



Final Report of Findings April 30, 2021

Introduction

On April 8, 2021, Linfield University President Miles Davis contacted the Salem-Keizer NAACP-1166 and shared his concerns regarding allegations of racial animus. It is the mission of the NAACP to secure the political, educational, social, and economic equality of rights in order to eliminate race-based discrimination and ensure the health and well-being of all persons. Consistent with that mission, we investigate cases of discrimination based on race, color, religion, ethnicity, point of national origin, immigration status, gender, gender identification, age, and/or sexual preference.

The process of the investigation involved a team of investigators. The scope of the investigation was to determine if the attacks on President Davis were unfair. If his treatment was unfair, was it more likely than not that this unfair treatment was because of his race and/or gender? The team reviewed relevant documents and scheduled interviews with faculty and staff. This Final Report of Findings represents the conclusions of our team.

Background

Oregon has a complex and disturbing history of racism. Decades of institutional racism have left an indelible imprint on how Oregonians experience and process race. The notion that an academic community has somehow moved past complex and historically layered racist attitudes is naïve. In assessing the racial climate at Linfield University, the history of institutional racism cannot be dismissed. The thread of racism is just as strong today as it was during slavery. Charles Mills (1997) profoundly stated in *The Racial Contract* that we need to recognize that racism is itself a political system (a global white supremacy), a particular power structure of formal and informal rules, socioeconomic privilege, and norms for the differential distribution of material wealth and opportunities, benefits and burdens, rights and duties. Discussing such topics as racism, white privilege, and multicultural education with educators can often be challenging and difficult, but necessary.

Findings

Linfield University is an institution that claims to honor human rights and academic freedom, celebrate diverse cultures, foster a climate of mutual respect, and promote an inclusive environment that affirms the value of all persons. However, the Salem Keizer NAACP did not observe that commitment extending to President Davis. Developing and maintaining positive race relations carry an essential role in detecting the climate and racial atmosphere of schools. Research has shown how institutional racism affects minorities in a variety of ways and has a significant effect on their perceptions of the learning environment and workplace climate.¹

Elements of Unfair Treatment of President Davis

We find that President Davis has been subject to numerous instances of unfair treatment since his arrival in July 2018, and this unfair treatment of personal attacks were due to being a Black man.

President Davis has been accused of being divisive, intimidating, combative, aggressive, disrespectful and abusive. This coded language plays off racist and toxic stereotypes with a long history in this country. Coded language operates by appealing to subconscious stereotypes of groups or individuals that are perceived to be threatening. Such tropes serve to delegitimize and disenfranchise their subject by associating them with racial stereotypes and rendering them one dimensional. Stereotypical behavior for males in the white dominant culture takes on a different meaning when compared to Black males. White males who exhibit bold, audacious, independent, and free-spirited behaviors are celebrated. These same behaviors displayed by Black males may be seen as threatening, aggressive, too-loud or violent. Whereby the Black male is perceived one way by the dominant white culture yet within him lives a hidden tension of stress and social cognition struggle to be understood, accepted, and seen.²

With regard to allegations of sexual misconduct, Linfield engaged external professionals to investigate these allegations. The investigation determined that “a preponderance of the evidence did not substantiate that this conduct rose to the level of violating Linfield’s Anti-harassment and Sexual Harassment policy or its Title IX policy.” Despite the conclusions of an independent investigation, allegations continued to be vetted internally, in news outlets, and on social media to the detriment of President Davis and the University community.

¹ Ogbu, John U. (1978). *Minority Education and Caste: The American System in Cross Cultural Perspective*. New York: Academic Press.

² Clark, R., Anderson, N. B., Clark, V. R., & Williams, D. R. (1999). Racism as a stressor for African Americans: A biopsychosocial model. *American psychologist*, 54(10), 805.

Critics do not credit President Davis with many significant accomplishments including the viability and sustainability of the institution. Dr. Davis arrived at a time when all of higher education was rapidly changing. Linfield University was facing reduced enrollment as well as financial difficulties. This environment was going to require them to adapt and to do so swiftly. President Davis entrepreneurial background and business acumen was the type of leadership Linfield University required to sustain financial stability in the changing times of higher education. President Davis was not afforded the luxury of time to build a rapport with the faculty and staff as substantial changes needed to occur rapidly. Yet, President Davis has been successful, including:

- Increased enrollment in one year by roughly 40%
- Rebranded the institution from a college to a university
- Hired an African American Dean of Business and the College of Arts and Sciences Dean
- Purchased a 20-acre NE Portland Campus
- Acquired the largest gift in the history of Linfield, \$10 million from the Keck Foundation

These innovative strategies were new to faculty and staff as well as working with and for a Black man as chief executive. The lack of campus diversity at all levels is alarming. It was disturbing to learn that from 1970-2020, there has never been a faculty of color elected as Trustee or faculty executive chair.

President Davis was hired to lead an institution of higher education that had very little to no experience with Black faculty or Black leadership. They were never required to work with or co create with Black faculty. The faculty, staff, and the Board of Trustees had little to no experience in navigating and respecting the nuances of Black culture. This lack of exposure resulted in faculty expecting President Davis to assimilate to the majority culture by abandoning his own. When President Davis refused to wear a mask and instead show up as his authentic self he was seen as threatening and aggressive. We find that there exist a cultural context that creates and maintains a white supremacy culture of power hoarding and the perceived right to comfort as Jones and Okun, 2001, discuss in *From Dismantling Racism: A Workbook for Social Change Groups*.

It is not lost on us that even our investigation was subject to false and racist attacks. Prior to the initiation of our investigation allegations of anti-Semitic comments made in 2018, by President Davis, the Northwest Chapter of the Anti-Defamation League failed to conduct any independent investigation, preferring to simply believe the complaint despite the fact the University had already conducted an independent review. Further, the Oregon Board of Rabbis also called for the resignation of President Davis without talking with him or conducting an investigation of any kind. Six faculty from the College of Arts Sciences were

invited to contribute to Salem Keizer NAACP's inquiry. In an email they declined to participate claiming even being asked to be interviewed was retaliation. It appeared that talking with the Jewish organizations did not constitute retaliation.

Those who condemn institutional racism, oppose the detrimental human impacts of implicit or explicit racism, or who claim to be anti-racist allies of People of Color, have stood silent. The intersectionality of race and racism asserts the ideology that the "master narrative" in storytelling is told by the dominant or "majoritarian" voice rather than creating space to hear from those who have been oppressed, set aside, unseen, marginalized, and forgotten. This dominant voice is the "unacknowledged white privilege that helps maintain racism's stories". This privilege is invisibly worn and used by its owner and yet visibly seen and felt by its victim. White privilege is considered to be a system of advantages and benefits that are normally received without merit and based entirely on race.³

The Board of Trustees has one employee and was unprepared for the challenges a Black leader would undoubtedly face in a predominantly white university. The Board of Trustees failed to adequately prepare the Linfield community for the painful, but necessary, reorganization that was certain to follow President Davis's appointment. After five to six years of decline, the Trustees correctly assessed the turn around that would be required and hired an executive leader qualified for the job, they also failed see that deeply-held resistance to Black leadership and culture fueled the ferocity of resistance to organization change.

This is what systemic and institutionalized racism look likes in Oregon.

Recommendations

1. Retract the damaging and racialized language used against President Davis and hold those individuals fully responsible for disseminating hatred and divisive language throughout the Linfield community.
2. Remove your words from paper and put them to action, including fulfilling your promises of responsibility, and the totality of interrupting racist practices, "As a community, we have an ethical responsibility to do even more. The injustices resulting from 400 years of colonialism, wars, slavery, the prison industrial complex, social inequities, and health disparities can only be adequately addressed through sustained cooperative action and a serious long-term commitment to unearthing racism's root causes and addressing barriers" (Linfield Review, 2020).

³ Delgado, R., & Stefancic, J. (2001). *Critical race theory: An introduction*. New York: New York University Press.

3. Require yearly Cognitive and Structural Bias training, Recognizing Racism and Interrupting Microaggressions for all current (and future hires) faculty and staff - including the Board of Trustees.
4. Require an equity audit to be completed in all human resource operations every 24 months and revise the Linfield Curriculum to include Critical Race Theory (CRT). CRT challenges claims of objectivity, neutrality, and colorblindness of the law and argues that these ideologies normalize and perpetuate racism.⁴ If Linfield University adopts a critical race lens perspective of what it means to have race at the forefront of the conversation, interrupting racist concepts and racial inequalities will equalize the playing field for those individuals who have traditionally been marginalized and not seen in the curriculum.⁵ CRT can be utilized to describe the current reality of BIPOC communities and help to create a framework to surface the counter-narratives that educators can learn from.
5. Reconstruct the seats of power and leadership by creating more seats at the table for BIPOC faculty. There needs to be an authentic representation for students and community members to see themselves in leadership positions and hear all voices from historically marginalized communities.
6. Recognize and know that empirical research has found a connection between an African American male's racial identity and experiences with racial discrimination and the affects racial discrimination has on mental health.^{6 7 8}
⁹ (Cross, 1991; Graves, 2014; Neblett Jr., 2006; Rowley, 1998).
7. Recommit to your cause and purpose "to address oppression in all its forms, whether it happens in the classroom, in field work, in clinicals, in research, or in service projects, must be approached with even greater urgency" (Linfield Review, 2020). Learning environments that dismiss or de-center racism, oppression, and its intersections with other forms of subordination omit and distort the experiences of those whose lives are daily affected by racism.

⁴ Delgado, R., & Stefancic, J. (2001). *Critical race theory: An introduction*. New York: New York University Press.

⁵ Singleton, G. E., & Linton, C. (2006). *Courageous conversations about race: a field guide for achieving equity in schools*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin, A SAGE Company.

⁶ Cross Jr, W. E. (1971). The Negro-to-Black conversion experience. *Black world*, 20(9), 13-27.

⁷ Graves, D. (2014). Black high school students' critical racial awareness, school-based racial socialization, and academic resilience. *Berkeley Review of Education*, 5(1).

⁸ Neblett Jr, E. W., Philip, C. L., Cogburn, C. D., & Sellers, R. M. (2006). African American adolescents' discrimination experiences and academic achievement: Racial socialization as a cultural compensatory and protective factor. *Journal of Black psychology*, 32(2), 199-218.

⁹ Rowley, S. J., Sellers, R. M., Chavous, T. M., & Smith, M. A. (1998). The relationship between racial identity and self-esteem in African American college and high school students. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, 74(3), 715.

8. Lastly, we strongly urge you to reimagine an atmosphere where all voices are heard, faces are seen, and identities affirmed. Linfield University's website states, "...takes pride in always striving to create an environment that honors academic freedom, celebrates diverse cultures, fosters a climate of mutual respect, and promotes an inclusive environment that affirms the value of all people." BIPOC communities are the victims of white privilege and the systemic oppression that comes with it. However, if BIPOC individuals are affirmed in their racial identities and given space to share their stories, "... the ideology of racism is examined and racist injuries are named, and victims of racism can find their voice."¹⁰

Submitted by:

Reginald C. Richardson, Sr., Ph.D., ACSW, LCSW

President

Salem Keizer NAACP- 1166

PO Box 13068

Salem, OR 97309

503-877-4045

president@sknaacp1166.org

<http://www.sknaacp1166.org>

¹⁰ Crenshaw, K., Gotanda, N., Peller, G., & Thomas, K. (Eds.). (1995). *Critical race theory: The key writings that formed the movement*. New York: The New Press.