

The Real Change Starts Now

Dr. Martin Luther King most eloquently stated "We must accept finite disappointment but must never lose infinite hope" At Eastern Illinois University, I am seen as an activist, a political leader, and a prominent intellectual. However, to be these things caused me to lose friends, faculty connections, and respect. My name is Jerimiah Boyd-Johnson. Most people know me on this campus as the 2021 Homecoming King and the Student Laureate. As I pause and reflect on my journey at EIU it has been extremely difficult. EIU has prided itself on diversity, being one of the safest campuses in the United States, and a providing the best resources to students. I have found that Eastern has diversity but neglects its minority communities, violence is disproportionately underreported, and the resources are limited. I am not saying that Eastern is all bad, but there is much work to be done. Without this campus, I never thought that I would fight this hard for civil rights.

I entered EIU as a transfer student from Iowa Wesleyan University. At this campus, I was denied the opportunity to create a Black Student Union. After I was denied these efforts, I decided to transfer. What made me choose Eastern was the programs, student involvement, and a thriving Political Science Department. I knew that this university would provide me with the resources to create change. When I got here, the Black Student Union was my home, and the campus was my bread and butter. As I began to be involved in the EIU Forensics Team, becoming the Parliamentarian of the Black Student Union, joining Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc, and then joining the police advisory board, I began to be more exposed to the flaws in the university.

My Sophomore year, there were posters placed on students of color cars, dorms, and meeting places that said, "Fuck Black History Month and Black lies matter." As an African American, I felt targeted and unsafe. However, I knew that we had to stand up against this

injustice. Therefore, I worked with a student group comprised of 5 students to schedule a peace march. The Vice-President of Student Affairs President Glassman, and nor did the director of student life attend. This was right before everyone was sent home for the Covid-19 pandemic. These kinds of actions were intolerable, but I used my voice and the press to combat them. I knew that I could not stay silent, and that once we returned to campus, I was going to make the campus a more inclusive place.

At the beginning of my junior year, the homecoming slogan was “Party Like It’s 1895”. While I understood that the homecoming committee wanted to commemorate the opening of campus, people of color and minorities were not partying during this time. I attempted to discuss my issues with the student life director about the theme, however she turned me down. Also, there were no people of color on the homecoming committee. Since I and the other students of color felt silenced, I initiated a boycott of the 2021 Homecoming. In the past few years, minorities have won these awards, and we decided to let the campus party in racism. I learned not only how to stand up for what I believed in, used social media to connect with my colleagues who felt the same way, and used my voice to prohibit minorities as posterchild's. I felt that if we were used for pictures as diversity, we must be respected.

Furthermore, I took to WCIA news to discuss my issues with the slogan. This semester, I took Constitutional Law which was taught by Dr. Karen B. Swenson. I learned about the Freedom of Information Act. I knew that I was being discussed negatively by the office of Director of Student Life because of an associate who works there. Therefore, I made a FOIA about my name being discussed. I read the emails and was not pleased that the director could say things about a student concerned about racism.

Eastern challenged me to speak up when nobody else would. I was raised around all African American people, and I did not experience many micro-aggressions growing up. Eastern pulled the inner civil rights leader that lived inside of me out. I learned how to be proactive, and not retreat when I see situations as a problem. This year I hosted along with my fraternity a Criminal Justice Reform Panel, and the Martin Luther King Vigil. I used these events as platforms to get the conversation going about how to make our environment equal. Furthermore, I have applied to many law schools this year and I got into the University of Illinois at Chicago, University of Miami, and University of San Francisco. I hope to become a Civil Rights Attorney. My passion is to help challenge unconstitutional laws which continuously burden minorities. "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere."

During homecoming this semester, I was jumped outside of a bar by another candidate and his fraternity brother who was jealous that I won. Student organizations have been instructed not to work with me because I have deemed as problematic. I know that being a leader is hard. Eastern needs a force of students to change its environment. This year I am graduating, and my journey at this university is coming to an end. I will never lose hope for this campus. I am forever grateful because it developed me as a leader.