

On Normalcy

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Acknowledgements

We would like to begin by expressing gratitude to the BIPOC laborers on this campus throughout the history of the College, from students to faculty and staff. Thank you to the authors of the 2020 Open Letter to the Bi-Co for beginning the push towards change and dismantling anti-Blackness at Haverford and Bryn Mawr. Thank you to Haverford's Black Students Refusing Further Inaction, Black Student League, Womxn of Color House, and all BIPOC students who labored for this strike for igniting the fire we now hold. Thank you to everyone at Bryn Mawr who has been helping us to organize, from the larger sector of the Core Strike Collective to the BIPOC faculty and staff who have been actively committed to aiding us. And thank you to everyone who has put their trust in this collective.

*“Thank you to our [predecessors] for cutting a path so that it might be easier for us to walk.
Thank you to [our peers staff, and faculty, in action] for walking with us”¹*

This is not normal: Thoughts from an Afropessimist

For Black folks this year's uncertainty brought more of the same violence, only now from a person with a mask on (or off). Despite our vulnerability, we continuously show up and show out in institutions, jobs, and our daily interactions. We still, even in a global pandemic, have to be emotionally, physically, and spiritually ready to educate non-Black folks on the validity of our existence in the hopes of making our existence easier or at least making the existence of the next Black person's life easier. But vocalizing the inhumanity of our status, as subjects in the white dominated apparatus, means bargaining for certain freedoms over others, which only goes so far. That is why we Struck. By taking this approach we withheld labor from BIPOC people by forcing you all to reckon and see, numerically, the fact that you operate in, think, and benefit from anti-Blackness and underpaid labor.

Though we knew many were (and still are) not ready to confront this reality we, The Strike Collective, decided that acting in solidarity with our BIPOC students at Haverford and

¹ *Homegoing* by Yaa Gyasi

calling attention to similar problems of inequity at Bryn Mawr would nonetheless be of value because we would help promote campus-wide conversations about white fragility and privilege. In offering teach-ins, tools for conversations on race and racism, and—with the hope of creating institutional change—a [list of demands](#) outlining varying administrative measures needed in order to begin the conversation about dismantling barriers to success for Black and brown students on campus, the Strike Collective successfully disrupted the order.

On November 3, 2020 in the form of an open letter we called on you all to support us in this work. Over four hundred students heard our call and took up the strike in the name of the completion of our demands. For the past sixteen days at Bryn Mawr we have rejected normalcy by disrupting the institution's profiting on unseen BIPOC labor by refusing to work, go to class, and participate in other events led by the institution. Together we encouraged our non-Black peers to acknowledge their benefits from the normalization of Black subjugation, by listening to Black folks at sit ins, working more diligently to see the violence Black bodies are exposed to in trainings, and paying BIPOC people for their labor and time in the form of mutual aid.

What this strike did on a local level is what Black Lives Matter did on the national level this summer. But, as countless Black folks noted at the end of the summer and here on campus, allying for Black lives is not a performance, gig, or choice. Here, at Bryn Mawr, we made it clear that by listening to Black folks from this campus we can shift the conversation away from “normal” and into the *actual lived* experiences of Black folks on this campus. We will never forget the tender moment that we shared in front of the Old Library on November 6, 2020². One after the other we heard our Black peers discuss what is usually ignored by white people and accepted only in Black spaces, such as, the home or the heart.

We must proclaim that for generations, out of fear that honesty would get you in trouble or hurt, Black folks on this campus have had the same conversations, fought for the same justice, and requested very similar demands³. That is why we say the strike is a mindset. They, like us, hosted late night calls, sent hundreds of texts in massive group chats, and created countless posts

² [Bryn Mawr Strike Collective Hosts Sit-Ins amidst Student Strike](#)

³ [3 thoughts on “A Comprehensive History of the Fight for Perry House”](#)

for social media with information about agendas, templates, public service announcements, and events with the hope of making Bryn Mawr a tolerable place.

So for non-Black folks who participated in the strike, we implore you to understand that what you did is only a fraction of the labor that Black folks have done for years. Additionally, as the Core Strike Collective has noted on our report card⁴ for administration, the institution has no intent on fixing itself without constant mobilization and demands for redress. This work to break free from Christina Sharpe’s ‘Wake’⁵ or Fred Moten and Steafno Harney’s ‘Undercommons’⁶ is unequally championed by BIPOC workers simultaneously co-opted by the institution. There must be deregularization of this “normal” labor, in order to insist on a new normal.

Because of our collective work the college’s social climate was disrupted and it’s administrative enforcers demanded to change the order. The future of the institution lives with BIPOC students and the collective. We, and hundreds of Black and Brown folks, make it undeniable that the college cannot succeed without us. We see you. We hear you. We love you. Be proud and bask in this moment. As we said in our first open letter we deserve our contributions to this institution to be rightfully compensated, acknowledged, and memorialized from this point on. A failure to do so will result in further disrupting of the order. This is the post new ‘normal’. This is abolitionist work from within the Wake and Undercommons.

We are not going back to “normal.” “Normal” is the invisibility of our experiences on campus yet the exploitation of our work. “Normal” is marginalization in the physical spaces of the campus and the minds and hearts of white members of the College. “Normal” is facing consistent microaggressions in and outside of the classroom with little to no avenue towards relief or healing. “Normal” is having to swallow our emotions towards our oppressors for the sake of “community.” “Normal” is exasperation. Normal is anti-Blackness. To draw upon some of our conclusions from conversations with Fred Moten and Nia Love, the strike will never be over. It is a state of consciousness, a consistent practice—though we call this moratorium today, we live in the general strike.

⁴ [Commitments to Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Anti-Racism's Report Card](#)

⁵ [In the Wake: On Blackness and Being Synopsis](#)

⁶ [The Undercommons](#)

Timothy Harte, Jennifer Walters, and Kimberly Cassidy would like to believe that today marks the end of the longest strike in Bryn Mawr's history. The narrative that they will try and spin is, in every sense of the word, utterly false. The strike did not end today, just like it did not end when Black students struck in 2018, or when Black students composed a list of demands in 2015, or in 1970 when Black students organized a boycott. We have been asking for basic rights since the establishment of this elitist institution. *None* of these demands are new, but rather a continuation of all the work Black gender minorities have done before us and will continue to do for as long as the administration fails its Black students. When you eventually fall back into your 'normal' routine of classes and jobs, do not forget what Black students on this campus have done. Do not forget that Black students were the ones that halted this entire campus for sixteen days. Do not forget that Black students were the ones that organized daily lessons on abolitionism. Do not forget that Black students make this campus function and that without us it would, in fact, fall apart. As you walk around the campus you are so fond of, the campus that truly is picture-perfect as a result of the labor of staff, a group that predominantly consists of BIPOC, and even more specifically, Black folks, remember who this campus has failed. Who it was built for. And who will disrupt the order.

Why we dissent

The structures that have been provided by the institution as methods of enacting change and/or doing antiracist work remain futile and exhibit the administration's value for the "long term health and safety of the institution" over that of its BIPOC members⁷. As a matter of fact, these "changes" the institution claims to have implemented exploit the brutal labor of those most affected by racism and anti-Blackness. For instance, Community Diversity Assistants work to manage the symptoms of racist structures present at the institution by the will of the administration and Board of Trustees. They tirelessly work to cultivate an environment where the microaggressions of our white and non-Black POC peers, staff, and faculty are suppressed⁸. Institutionalized forms of student involvement such as Plenary and student consultants exist only as an illusion of agency for what has been decided by students will ultimately have to be

⁷ President Kimberly's explanation of the focus of the Board of Trustees.

⁸ Understanding of student administrative positions as explained by Fred Moten in his Teach-In

approved by the administration and faculty members. Thus, the only option was to disrupt the fictitious life of those who benefit from the status quo and withhold labor from the corporation that poses itself as an educational institution. In our disruption, we have successfully contested this “community” that has been imposed on those of us who “live in this community [but], not of the community.”⁹ We prefigured nonhierarchical social relationships with all members of BMC by directly engaging students and deviating from the rigid top down bureaucracy presented to us. What has wrongfully been labeled as divisive and factionary was the illumination of a conflict that has long been censored through professionalism and “inclusion.” The refusal of a large number of students to attend classes has forced departments to host town halls with the goal of addressing the lack of departmental wide antiracist pedagogy. This level of campus wide engagement to address anti-Blackness is unheard of especially in the STEM fields. Hence, we want to recognize the students that have organized each other and provided demands to the Biology, Chemistry, and Math departments. These are not conversations that we should be so eager to stop once the strike is “concluded”¹⁰. Rather, we urge you to lean into the discomfort of perpetual awareness that members of your “community” are structurally abused and alienated by the same system you participate in.

What we’ve achieved (and what needs work)

Before we say anymore, we want to acknowledge the tangible progress **WE** have made thus far:

- An annual funding of \$100,000 for the Enid Cook Center (ECC) to cover the salary of a full-time director position, the stipend of a paid student coordinator position, and the spending of campus wide events hosted at the ECC.
- The implementation of a system whereby Bryn Mawr provides \$90,000 of funding to international students to cover their scholarship taxes.
- The transformation of the Dean’s Emergency Fund into the Dean’s Student Assistance Fund and a doubling of the budget to \$10,000.
- The creation of *A Radical Imagination: The Bryn Mawr Strike Collective* fellowship with an initial budget of \$10,000.

⁹ Robinson, “HOW HAS ALIENATION AFFECTED BLACK STUDENT PROTEST AT HAVERFORD COLLEGE?”

¹⁰ The strike doesn’t end.

- The creation of a new Student Success position to be hired with a salary of \$60,000 to address the needs of DACAmented and Undocumented Students.
- The removal of the M. Carey Thomas bust and portrait by January 29th, 2021.
- A commitment to begin to implement universal design standards in curricular and co-curricular programs in Spring 2021.
- A revision to the College's financial aid policy will be implemented by the 2022-2023 school year, to ensure that paid fellowships no longer replace grants and compromise financial aid.
- A commitment to hire transformative justice experts to discuss the College's relationship with law enforcement.
- Initiation to review endowment investments to determine what, if any, securities related to the penal system or the defense industry are held by Bryn Mawr in the endowment; information to be shared with the "community."
- The administration of regular campus climate assessments.
- An annual open forum on the College's budget.
- An impact survey to assess the effectiveness of the work being undertaken by the College.
- If approved by the curriculum committee, a new distribution requirement that includes diversity, equity, and inclusion education and the impact of systemic hierarchies.
- A revamped THRIVE program through the lens of issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion.
- A continuation of successful teach-ins, our mode of reimagining education throughout the strike, to occur regularly during quarantine and the semester.
- A commitment to hiring external consultants and other positions to support and resource work undergone at the College.
- An establishment of budgets for previously instituted policies and action items (such as those about institutional memory).
- A commitment to use a transformative justice framework to change College protocols around mental health crises.

- A commitment to working with students and the Anti-Racism Committee on the implementation of the new work taken on by the College.
- Pushed the College in its entirety to face its history and current manifestations of white supremacy, anti-Blackness, carcerality, and imperialism.
- Organized action across the Bi-Co in a way that has not been seen before.
- **Effectively disrupted the fucking order of the institution for 16 days.**

What we have achieved cannot be attributed to the will of the administration; none of this would have been possible if we, as Black students in collaboration with other BIPOC students, faculty and staff, and our accomplices, had not done the work to push this administration forward. We have done hours upon hours of painstaking work, including: research on administrative processes, revisions, outreach, responding to questions and concerns, planning for and holding sit ins and town halls, and negotiating with administration directly. This was us, Black women and nonbinary folks, and it is imperative that the College “community” never forget that fact.

To be clear, for many of our conversations administrative powers were utterly unprepared, failing to understand what we so clearly stated, and lacking in the respect that we should have been afforded not only because of the massive amounts of work we did, but simply because we are people, too. It was not until the conclusion of our meeting with President Cassidy, Dean Walters, and Provost Harte, which lasted around 2.5 hours, that President Cassidy decided to revise her stance on compensating us.

The amount of work we have done cannot ever be accurately described or quantified, but we would be doing each other and our predecessors a disservice if we did not acknowledge the severe labor required of us to achieve the bare minimum at this institution. In the past two weeks, we have responded to 548 emails and direct messages, made 74 social media posts, created 27 documents, organized 29 teach-ins, hosted six office hours, four town halls, and have been in what feels like countless hours of Zoom meetings. Yet, this is nothing compared to the cognitive labor we had to do. In synchronous with organizing, we were enduring threats of lawsuits,

defamation of our characters from our peers, professors and “president”, and the re-traumatization of being in meetings with apathetic administration who went as far as to say, “Black lives matter, BUT our stance is to only focus on making statements on education,” when asked about their refusal to publicly answer the following questions as initially stated in our demands: *Why does Bryn Mawr College not have any formal relationships with a Police Department? Will the College promise to never have any formal relationships with ANY Police Department? Why or why not? Is the College working on the active abolition of police and penal systems? Why or why not? If yes, what are precise examples of such work?*

We would like to remind everyone that as part of her response to our demands on Monday, November 16th, President Cassidy wrote that the College was committed to acting on all of our stated demands. At the Town Hall on Friday, November 13th, with nearly 700 people in attendance, President Cassidy, Dean Walters, and Provost Harte stated that they would resign should they fail to keep their commitment to enact real, visible change at the College. By our standards, there remain significant gaps missing from their responses to our demands, the current path forward, and an inability to meet us in respectful conduct as shown in their body language, lack of preparedness, and inappropriate communication with off campus parties. They have failed to demonstrate any real care for Black students at the College and Black lives as a whole—historically. They have presently succeeded in alienating, enraging, and traumatizing us. Therefore, we expect that President Cassidy, Dean Walters, and Provost Harte will use their positions of power and responsibility of their offices to continue to move the College beyond insufficient reform and towards the vision of abolition we envision. Abolition, for our movement, is labor championed by BIPOC folks that attempts to achieve a world in which inherently violent and exploitative institutions no longer exist by centering, acknowledging, and empowering organizers who do administrative and consulting work for the institution. In writing this, we echo Fred Moten’s definition of ‘fugitivity’ as Black folks’ continuous resistance to the “proper and the proposed” standards of whiteness. Thus our dissent remains unwavering and our strike ongoing¹¹. Trust.

Personal reflections and what comes next

¹¹ “Stolen Life” by Fred Moten

It is a myth that Bryn Mawr is a “community” but is a fact that Bryn Mawr has communities but those groups of people are the people who prevent this school from having a collective identity. This school marginalizes people that refuse to bend to the institution and the “communities” will. And rather than administration and certain faculty and staff advocating for the institution to bend to its students to formulate a “community”, the administration gaslights, bullies, and shames student organizers. The many many trailblazers that came before this group exist in a sub-community that regardless of its visibility on campus will never be fully accepted on campus.

It is clear that the College in its entirety has incredible problems with anti-Blackness and white supremacy that must be dealt with. That we had to go through an intensely traumatizing experience to achieve any of this is unacceptable. That there are still members of the “community” who fail to recognize this labor and pain is unbearable. As the strike’s work transitions into its next phase, we are making it clear that anti-Blackness is part and parcel of not only the structure of this institution, but also of the very essence of its members’ lives.

We understand that this point in the semester presents new challenges and stressors for the whole of the Bryn Mawr “community”—we are students too. And we know that this moment presents a time to think about moving forward in a number of adaptable ways which continue to center the collective, and especially Black voices. The work is not yet done, and will never be done. It will continue in a greater scope than previously thought. The strike is a state of consciousness which we, students working towards this collective action, have embodied for years. For that reason, we hope that our detractors -- those who have continually punished us, engaged in bad faith, spoken ill of our intentions, attempted to derail our movement, and refused to protect and work with us -- are not satisfied that we have now chosen to release a memorandum on the strike. In fact, we hope you are ashamed of yourselves, and that you toil in that shame. Every minute of your passivity and lack of care is a minute of violence. Everyone who refused to join us now has a chance to engage in the work we are doing as we continue to seek transparency and accountability from the administration and fundamental change in the “community” as well. We would like to acknowledge, as well, those who are on the fence,

unsure of where they belong, or afraid to speak up under the threat of retaliation – through all we’ve experienced, our engagement with and trust in the collective has carried us; we invite you to walk alongside us.

This is the beginning of a larger movement, the beginning of the new normal we collectively need. Thus far, those of us who have organized at Haverford and Bryn Mawr have inspired students at Swarthmore, beginning a strike across the Tri-Co, as well as several other institutions including Villanova, Northwestern, Colby, and Bates. Continuing into the next phase of our ongoing strike at Bryn Mawr we will support organizers at these institutions throughout the progression of their movements and maintain collaboration within the Tri-Co as we create a new coalition and mode of organization. What we have started has spread much farther than originally thought possible.

_____ We urge you to invest in the “community” beyond what is regulated through the institution’s construction. Be on the lookout for ongoing mutual aid efforts and invest in Bi-co Mutual Aid’s funding and other fundraisers they boost. Do your research on Philadelphia and Ardmore’s Black communities and histories of gentrification and displacement, and invest in those communities as well. Fight for those who are most vulnerable.

To our Bryn Mawr peers

Thank you to the countless students that have supported the strike, advocated for the strike at various town halls, went head to head with professors who opposed the strike, debated with other students who also had opposing views of the strike, and risked their standing at the college by being committed to divest from the institution. Most importantly, thank you to the students who struck in solidarity with students at Haverford College and who continued to

commit to striking with their own peers at Bryn Mawr College to progress for change at the institution.

Please remember that we, as students and as young people in this society, hold a lot more power than we think. Bryn Mawr College *cannot* function without the time, labor, and commitment that *we (students) invest* in the institution. Bryn Mawr College *cannot* function without the time, commitment, and *exploited labor* of its first-generation low-income students. Most importantly, Bryn Mawr College *cannot* function without the time, commitment, and *exploited* labor of its Black, Indigenous, and other students of color who are not only marginalized because of their gender and racial identification, but may also be marginalized because of their class status, migration status, sexuality, (dis)abilities, and other identifications that continue to marginalize groups of people in the oppressive white-anglo saxon protestant society of the “United” States.

Institutional change at Bryn Mawr College is not guaranteed after a sixteen day divestment from the system. Although we successfully disrupted the order of the system for sixteen days, *please remember that the system of Bryn Mawr College has been constructed to be oppressive for 135 years.* Thus, sixteen days of disruption and divestment will not undo 135 years of institutional oppression that is prevalent in the system of Bryn Mawr College. Following the sentiments of our peers at Haverford College from Womxn of Color House, Black Students Refusing Further Inaction, Black Student League, and other BIPOC students that the institution has failed, we must continue to *disrupt the fucking order.* Never stop advocating for change and never stop imagining radical ways towards a just and progressive society.

We invite you in welcoming the *Black Student Liberatory Coalition*, a group of Black students who will collaborate with other groups of students on campus to continue to *hold the administration accountable* for the continued negligence of its commitment to serve ‘all’ “students to the highest standard of excellence to prepare them for lives of purpose”¹². President Cassidy plans on implementing a transition team to continue to work with students to move forward with the demands presented by the Strike Collective on November 13, 2020 and to

¹² [Bryn Mawr Mission Statement](#)

continue implementing more changes at the college to progress towards a more just institution. The Black Student Liberatory Coalition and other allies will be involved with the transition process to hold President Cassidy, Dean Walters, and Provost Harte to their word in seeing that these demands are met and that progression at the institution is assured. We invite you all to continue to ***disrupt the fucking order***. We invite students, and other members of the College with significant standing and security, to continue to self-organize alongside us and to leverage their power in aid of this shared goal.

“Sometimes people hold a core belief that is very strong. When they are presented with evidence that works against that belief, the new evidence cannot be accepted. It would create a feeling that is extremely uncomfortable, called cognitive dissonance. And because it is so important to protect the core belief, they will rationalize, ignore and even deny anything that doesn’t fit in with the core belief.” -Franz Fanon

The strike has concluded. We achieved some institutional change and will continue to advocate for the advancement of the Core Strike Collective’s demands.

To conclude

We are continuing our work, as we always have, and we will hold no one’s hand through it. Approach the movement, its action, and its actors with the respect we deserve as we, Black folks, struggle. And make your position in the struggle known.

Relevant links

[Strike Conclusion Statement](#)

[Commitments to Diversity, Equity, Inclusion Anti-Racism Report Card](#)

[Official List of Demands](#)

[Shorthand Demands](#) (often referred to as the “first list” of demands)

[President Cassidy's Report Card](#)

[Christina Sharpe *In The Wake: On Blackness and Being*](#)

[Fred Moten and Stefano Harney *The Undercommons Fugitive Planning and Black Study*](#)

[Nia Love](#)