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Transferring black students recommend incoming freshman to choose another school

Black Student Union

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Mr. Robert S. Carr
3602 20th Street
Washington, D.C.

February 11, 1970

DEAR Mr. Carr:

We know that you are considering coming to Denison University or may already have been accepted as a Denison freshman for the academic year, 1970-1971. We feel very strongly that you should reconsider any decision you may already have made, and that you should be in full possession of the facts before you make any decision about coming here. Our only concern is that you go somewhere, where you can receive, in peace, a decent education, an education that will equip you to serve yourself, the black community and the larger society. The following facts, we think, are significant and should be borne in mind.

Denison University was founded in 1831 and for 133 years it remained a virtually all-white institution. In 1964, Miss Catherine Hodges of the National Scholarship Service for Negroes stated that Denison had been taken off the list of recommended colleges for Negroes. The Board of the National Scholarship Service for Negroes gave two basic reasons for this important decision:

- a) that the atmosphere of Denison was not conducive to interaction between white and Negro on the important, educational level of understanding and acceptance.
- b) that the exclusive social structure of the Denison fraternity and sorority system placed a large barrier in the way of interaction between white and Negro students.

It must be pointed out that when this decision was made, only a handful of black students were at Denison. Since then some more blacks have been recruited, most of whom are planning to, and are moving elsewhere. The reasons for this are many and varied:

- a) The traffic in black students was first prompted by the Denison need for Federal funds. The appearance of a token number of blacks guaranteed this. This is borne out by the fact that Denison has always had the lowest enrollment of non-white students, not only in the Great Lakes College Association, but in the entire state of Ohio. It is the only college in Ohio where the Black Student enrollment has been less than 1% of the entire student body.

- b) Black students made it possible for Denison to receive Federal funds. These funds were received, Denison built its buildings and then lost interest in the black students who had been used to further Denison's plans.

Race relations at Denison have been very stormy. There have been many incidents, minor and major, and the basic business of getting an education has been an unnecessarily tough and difficult proposition. Living in the dormitories is hell! Not only is it uncomfortable and trying on a day-by-day basis, but it also affects the atmosphere conducive for studying. Racial slurs, constant harassment, fights, and the constant tension make normal living conditions, studying, and learning virtually impossible. In short, the main purpose in being here--to get an education--is constantly being defeated.

Black students with high academic standing in high school have suffered tremendously: grades have declined, interest in learning has fallen off, motivation has disappeared; all this has nothing to do with the ability of the students to handle the courses, but is due to the mental pressures and tensions created by the racist atmosphere.

Granville, the village in which Denison is located, is situated in the middle of nowhere. Granville, with a population of 3,000 has no black families. In the community, there are racist groups, such as the John Birch Society. The Denison campus is therefore dangerously isolated.

Faced with this kind of environment, the black students felt that they had two choices--either to make the Denison campus less hostile and more conducive to learning or, regrettably, leave. For the past 3 years, all attempts to improve things have been cruelly frustrated and defeated. For the sake of our physical and mental well-being, we have decided to go elsewhere to continue our education.

We do not wish to talk about the alcohol, drugs, and guns which are a part of this campus scene.

For all these reasons, we are leaving and we strongly advise you to choose another school.

The Black Students of Denison University