

November 3, 2016

Rebecca Blank  
Chancellor  
University of Wisconsin-Madison  
161 Bascom Hall  
500 Lincoln Drive  
Madison WI 53706

# YWCA IS ON A MISSION

Dear Chancellor Blank:

Over the last few years we have seen racial tensions on the rise, whether between communities of color and law enforcement, on the presidential campaign trail, or college campuses. During this time we started also experiencing more people feeling empowered to share their hatred of others, openly. When a blatant incident of racism showed up at the UW Madison Badger game this past weekend it was an opportunity for the University of Wisconsin to protect, empower, and support their students, especially students of color.

Instead, the response by the Chancellor, UW Police Department, and the Athletic Director was muted, citing free speech. YWCA Madison invites you to read two excellent statements by [Dr. Reuben Anthony](#) and [Rev. Alex Gee](#), expressing both the pain and the problematic nature of the incident and the response.

These statements also convey an historical perspective that says these incidents are not new, and they call upon the broader community to weigh in and come up with definitive action steps.

While freedom of speech is protected by the First Amendment of the US Constitution, it is not absolute. There is no “hate speech” clause in the First Amendment, yet many of us understand there is a clear line where free speech ends and hate speech begins. In this case, a distinction should have been made between speech and the historical act being depicted and its symbolic significance.

Our community will have to answer these questions: How is this acceptable, even under the cloak of free speech? Where was the visceral outrage and response by those community members seated in the stands? What are the norms and values we want to project to the world?

We expect in an academic setting for there to be an exchange of ideas and information or expression that others sometime may question. We do not expect academic institutions to compound the historical trauma many people may feel by responding halfheartedly. As UW Wisconsin-Madison continues to work on campus climate issues related to diversity and racial tensions, it must understand that any response that justifies or excuses incidents of blatant racism have the potential to undermine the hard work and relationship building that has already taken place. As community members, we have to take a stand that such behavior is unacceptable and confront it directly.

Sincerely,



Rachel Krinsky  
CEO

Cc: Director Alvarez & Chief Bridges

eliminating racism  
empowering women  
**ywca**



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