

How Should Students Advance Change on Campus? <https://www.considermagazine.org/post/how-should-students-advance-change-on-campus>

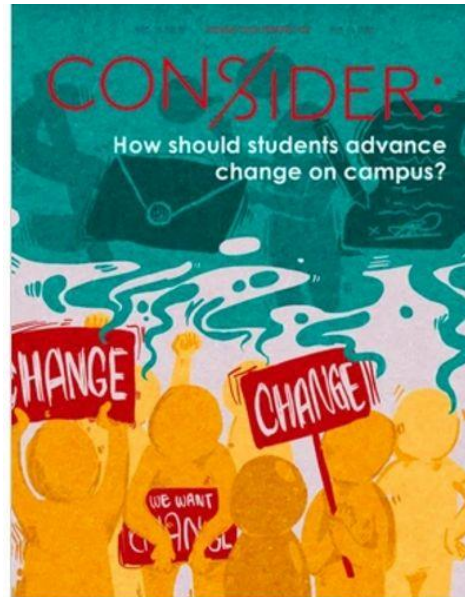
The Kneeling Man By Kellee Byard

Kellee Byard is a Program in the University of Michigan. experiences in high AP Environmental meeting passionate has come to for the environment

I come from a fairly to the hustle and so it shouldn't be how overwhelmed I my very first semester always loved the city as if I was out of touch and the culture of our always marvelled at seeming inclusivity soon realized my

It became clear that idealistic school my mind had made it out to be after several racist incidents occurred within the first month of school. Dorm room doors were scrawled with racial slurs and a building downtown was smeared with support for the white supremacist murderer, Dylann Roof. It was shameful behavior, and it most certainly had always been bubbling under the surface of the University's populace. How could I have felt alienated in Ann Arbor, when my black peers were being subjected to derisive attacks in their city, on campus, and in their residences?

The University of Michigan often proclaims how this campus is a "microcosm of diversity," but with a population that is comprised of only 5% black students,



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rural town compared bustle of Ann Arbor, difficult to imagine felt at the beginning of at Michigan. I've but felt disconnected, with the student body university. I had Michigan for its and diversity, but I naïvety.

Michigan was not the

it's clear to see the isolation and difficulty they face, especially after the recent racist incidents that occurred on campus. The blatant hatred affecting black students across our campus stirred one man to take a stand, or rather, a knee. What this led to was an impactful protesting event that inspired hundreds of students to join in solidarity with Dana Greene Jr., a graduate student at our University.

The feeling of exclusion that students were suffering from was his main reason for protesting, stating he knelt for "every student on this campus that has ever felt that they didn't belong here." As I walked to my first class the morning of September 25th, 2017, there was the usual passerbys on the Diag. Everyone was to and fro, rushing to their 9am classes just the same as me. No one batted an eye at the man that knelt in front of the symbolic M, including myself, being too wrapped up in our own thoughts and directive. By that time, he had already been kneeling for two hours. As the day wore on and the temperatures rose feverishly high, I returned to the Diag to find several tents and a multitude of people sitting and kneeling, facing the United States flag. It was a curious sight.

Before long I read Dana's manifesto "Why I Kneel," and was awed by his tenacity and determination to force discourse from our university's president and create an inclusive space for those affected by campus racism. He promised to kneel until he bled to bring awareness to the injustices inflicted upon minorities on campus. I wholeheartedly agreed with his mission, but I was momentarily hesitant to join. Did I belong in this moment? Was I wanted, or needed? What would others think?

I soon brushed aside these questions knowing it was right to support this man, who was sacrificing his time and health on this sweltering September day, and knelt beside my fellow students. As the day wore on and the sun beat down over our heads, my friends and I tried to imagine what being cool felt like. But the suffering we endured for the hours we were there paled in comparison to Dana's and the marginalized groups he knelt for.

Dana had been periodically interviewed by numerous news outlets and student-led newspapers and magazines, which goes to show the publicity this sort of protest garnered. Over the course of the day, a solid group of protestors had amassed around Dana, and supplies from food and water to yoga mats and umbrellas had been brought to alleviate any discomfort of the protestors.

At 3:30am the next morning, the protest had ended and all the supporters dispersed, but the renewed sense of hope and accomplishment remained. The infectious nature of this protest is what made it so influential and important to the history of the University of Michigan. Outward, public protests led by students such as Dana force attention and dialogue from the ground up, and start the momentum to drive change. Protests can start in the mundane, everyday world by one impassioned person. Not everyone is capable of making the first move like Dana did, but figures such as him can allow a movement to begin. They serve as examples for others and attracts others to join these causes, whether due to some admission of guilt or feeling of obligation.

For me, seeing a man putting his health and education on the line to try and ensure that Michigan students feel welcome, included, and safe on campus made me feel like I couldn't walk away. His publicized protest allowed his message to reach a far wider audience than what was likely intended, from its central location on the Diag to it being plastered over local and state news. Even social media social justice figureheads like Shaun King and DeRay Mckesson commented on it, bringing more attention to the movement. Dana's success, attributed to his initial bravery and sacrifice, has spread through the student body as well as the local citizens of Ann Arbor, creating dialogue to improve the campus racial climate.