



1776 Unites Open Letter to Smith College

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Monday, March 22, 2021

Kathleen McCartney

President of Smith College College Hall 201

Smith College Northampton, MA01063

Dear President McCartney,

We, the undersigned, are writing as Black Americans to express our outrage at the treatment of the service workers of Smith College in light of the incident of alleged racial profiling that occurred in the summer of 2018.

Before investigating the facts, Smith College assumed that every one of the people who prepare its food and clean its facilities was guilty of the vile sin of racism and forced them to publicly “cleanse” themselves through a series of humiliating exercises in order to keep their jobs. When an investigation of the precipitating incident revealed no evidence of bias, Smith College offered no public apology to the falsely accused and merely doubled down on the shaming of its most vulnerable employees.

Many of us participated in the Civil Rights Movement, fighting for equal treatment under the law, which included due process and the presumption of innocence. We didn’t march so that Americans of any race could be presumed guilty and punished for false accusations while the elite institution that employed them cowered in fear of a social media mob. We certainly didn’t march so that privileged Blacks could abuse working class whites based on “lived experience.”

In your February 22 letter to the community you wrote, “At Smith College, our commitment to, and strategies for, advancing equity and inclusion are grounded in evidence.” Have you gathered any verifiable

evidence of success from the “anti- bias” training you forced your service employees to undergo as a condition of their employment?

Please consider that many Black Americans find training that reduces us simply to a racial category profoundly condescending and dehumanizing. Not only do such activities often increase racial animosity rather than reduce it, but they also deeply harm students of color by teaching them to process every one of life’s difficulties through the lens of race. Elite institutions like Smith should be teaching all their students to work through misunderstandings and offenses with the very grace you ask for in your letters, not punishing its least powerful employees in order to virtue signal.

Imagine an institution that responded to an allegation of theft by a Black employee by searching the pockets of all its Black employees before they left the workplace. Then after an investigation showed that the employee in question had not actually stolen anything, the institution only increased the frequency and invasiveness of the searches. Such treatment would rightly be condemned as racist. Yet that is exactly what Smith College has done to its service workers.

We applaud Smith’s desire to provide a welcoming environment for all its students, including its students of color. But this is not accomplished by throwing its employees under the bus over a misunderstanding. Students today do not need to be taught moral cowardice or how to impulsively rush to judgment. They need models of maturity, courage, and positive conflict resolution.

We implore you to rethink how you have handled this situation. We ask that you publicly apologize to the falsely accused service workers, that you cease forced, accusatory “anti-bias” training, and that you compensate your service workers for the harm that you have caused them.

Sincerely,

Robert “Bob” L. Woodson, Sr.

Founder and President, The Woodson Center

And the below countersigned:

Shelby Steele
Author of Shame, Senior
Fellow, Hoover Institute

Glenn Loury
Merton P. Stoltz Professor of
the Social Sciences, Brown
University

John McWhorter
Professor of Linguistics,
Columbia University

Carol M. Swain
Former Professor of Political
Science and Law,
Vanderbilt University

John Sibley Butler
Professor,
University of Texas, Austin

Clarence Page
Pulitzer Prize Winning
Syndicated Columnist
Washington, DC

Jason Hill
Author and Professor of
Philosophy, DePaul University

Bernard Anderson
Professor Emeritus, University
of Pennsylvania

Rev. Corey Brooks,
New Beginnings Church, CEO
of Project HOOD

Harold Black
Professor of Finance
(Emeritus), University of
Tennessee

Yaya Jata Fanusie,
Former CIA analyst, Financial
Technology Consultant,
Washington, DC

Charles Love
Radio Host, Writer
Chicago, IL

Ariana Woodson
Attorney
Silver Spring, MD

Eli Steele
Filmmaker
Los Angeles, CA

Rev. Dean Nelson
Chairman, Frederick Douglass
Foundation, Washington, DC

Rev. Dr. Eric Wallace
President, Freedom's Journal
Institute

John Wood, Jr.
National Ambassador, Braver
Angels

Rev. Arnold M. Culbreath
Douglass Leadership Institute,
Cincinnati, OH

Bill Cleveland
Special Assistant, Frederick
Douglass Foundation,
Alexandria, VA

Ruth Cleveland
Douglass Leadership Institute
Alexandria, VA

Chaplain Ayesha Kreutz
Frederick Douglass Foundation
New York

Dr. William B. Allen
Emeritus Dean and Professor,
Michigan State University

Curtis Hill Esq.,
Former Attorney General of
Indiana

Minister Catherine Davis
Founder, The Restoration
Project, Atlanta, GA

Babette Holder Youngberg,
Frederick Douglass Foundation
Illinois

Dr. Dwayne B. Hardin
Embassy Church, Atlanta, GA

Rev. Jesse C. Turner
Executive Director of Pine
Bluff Interested Citizens for
Voter Registration, Inc.

Jessica Ann Tyson
Frederick Douglass Foundation
Michigan

Torin Brazzle
Executive Director, IGNITE!
Alabama

David Mahan
Center for Christian Virtue
Columbus, OH

Jon Ponder
Founder and CEO, Hope for
Prisoners, Las Vegas, NV

Beverly Smith-Brown,
Founder/Executive Director,
Momma's Safe Haven
Washington, DC

Dr. Rosalyn Francis
Executive Director, Settegast
Heights Redevelopment
Corporation, Houston, TX

Willie F. Peterson
Executive Director, The Center
for Community Empowerment,
Youngstown, OH

Jacqueline Holder
Healthcare Worker, Silver
Spring, MD

Roderick Stevenson
Director of Planning &
Development, Roots
Community Health Center
Bay Area, California

Ralph Williams
Executive Director, Nehemiah
Project, Washington, DC

Robert Bracy
CEO, Pinnacle Business
Management, Inc., New York
City, New York

Rev. Bill Owens
Founder & President, Coalition
of African American Pastors
Henderson, NV

Dr. Deborah Owens
President & CEO, Education
For All Foundation

Dr. Richard A. Johnson III
Director, Booker T. Washington
Initiative, Texas Public Policy
Foundation

Pastor Calvin Johnson
Emmanuel Missionary Baptist
Church, Colorado Springs

Rochelle Johnson-Smith
CEO, RJS Global Consulting,
LLC, Houston, TX

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