



**RE: Statement on Halloween Costume Incident
November 1, 2017**

The African American Studies Program at the College of Charleston stands in solidarity with the Black Student Union and other student organizations to insist that the administration take immediate action against the students involved in any and all acts that aim to intimidate and make mockery of the students, faculty, and staff of color on this campus. We believe the images circulating on social media, in which a student dressed as the deceased Freddie Gray and used racial epithets, indicate that the students involved are in violation of the Student Code of Conduct which “specifically forbids”:

6. Intimidation, defined as to place another person in reasonable fear of bodily harm and/or emotional distress through the use of threatening words or other conduct, or both, but without displaying a weapon or subjecting the victim to physical attack.
24. Conduct that is disorderly, lewd, or indecent; breach of peace; or aiding, abetting, or procuring another person to breach the peace on College premises, surrounding areas, or at functions sponsored by, or participated in, by the College.
25. Facilitating and/or accepting improper behavior: Facilitating and/or accepting improper behavior are defined as aiding and/or choosing not to confront a person violating the Honor Code, Code of Conduct or other regulation, choosing not to leave such a situation, and/or choosing not to tell a College staff member about the violation (Student Handbook 2017-18, 15-17).

We are encouraged that the Offices of Student Affairs and Public Safety have launched an investigation and expect that the policy outlined in the Student Handbook will determine the outcome for those involved. This, however, only addresses one of myriad impacts this type of behavior has on the campus community. The peace has most certainly been breached. By invoking the life and brutal death of Freddie Gray in a tasteless Halloween costume the students involved have elevated the racial tension on campus. The act says in no unclear terms that the suffering and racially motivated death of African Americans is laughable, not to be taken seriously. It also implies that, though the College of Charleston does not share such values, a not-so-silent population of its community harbors racist, bigoted beliefs. The *same* type of beliefs that lead to Dylann Roof murdering nine African Americans just a few blocks from our campus.

The actions of a few have impacted many. Following earlier concerns about the “Grand Flagging” of our campus proposed by the Secessionist Party, this incident suggests that there is a clear and present danger of racial terrorism within the very boundaries of our campus thus creating an environment where neither our students of color and of diverse backgrounds feel safe, nor our faculty and staff. Our students of color feel mocked and intimidated; faculty and staff of color are demoralized. We are experiencing what William Smith has termed Racial Battle Fatigue, which “refers to the psychophysiological symptoms resulting from living in mundane extreme racist environments” (Smith 2004).

We must all enter a classroom, common area, dining facility, or residence hall wherein we may be faced with an individual who causes us emotional distress or seeks to intimidate us through micro-aggressions. The mere thought of such an exchange is likely its own type of emotional distress. While the majority of campus is unaffected by or even unaware of the mental challenges such racially motivated incidents raise for people from underrepresented groups, we contend that is a real, palpable outcome of the weekend's events and warrants a different type of conflict resolution for the campus community.

While the Office of Institutional Diversity, Student Counseling and Substance Abuse Services, and the Office of Multicultural Student Programs and Services are venues through which individuals can seek resources for coping with the impact of the incident, we urge the administration at the College of Charleston to take more proactive steps in addressing how the campus—not just the students—can move toward reconciliation and the cultivation of an institutional culture where behavior such as that reported over the weekend would not dare to rear its ugly head on campus or otherwise. The movement toward healing and building community is not the responsibility of a few, but of the collective.

Respectfully Submitted,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Kameelah L. Martin". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "K" and "M".

Kameelah L. Martin
Director of African American Studies