will be the ones who look back on tonight
 And still hold dear the things for which we fight...
 Timeless
 Are the photos with ragged edges
 And prophecies aligned
 And dreams come to fruition
 And new ones designed
 By the people who once stood here and defined
 A way for us to be—
 And thus, you and I stand here to achieve.

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The high turnout of students at the diversity panel, Race Relations in Housing workshops, and the Townhall meeting, demonstrate the importance of speaking about diversity at the University of Notre Dame and the creation of cultural awareness and sensitivity. A variety of administrators have shown their support for these student-led events, through their participation and their goodwill. The opening of dialogue between students and the administration has won clear positive improvements thanks to the collaboration of students.

The question remains: how do we define cultural diversity? It is a way of thinking and acting that demonstrates an understanding, a respect, and a valorization of all traditions. The struggles of students to promote a community where everyone has a voice, fulfills the mission of the University of Notre Dame. We are all part of the same community and need to live in solidarity to create an environment of acceptance towards all, irrespective of race, ethnicity, or beliefs.

Written By Maya Younes
ROSP: Race and Ethnicity in U.S. Latino
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