

# Allegations of racist incidents lead to virtual shutdown of campus at Syracuse University

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23 November 2019

Over the past two weeks, Syracuse University has been embroiled in a conflict between a group of students and the university administration over 12 alleged racist incidents on the campus.

The incidents, which allegedly took place in the span of 13 days on or near the campus, included racist graffiti and verbal epithets against African American students. There was also a report that the manifesto of the white supremacist New Zealand gunman had been sent by AirDrop to various students at the Bird Library. However, officials state that they were not able to find any students who actually received the manifesto, and the chancellor has since said that it was a hoax.

Given the reactionary political climate whipped up by the Trump administration, with its open appeals to racism, it is possible that some or all the incidents happened. However, it remains very unclear what actually took place. Given that there at least appears to have been a hoax, one cannot exclude the possibility that there is a deliberate effort to incite racial divisions by elements within the state.

In any case, even assuming that all the incidents happened, the response of the student groups organizing the protests is dangerously influenced by the reactionary politics of the Democratic Party, which is seeking to promote racial conflicts in the run-up to the 2020 election.

In reaction to what they said was an inadequate response from the university administration, a group of about 50 students began a week-long occupation of a central building on campus, the Barnes Center. The group issued a set of 19 demands and set a deadline for Chancellor Kent Syverud to agree to all of them, unchanged, or to resign.

The most egregious demand is for the forced segregation of the dorms by race. The students slightly

modified the demand later to require only that students be offered an option to choose that their roommate share the same race, instead of the segregation being mandatory.

Other demands include the allocation of a minimum of \$1 million for the creation of a “required curriculum that educates the campus on diversity issues, specifically anti-racism;” that “individual diversity” be considered when admitting students to the intra-university transfer process; that there be a mandated “State of the University” address focused on “the student of color experience;” and that a building for multicultural offices be established.

None of the demands address the burning issues affecting working class students of all races and genders, including the burden of student debt, food insecurity, poverty and unemployment.

The university has been virtually shut down in response to the incidents. Hundreds of classes have been canceled, and the majority of the students have left. The FBI, Syracuse police and New York State police have begun investigations into the incidents, swarming the campus with police officers.

On Sunday, the university suspended all social activities at fraternities for the rest of the semester, and the administration is currently discussing the possibility of canceling all classes until after the winter break.

On Tuesday, the University posted a lengthy “response to student concerns,” noting that university officials were aware of “concrete concerns related to the environment for diversity and inclusion on our campus.”

On Wednesday, at a community forum hosted by the administration, Chancellor Syverud publicly promised swift action, agreeing to all but three of the student demands. The students, at this point approximately 150

in all, walked out of the forum in protest.

On Thursday, the administration agreed to a slightly edited list of the 19 demands, including the demand for choosing the race of roommates. On Friday, however, the students involved declared that this was not enough and continued calling for the immediate resignation of Syverud.

The events have led to the intervention of the Democratic Party establishment, including New York Governor Andrew Cuomo, who criticized the university's response on Tuesday as "not enough." He called on the university board of trustees to hire an independent monitor to investigate. Democratic Party presidential candidate Kamala Harris issued a statement supporting the students' demands.

There is clearly overwhelming opposition to the racist incidents, both on and off campus. Despite Trump's best efforts, there is no mass constituency for his fascist policies.

However, there is no progressive content to the demands put forward by the relatively small student group. The demand for the segregation of dorms and for the division of students by race is inherently reactionary.

What would happen if opposition were to emerge from students to the demand for segregated dorms? One would confront a situation in which the students fighting against segregation would be denounced as racist.

The racist campaign at Syracuse University is part of a broader effort to promote racial divisions by the Democratic Party and to explain all political and social problems through the prism of race. This finds starkest expression in the "Project 1619" initiative launched by the *New York Times*. Its aim is to create a historical narrative centered on the claim that the country is seething with racial conflicts.

The promotion of racial divisions by forces aligned with the Democratic Party plays into the hands of the Trump administration and its own efforts to build a base of support through appeals to racism.

The International Youth and Students for Social Equality opposes all efforts to divide students on the basis of race. Opposition to racism requires not racial separatism and identity politics, but the fight to unify the working class and youth of all races on the basis of their common class interests.



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