April 7th Forum Racism: The Power of Illusion

Ashley: Good evening students, staff, faculty, administration, and members of the community. My name is Ashley Sharpe and I am the current president of the NAACP chapter here at Tech. And my name is Morgan Esters and I serve as vice president. We would like to thank you all for coming out tonight to our event Racism: The Power of Illusion. We have a great performance for you all today, followed by very insightful speakers, and enlightening discussions, all with the purpose of you leaving tonight with the desire to be agents of change. We would also like to thank SGA for sponsoring and collaborating with us on this event, as well as Alpha Phi Omega and many other organizations for their support.

Morgan: This event comes in the wake of the demonstrations that we held last semester in response to the killings of Michael Brown, Eric Garner, and Tamir Rice, and the campus' response to them. Afterwards, we began to brainstorm ideas for programs and ways to address some of the unrest and confusion that seemed to linger. We were reminded that Virginia Tech is willing to progress in thinking and wants to create a more inclusive campus community where all students feel welcomed. We were also reminded of social justice allies who work to raise campus consciousness.

In addition to tonight’s program, we have started a campaign called hashtag Not Temporarily Upset. Not temporarily upset is a movement to encourage concern about systemic issues, extending beyond isolated incidents. Cases such as Martese Johnson, Mike Brown, and Tamir Rice, add insight towards a larger problem in our society. We aim to take action year-round to not only fight against issues that have occurred, but to stop future occurrences. I hope that after tonight more of you are inspired to become allies in this fight towards social justice.

Ashley: Tonight we will start off with an interactive theater performance by Building Home. Building Home is a program from the school of performing arts. As stated, this performance is INTERACTIVE so please when it's time raise your hands, participate, ask questions, and don't be afraid to get involved. Building Home has created a very innovative style of theater so think objectively and pay close attention to what's being said. Your participation is essential to the effectiveness of this performance and I hope you all enjoy.

(*Building Home Performance*)

Devon: Thank you building home for that performance. (Introduce **both** speakers)

(*Dr. Christian Matheis speaks)*

(*Dr. Graves speaks)*

Ashley: Thank you Dr. Matheis and Dr. Graves for your very thorough and insightful presentations. We appreciate you taking your time to share your expertise on these important topics. Now we will take a short break to allow everyone to get some pizza; your tables will be individually called. When you return to your seats facilitators will begin the group discussions. Lets use the background we have just learned from our speakers to have productive, but safe conversations, guided by questions from our facilitators. Our facilitators have been working hard to ensure that this is a safe space.

(*Discussions Begin*)

Morgan: We hope that the conversations at all of your tables were fruitful for everyone and caused you to think deeper about that which the speakers laid out for you. There are a few people who have volunteered to give us a summary of what they personally got out of tonight’s program and a few takeaway messages. At this time I would like to give them the opportunity to do so.

(*Selected students give feedback*)

Morgan: Thank you all for sharing. We hope that this won’t stop here and that you’ve been inspired to continue conversations and expand your knowledge on this topic beyond this event. We encourage all of you to share what you have learned today with others and be courageous in engaging in conversations concerning the larger issue of systemic racism. Because contrary to what some may say, it is not an issue that will go away by simply not talking about it. We know that any issue as deeply ingrained as this cannot be solved in such a way, but instead talk about it, study it, and organize with others against it.

We still have some #NotTemporarilyUpset shirts that we are selling at the table. Also, if you have not already, please like our facebook page at NAACP Chapter at Virginia Tech and follow us on Twitter and Instagram at NAACP\_VT to keep up with all future events.

Ashley: This event is only the beginning of inclusive conversations here at Tech. No matter what organizational work you may be involved in there is a motto many of us should live by. The motto goes: “What? So what? Now what?” I hope tonight we have identified the what, and the so what. The NAACP chapter here at Tech is currently working towards programs and events for next year that allow for action plans addressing the “now what”. Please make sure to keep your eyes open for that. Lastly, on April 25th from 9am-1pm at the Inn, please come out to the 4th Annual Combatting Racial Injustice Workshop. Hear from people about the Criminal Justice system, and get involved with things like helping push legislation. Thank you all again for joining us this evening and have a wonderful night!