

Dear Bonnie,

I've tried to write this letter several times, but not knowing how to give voice to silence and fear, I dropped it. But recent events have made me pick it up again and this time, I must try to give voice to the silence that I bear, because my life depends on it at this time. I doubt if any of this has gotten to you, because my concerns have often been dismissed as though baseless and without any atom of truth to it, because that is how black people are treated in this country whenever they say anything about racism. The easiest way is to tag them as crazy, which is what the MFA department has tried to do to me all time, but I never gave them the chance to. But in all these, I've kept a trail of papers and records which when requested, I will provide them, but honestly, that is still not why I am writing this letter. I am writing this letter because the racist forces in charge at UMD MFA program have empowered monsters to hunt me even in my own living space. Sometimes, keeping silence means that one is guilty to an extent, but that is not the case in this instance. All I have ever asked for was a better treatment of the black people at the UMD MFA program. All I asked for is equality and equity for everyone. I have taken my concerns to various levels of authority, from the head of the program to the department, and yet nothing has been done to those who cause harm or continue to cause harm to me as an individual (I will explain). When I stood up to speak out about racism at the MFA program, I knew I was going to stand alone, and I have no problem doing it all alone. I will not live my life on my knees, so I must speak out again, and if nothing drastic is done at this level, I will take it to social media and literary journals/media.

**From The Beginning:**

My name is Chika Onyenezi, I am from Nigerian, two years ago I got a letter of admission to the MFA program at University of Maryland and a few weeks later I saw a post by a student advertising a vacancy at an on-campus apartment and decided to jump on it because I was coming all the way from Maryland and had no time arranging everything. In fact, the day I heard about the offer, I was in my classroom teaching 8<sup>th</sup> grade mathematics, a job I had done for three years after moving to America from Austria a couple of years before. I sent in all the requirements for the room and was approved for it as soon as possible. I didn't have time to visit either the department nor the apartment, nor did I know anything about the student (Alannah Hensley) before applying for it. Everything I did here was done blind, including coming to the university. I drove 8 hours to the place and settled in as soon as possible for school. I barely knew the student in question even after moving into the house because of how it was sectioned, I kept to myself mostly because I noticed from day one that this student in question had racist tendencies (I will still come back to this).

May 3<sup>rd</sup> 2020 amidst the heat of the pandemic, I sent a letter to Prof. Casey Maud about my failing health and worries and clearly indicated my inability to continue with the coursework for the semester (I attached correspondence to this email and some conversations happened over the phone too), and replied in a kind manner, but during those calls and subsequent emails, she continued to talk about work to a student who clearly told her that he wasn't able to continue with work as if she was talking to someone who was lying. Before then, I had noticed a lot of things going on in the department, awarding prizes to white students and many other systemic racist activities that were going on in the department. With further research, I can realize how they've treated faculty of color in the past and had issues with many past students of color. I am not the first nor will I be the last to accuse of racism, but I will be the first to expose

their systemic harm to people of color. On 6<sup>th</sup> of June 23, 2020, I sent out an email to the department titled: The Falcon cannot hear the Falconer, attacking the shallow language and letter issued on account of George Floyd by the head of the department, a letter that lacked substance or any atom of emotion, but full of symbolic gestures (and I will say it again, such a man is not worthy to run an MFA program):

Dear All,

The events unfolding before us demand that we take action. I have been silent for too long, and I will no longer stay silent any longer. If everyone refuses to speak, then I will. It has fallen up to us to hold this institution accountable, not just in words, but in action. I will speak.

Growing up, I was fascinated by language and how people use it. That fascination has never weaned in me to this day. So, I will look at the responses I received from this program in terms of language. All paragraphs could be distilled into:

"Emotion"

"Emotion"

"let's go back to normal"

A lot has been going on this MFA for too long and I feel appalled to be any part of it (receiving end or otherwise). There is racism here and it's obscene. The letter from our director Joshua Weiner is an insult to every black person and angst of the moment. It doesn't call for real change in this program. It calls for a return to normal. Normal is killing black people. Normal is your foot in our necks, grinding endlessly, demanding for work even when we say: "I can't breathe".

There is no normal here. There is ingrained structural racism. I will be here. I will be a moral consciousness in this place that needs it the most. I will be that lone voice in the wilderness. I am not interested in performing my blackness or life.

I call for an inquiry into the activities of this faculty. I call for a review. A survey should be taken among all alumni of color, based on their experience in this place. We need a way forward driven by people of good consciousness, not recycling the same old ideas. We need a breath of fresh air. I need all of you to demand what is right. I am not writing for emotional appeal. I am saying that we need to start doing the right thing in this faculty. History will remember me for this day.

I will keep calling for change until something happens. I will keep calling for change until I see it. I am calling for profound change in this institution, I will not be fooled by language and rhetoric. The only action in the right direction can turn the tide around. Some of your friends go home crying, be. Start doing the right thing now. Call for change here.

I discussed the content of this letter with the following:

....

Signed:

Chika Onyenezi

I sent this to them and a meeting was arranged afterwards, the minutes of that meeting are still available and can be provided at request. Again, I accused them of systemic racism at that meeting, and we all know that there can be no systemic racism without having actual racist on ground. What the program did was dismiss my claim and constitute a clownish gathering to address the issue. In my correspondence with Josh, I repeatedly cautioned him against using divide and conquer, but he went ahead to use it. He paid many of the black students off through various means that summer and bought their silence. Check the department account during that summer and follow the money. One of the black students, Maiasia Grimes, moved into the house that summer and attacked me (I have correspondence with my landlady and other evidence of this). This socio-pathic attach came in form of sexual harassment and physical attack. I notified my landlady about Maiasia Grimes' sociopathic tendencies and asked her to do a background check on her to make sure that she deserves to be there. I don't know what the result of that background check was, but I guess it wasn't good. I can send the correspondence with my landlady when needed. Since then, Maiasia Grimes has not stopped to attack me. She sent her friend who I cut off as soon as I discovered her plot in order to protect myself. She didn't stop there, with Alannah Hensley, who was still living in a room under me, they continued to plot on how to get me with the full support of the department members. On September 13 2020, I received a letter from John Zacker:

Dear Mr. Onyenezi,

As assistant vice president for student affairs, I chair the university's behavior evaluation team. I have recently received a report that your behavior has caused concern for others on campus.

I request that you meet with me via Zoom tomorrow and at your earliest convenience so we may discuss. Kindly respond immediately upon receipt of this email with your availability.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

John Zacker

I sent a letter to Amanda Bailey immediately and we fixed a meeting, because previously she has been on the case too and asked me for evidence of racism which I declined and asked her to source them out herself. I cannot do the work of dictative for the department/faculty, I deserve some level of peace. Again, for the first time in my life as a Blackman I had to clear myself again, this after teaching middle school for six years, after having no issue with mental disorder or anything. Nothing was done that brought these false allegations against me and attacked me in my own house. I reported the attack to Amanda Bailey and Rion Scott. Everything they brought against me was baseless and lacked any evidence and in contrast it was what they did to me. I have evidence.

They didn't stop there, they made sure that my living at 2506 Pawnee Street was a living hell. At night, they made noise all night and disturbed my peace until Alannah Hensley moved out this summer. They acted without concern without any form of humanity in them until their very last day here. Note: I lived here for one year without any problem until I spoke up about racism at UMD. Since then, I have been attacked in the classroom

but my fellow students and even gaslighted by teachers in class. This made me leave my last workshop class and stopped attending. It was conducted by Emily Mitchel, ask her about it. She gaslighted too in our conversations during this period. I left to have peace and be on my own and focus on my art, but they will still not let me be. Recently, a boy moved into my place, Brian Ngoh, a student at UMD, under the pretext that he is conducting research at UMD/internship for engineering. He rarely leaves the house, last night he made sure that I didn't sleep, he kept banging metal together and making all sorts of noises. I don't know what his goal is. Maybe for me to report again so that I will be ultimately dismissed as crazy. The easiest thing to call a man is crazy. When you don't want to understand a man, you call him crazy. I have left the department for them, I only/ will only go there to teach and leave, but they will not continue to harass my life however they deem fit. The white racist echelon in charge of the program will not continue to make sure that these horrible humans have wheels to harm another. I have never had any form of protection in this program, I am black and male, I am an open target, all I ask is that I be allowed to complete my program in peace and work on my project with Rion Scott until the end of my program. There is a lot I cannot say in this email because I don't even have the mental energy any longer. This place will drain a man of life, that is how dangerous this place is. I am not accusing Brian Ngoh of anything yet, but please I need an investigation in place because I am beginning to fear for my personal safety. I am beginning to fear how far people can go to dismiss one of being crazy, I don't mind leaving for Florida at this point if a lawyer can help me get out of the lease. The evil being done here and sanctioned by these monsters is enormous and nothing will stop me from speaking out again and again, and if nothing is done, I will take it to the next level. Please, see if you can discreetly investigate this student's claim that he is doing an internship at UMD this summer, if not, then his claim is false and his intention in moving in here is malicious. I have raised enough dust, but I am also using this as a medium in case anything happens to me at this place. Again, there

is a lot I cannot say here because I am tired of typing. I will be happy to speak to you in person if possible.

You can find my work here:

[www.chikaonyenezi.com](http://www.chikaonyenezi.com)

most I published during my stay here. Also, check my teaching evaluations, i've done my best for many students here. I just want to breathe, I can't breathe. My stay here cannot be a living hell BECAUSE I spoke up against racism. I will either take any assault in silence, I will shout until I bring down the walls of Jerrico. Again, I have records of most and will provide when needed.

Sincerely,

Chika Onyenezi