

October 2015

Attention: BUSU Executive Members Kyle Rose, Spencer Dawson, Antonio Sergi, Brian Horvath and General Manager

CC: Isaac's Bar and Grill Manager, Dan Celetti

CC: BUSAC Members and Ombudsperson, Carol Moss.

CC: Jack Lightstone, President, Brock University

CC: Brad Clarke, Director, Student Life and Community Experience

CUPE 4207 (Academic Workers at Brock University) is contacting BUSU in support of students and campus community members to voice concerns about racism and cultural appropriation on the Brock University campus. We believe that campus communities should operate as political spaces and work together to create a democratic, inclusive and non-oppressive environment. As many of you are aware, last Halloween at Isaac's Bar and Grill, four students won \$500 in the Halloween costume contest for dressing in blackface. Several community members, professors, students, student groups and campus workers including CUPE 4207 spoke out against this incident as it was racist, offensive, and created an unsafe, and uncomfortable environment for marginalized students, primarily students of colour.

We are highly concerned especially since this is the third time that blackface has occurred on Brock's campus at Isaac's Bar and Grill. It first occurred in 2007 when students won money for dressing up as the Jamaican bobsled team, and also in 2009 when a student won \$800 for dressing up as Lil' Wayne. It is clear that racist discourses and racist acts such as dressing in blackface are part of a cultural trend on this campus that has often been condoned and ignored and therefore, continues to take place.

We would like to acknowledge that racism and dressing in blackface are not unique problems to the Brock University campus and progressive groups such as Black Lives Matter and Idle No More have formed through the grassroots to fight against racism across North America. However, it is still vital for Brock community members to acknowledge and address the continued racism that is occurring on our campus. Please see the attached news articles and letter.

We are aware that BUSU has led diversity training for the BUSU office staff from the Ombudsperson, Carole Moss, and that BUSU will be organizing a diversity week to take place in fall of 2015. We are happy to see BUSU responding to the blackface incident, but we also have questions and concerns about the details of the diversity training and the diversity week. We are inquiring:

- What topics have been covered in the training for BUSU and what topics will be covered during the upcoming diversity week?
- Who will be leading initiatives and events during diversity week? What are these leaders' qualifications?
- Will the training and event include topics such as cultural appropriation, colonization, carding/the policing of students of colour, anti-black racism, Islamophobia, and various barriers that ESL and international students face on campus?

- Has the Isaac's Bar and Grill staff received training, or been scheduled to receive training, on the above listed topics? Please note that this is especially important since this is the third time that blackface has taken place at Isaac's Bar and Grill and, worse, been rewarded and celebrated. Please see attached news reports that outline these incidents.
- Will members from Brock Roots, Aboriginal Students' Organization, Brock Students Against Migrant Exploitation, Young Black and Educated, African Heritage, and Muslim Student Association have *leadership* roles in helping to organize diversity week? Have any of these groups been invited to lead workshops, events etc.?
- What events will be taking place during diversity week?
- What supports are student groups receiving from their student union? When student groups lead initiatives and events on campus that are created to celebrate and educate about the cultures and histories of students of colour, how does the student union support this work? For example how is Black History Month, run by Brock Roots, being supported?

In addition, regarding the aftermath of the blackface incident:

- Has BUSU as a student union released a formal apology about the blackface incident?
- Were the students who participated in blackface formally educated about the offensiveness of the act of blackface? How were these students held accountable for their actions?

In addition to our questions, we also have a list of recommendations that we feel are important to implement in order to seriously address racism on campus. Our recommendations include:

- Support and provide resources for Brock Roots' upcoming Halloween costume poster campaign that will feature the following posters: <http://www.colorlines.com/articles/ohio-univ-students-classmates-were-culture-not-costume>. We ask that BUSU share the posters on their website, Facebook page, twitter, and Instagram as well as support the group to access high traffic areas on campus, including Isaac's Bar and Grill, in order to display these posters. We recommend that BUSU executive and BUSU support this campaign in all ways possible such as providing access to a printer that BUSU might have access to and/or provide funding to print the posters. We also recommend that BUSU contact Brock Roots' to determine other kinds of support this group would require to make the poster campaign as successful as possible. Please contact Brock Roots to inquire how BUSU could best support their upcoming video which will focus on drawing attention to the problem of blackface.
- Speak out against policies and attitudes on the Brock University campus that promote racism, colonization, and Islamophobia. (Ex: everyday racist language; Isaac Brock statue).
- Support the following student groups: Brock Roots, Aboriginal Students' Organization, Brock Students Against Migrant Exploitation, Young Black and Educated, Brock African Heritage Recognition Committee, and Muslim Student Association by contacting these groups asking how the student union could best support them and help promote events such as Black History month as indicated by Brock Roots in their feedback letter.
- Invite Black, Brown and Red Lives Matter Hamilton and Toronto Black Lives Matter to implement mandatory workshops for BUSAC council members, BUSU executives and Isaac's Bar and Grill Employees. Also make such training open to other Brock students and campus

members who would be interested in receiving such training. We further recommend that the BUSU executive discuss with these groups an appropriate stipend amount to be given to workshop presenters in order to accommodate them for things like travel expenses and workshop time.

- If the BUSU student union has not released a formal apology yet about the blackface incident, we recommend that campus leaders do so. Please note that in 2012, student union leaders from the University of Carlton released a formal apology following a blackface incident on their campus. We have attached an article about this incident for your reference.
<http://www.charlatan.ca/2012/11/mcgill-student-union-apologizes-for-students-who-blackfaced-at-halloween-party/>

We would like to note that CUPE 4207 Equity committee members are willing to offer support in order to help implement such initiatives. We encourage any students or campus community members who are concerned about these issues to contact the CUPE 4207 Equity Committee via cupe4207@brocku.ca. We look forward to hearing from BUSU, BUSAC and Isaac's Bar and Grill and wish you all the best of success in your preparations for this upcoming school year.

Sincerely,

CUPE 4207 Executive