

DePaul News 1: Communal Slander

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This statement was read in the Student Government Association meeting held on February 10th in response to the condemnation of the speaking engagement of Elaine Brown.

On behalf of the Black Student Union at DePaul University, I would like to thank the Student Government Association for allowing me to speak out against the condemnation of the speaking engagement of Elaine Brown that was issued on February 3rd in this body. As a council that advocates for students, we find it necessary to acknowledge and reflect on the statement that was read.

Senator for Transfer Students, Dan Dunham read the following:

“It is clear that a large portion of my constituency of students at DePaul strongly object to the rash decision by the University to invite the violent communist leader Elaine Brown to speak on campus for Martin Luther King Jr. Day. Though I am saddened that the DePaul Student Government Association will not unite together to confront this shameful and disgraceful event, I as an elected representative cannot allow it to go unaddressed. Thus let it be known by the Student Government Senate, as well as by the DePaul University administration that I, Dan Dunham, in my capacity as Senator for Transfer Students officially issue this condemnation of the speaking engagement that took place on Monday, January 17, 2011. As leaders on campus it is up to all of us to heed the will of those by whom we were elected, and to do what is right even when it is in contradiction with the administration. I am hopeful that a message can be sent to those who made this unfortunate decision, even if that message is only given voice through one senator moved by the strength of his individual conviction to stand up and do the right thing.”

What is unclear in this message is the general, or in his words ‘large’, consensus that was alleged to be reached. In reading this, I question many of the statements that were made and the ideologies of the person who made them. First, in referring to your large constituency, I would like to see the data of which was collected to reaffirm this position, because it is only when we surround ourselves with like-minded people that we are hindered from mutual respect and understanding. Second, the statement that she is a “violent, communist leader” is slanderous and represents the unilateral view a person who has little to no knowledge of the history of the Black Panther Party, because this is a statement against the organization as a whole. Consequently, I feel that I must educate you on the history and mission of the Black Panther Party so that this skewed view of rebellion does not continue. The Black Panther Party was founded in the mid 1960s at a time where America had just begun to “legally” afford African-Americans rights. The mission was “to serve the needs of the oppressed people in our communities and defend them against their oppressors” at a time where police brutality was and still is killing off our men, only now it has transformed into less violent tactics that make home – prison. They wanted jobs, proper education, decent housing, health care, and an end to police brutality. Yet, you harp on the violent aspect of the movement. Well tell me, if you walked every day with fear of being beaten or killed; with the reality that your upward mobility has been impeded not because of your inability to perform but because of a political system rooted deeply in white male supremacist ideals; with the foresight that your children will be forced to work jobs for menial wages and not

be properly educated, not because of the audacious theory that Thomas Jefferson held of Blacks smelling funny or being of a mongrel race, but in actuality because of that.- would you not protect yourself and community?

The idea of social change resounds at this university, as well as the message of the inherent dignity of all. I think the only thing that we may agree on is that Elaine Brown was indeed a leader. She advocated for rights that would negate the double consciousness of Black America. So in this I must ask one question. Did you attend the events? I am referring to the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Prayer Breakfast as well as the Evening Lecture: In Defense of our Boys, in which your own, LeAaron Foley gave the student welcome address. Did you speak to people (who actually went) about how her presence and her words affected them? You did not. However, I did. I spoke with students, faculty and staff members of all races, creeds, political affiliations, and religious backgrounds. They understood. They understood that it is important to understand the entire struggle. Additionally, one staff member stated that her presence was the most powerful moment had at DePaul! Yet to insult her name is in actuality "shameful and disgraceful" because while you attempt to push your personal agenda, she was not there to push hers. Her knowledge of women in history and the current state of crisis for Black males was heard and respected. This is indeed one of our angels.

In a time of much needed discussion on the history of social movements in this nation, we as students must not be dismissive towards different perspectives. I too have the conviction to speak up for what is right. But when what is right is indeterminable, we must settle on controversy with civility. Thus, let it be known that in my capacity as President of the Black Student Union at DePaul University I firmly denounce the condemnation of the speaking engagement of Elaine Brown.