



HISTORY

COLLEGE OF ARTS, LETTERS, AND SCIENCES
UNIVERSITY OF ARKANSAS AT LITTLE ROCK

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May 20, 2022

The Resignation of Dr. Brian Mitchell

To whom it may concern,

I am writing to inform you that I am resigning my position as an Associate Professor in the History Department with my last day being June 10, 2022. I do not believe that the words “resigning or resignation” adequately express my sentiments in regard to my departure or my experiences as an African American faculty member at the University of Arkansas Little Rock. When describing my decision to leave the institution, I believe the term “constructive discharge” fits more appropriately. I am resigning my position because I no longer feel safe, professionally or physically, at the university. My fears are rooted in the widely held belief that the university’s social climate is one of pervasive and entrenched systemic racism and discrimination, and that the administration has dedicated itself to covering up the acts of those that participate in harassment, discrimination, and retaliation. My concerns are substantiated by the university’s



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Racial Climate Survey results, in the comments made during the institution's nine public forums on racial discrimination on the campus, in the alarming number of resignations by faculty and staff of color wherein those resigning noted discrimination, harassment, and retaliation in exit interviews and resignation letters, in the list of concerns tendered to the chancellor by the Black and Brown Faculty Committee, in the recent *Forum* article written by student journalists outlining issues of discrimination on the campus, and in the enormous volume of complaints lodged by the university's students, staff, and faculty to the administration.

Prior to resigning, I worked actively using the established organizational channels, departments, and outlets to report my concerns, however, several human resources policies are in conflict with federal law, and the office and its personnel refuse to investigate or report incidents of crime to law enforcement authorities. (One of my favorite examples of the institution's illegal human resource practices is its use of the university's "informal complaint" policy wherein it guarantees that if a complaint is submitted using that complaint method, that the harasser will be talked to but **"no disciplinary action will be taken as a result of the informal complaint procedure."**) When records disappeared after I filed a complaint of discrimination, my attorney urged the administration to report the disappearance of the public records, which were supposed to be retained in triplicate in the Department Chair's Office, the dean's office, and by human resources, to the State Police. The university declined to comply with state law in regard to the disappearance of public records. I similarly



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asked that the university investigate and report the disappearance of data, when only the results of Black faculty, staff, and students disappeared from the dataset for the racial climate survey. After that report and a similar request from me for an investigation, I was told that the data in question mysteriously reappeared, when a laptop was allegedly discovered on the top shelf of a closet. Additionally, I have urged the administration to investigate the disappearance of the recordings and transcripts of six of the nine public forums held by the administration wherein faculty, staff, and students described incidents of discrimination and their interactions with members of the administration and human resources relating to those incidents. Prior to these forums, the Black and Brown Faculty Committee requested that these forums be moderated by a neutral party, that video of the forums be recorded and made publicly available on the Chancellor's Diversity Council's website, and that the proceedings be transcribed and archived. The chancellor did not comply with a single request garnered by the committee.

The administration has additionally refused to explain or investigate the disappearance of evaluation score sheets (from several different evaluation periods), which somehow disappeared from multiple offices on the campus. Therefore, they cannot explain how I routinely received lower evaluation scores than my colleagues despite having consistently stellar scholarship, teaching, and service. They have similarly provided vague and conflicting information as to why they sought to disqualify my last book from consideration for tenure. I will remind you that the text has received numerous favorable reviews from the



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academic community and won several book awards. After being reassured that there would be no more irregularities in my evaluations, I received an evaluation in the Spring of 2022 wherein my scores in service dropped from the previous score even though I had performed nearly 300% more service than I did in the past year.

While I have only listed a fraction of my problematic experiences at the institution, I must note that a specific series of events were so distressing that they convinced me that it was no longer safe to continue my employment at university. After being informed by the chair of the Institutional Research Board that a graduate student had placed a complaint about the transcription of a publicly accessible record at a public archive, I was subsequently informed by faculty that the student had not in fact made the complaint. I was informed that the complaint had been submitted by a member of the administration impersonating the student to mask their actual identity. The individual who was alleged to have committed this fraud was identified as a member of management who had been selected by the chancellor to chair a hearing in regard to my complaints of discrimination and is listed in my lawsuit with the university. After being informed of this alleged “retaliatory and criminal activity,” I reported the conduct directly to the chancellor, in a requested meeting, in her office. I also reported the alleged conduct in writing via email to my department chair, dean, human resources, the IRB Chair, and chancellor. I made Freedom of Information requests in regard to contacts between my student and



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the administrator, and I requested to know whether or not the IP address from which the complaint had been sent belonged to the administrator or a computer that the administrator had logged into. The university maintained that these records were educational records and could not be acquired via FOIA request. Despite notifying my entire chain of management, not a single member of management called for an investigation, not a single individual reported back to me, and more importantly, not a single member of management notified law enforcement or reported the alleged crime to campus police. The administrator alleged to have done this was instead allowed to resign effective immediately.

It is my belief that the alleged administrator was unlikely to have been working alone. Despite numerous outstanding complaints from students of research misconduct, the spurious complaint against me was pushed into immediate investigation. In a recent complaint, a student maintained that they repeatedly reported research misconduct of another faculty member and that their requests for an investigation were ignored. I believe that it is unusual that the spurious complaint that was lodged against me on the last week of the semester was immediately sent to investigation; this was particularly suspicious because federal regulation maintains that historical scholarship is not subject to the Institutional Review Board (IRB), and no other historian in the department, not even those that work with human subjects (Oral Historians), has been treated similarly. What makes this additionally suspicious is how this complaint moved from a complaint to an investigation without the university having a Research



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Integrity Officer (RIO) in place. It should also be noted that the RIO is required by federal law. I find it suspicious that all my replies to IRB were required to be in writing while the university's audit during the investigation was not written down. I find it suspicious that this auditor was also selected to head an investigation of an eerily similar student complaint against another Black professor and has now been selected to chair the whistleblower investigation in regard to the aforementioned student's complaint of research misconduct. One would think that an auditor who fails to write down their audit findings would not be in such high demand. The IRB also has a virtually unique organizational structure on campus: the office is directly under the control of the chancellor, the entire composition of its membership is selected by the chancellor, and the senate and faculty appeals committee have no authority or oversight of IRB. IRB hears its own appeals, hands out its own punishments, and is therefore judge, jury, and executioner of all who go before it.

As one of the nation's leading scholars of the Elaine Massacre, I see similarities between actions of the university's administrators and those of the Phillips County's plantation owners who rushed to use violence against Black sharecroppers that demanded equality and fair treatment. Plantation owners used racialized violence to maintain control, to keep Black wages and advancement to a minimum, and to make examples of those that sought to challenge the boundaries established under white supremacy. Those sharecroppers who were brave enough to organize themselves and demand fair payment were not dragged to gallows or hung from sturdy trees. Instead, they



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were brought before committees and juries composed of the very men who committed countless atrocities against them and their families on a daily basis. Their judges and juries were the owners and overseers of the plantations they worked on, members of the mobs who hunted them as they hid in the bogs and thickets; in other words, they were the very people who robbed them and their families of their livelihoods and humanity. Like the plantation owners, the university's administration has operated clandestinely in the shadows hiding their faces while committing dastardly deeds under the cover of their official positions.

In closing, I want to thank those that have worked as friends and allies, those that have stood beside me in times of difficulty, and those who have laughed and lamented with me. I owe each of you a debt I can never repay. I want to thank my students and mentees for always being the high point of my work day and reminding me to take a break and binge watch a show from time to time. I want to remind the members of the Black and Brown Committee that they will always be stronger as a collective than they would be individually.

*Dean Estes – Please contact me in regard to conducting my exit interview.

Sincerely,

Brian K. Mitchell, Ph.D