

Diary of an (Almost) Mad Black Woman

*Written by Solace Mensah-Narh, Milton Academy Editor
September 30, 2016*

Dear Milton,

Before I begin, let me start by saying that I love Milton. This community has introduced me to my closest friends, has opened my mind up and allowed me to foster as a thinker and a learner. I cannot imagine attending another school. Milton has made me into who I am today: a student who dares to say what she believes in. As any high school experience, it was not always ups, which is why I am writing this article. More than anything else, it saddens me to see younger black girls are going through the same hardships I had to experience at Milton, so I think it is time we change that. In writing this article I am not condemning Milton, or anyone in the institution. I am simply bringing light to issues that the community may not have yet have noticed; I am expressing my right to dare to be true.

On Thursday night, in lieu of the recent issues concerning Black Lives Matter, a group of students were emailed to hold a meeting the following day. Stated in the email, the specific group was chosen because they are “the representatives of a few groups working on issues of inclusion” and our goal was to “facilitate an open session that would be held on Tuesday”. This email was extremely late notice, nonetheless integral, so I canceled my Friday plans to attend.

The meeting, like most things at Milton, started late, then we were all told to share our feelings about the week. Silence filled the room, surprisingly though, because at this point we have been sharing our feelings for three years. I sat in this room, with my head almost exploding, wondering what the point was of all this.

This is what Milton seems to be good at: acting like they care. To hold this meeting was extremely respectful, and I am grateful for this. However, the meeting never actually went anywhere because we spent our time talking about “our feelings”. It is time now to take action and to make steps in change, because this meeting has shown me that more than anything else that the Milton administration is censoring us.

So here is the first problem: Milton’s administration believes they can choose people to represent a race. A group of black females attending Milton Academy may go through similar experiences. We may get questions about our hair, sit through awkward U.S. History classes, and attend Wednesday assemblies that irritate our blackness. Still, not every black girl at Milton has gone through the exact same experience because we are different people, from different backgrounds, that live different lives at Milton. Instead of realizing this, our administration has decided that only certain people can really represent the black female voice. For any opportunity to share your concern about the Milton community, you need to either apply or be chosen. It is not a lottery system; the administration does a great job of hand picking the same people for everything. Who

gets to go to student diversity conferences? The same six black students who got to be Transitions counselors, Link Mentors, and to be in that conversation we had last Friday. It is like an ongoing email chain of the perfect black students, and we just go in rotation. Here is the thing though: the people they choose are not always the people ready to drive change.

The lack of change leads me to the second problem of our administration: we tend to silence people who are deemed radical. My sophomore year, there was an article written to one of the publications on campus that caused a school-wide discourse. There was a thick air of intensity on campus, so our administration, knowing that the black students were outraged, did whatever they could to pacify the situation without actually letting the students express their emotions. Some of the black students tried to start a newspaper called “The X”, aiming to raise awareness about the student of colour issues. The name itself illustrated how radical this paper planned to be. Uncensored, raw emotions from the black community at Milton would be on full display; the administration stopped that in a heartbeat. Instead, a more censored, controlled paper aimed to bring light to minority voices on campus was passed, through our Director of Multiculturalism and Community Development. This paper was pacified and controlled, which is exactly what the administration wants. The student representatives can never be the fiery ones with motivation and anger in their heart to change Milton; they are always the people who are saying that everything is going to be okay.

Guess what Milton: not everything is okay. I am no longer going to sit in a circle and sing Kumbaya. I will no longer sit in our ineffective affective education classes and pray to God that my teacher is strong enough to facilitate the conversation without making me lead as the black voice. I am no longer going to fill out an eight question application about why my voice is valid. I am going to speak, actually I am going to shout—I will express how I feel until you have no other choice but to make a change. Because here is the thing Milton: there is a difference between caring and doing.

Last year a group of five students, including myself, met with the administration about the problems we face on this campus. I poured out my soul about the problems I have here. The administration, some in tears, promised to make a change and to hold a second meeting. Then meeting got rescheduled, and eventually fell through. We were told that teachers were attending more workshops, but let’s be honest: how much are these “workshops” helping? This meeting held some of the most powerful black student voices at Milton over the course of my four years, but instead of listening to them, the meeting seemed much more like a causality to quiet the voices on campus—well that didn’t work.

This is what happens when you censor black voices for three years: they explode. Have you not noticed by now, Milton? Many black girls have graduated completely hating this institution, feeling like nothing actually changed over the four years they attended. This is disheartening, because as a black female, I am still in love with Milton and hope that this year we can really make a change. As presented by Mr. Bland, our head of school, our goal for this year is to engage in discourse and to listen to different voices. I think we can go a step further than that: let’s listen

and make action for change. Milton, I want you to do better, and with the plethora of different voices and thinkers we have I really believe we may finally have the power to.

Sincerely,
An (Almost) Mad Black Woman

Out of respect for my school, I showed this article to one of our Deans before publishing. To my surprise, instead of discrediting or denying my words entirely, he faced me apologetically and willing to change. I explained this earlier, but this self reflection is the reason why I think that we, as the Milton community, are so strong. Truly, out of all of the pieces in *The Tavern's* September issue, mine is the most grappling with the issues that Milton WOC face. I was daring enough to write about this because I believe our institution can take criticism well, and will use this opportunity to grow.

On that note I challenge students, faculty, and friends from all schools to look upon ways both you and your community can improve on to become more inclusive to the diverse environments we are lucky enough to study in. Students, I challenge you to raise awareness about the issues you may face to the administration. You may, like I did, gain a new perspective on these issues in the eyes of someone else's point of view. Still, it is crucial that you remember that your emotions are important and valid in any situation, if it is what you feel. Faculty and administrators, I challenge you to, in the course of your busy lives, look into yourselves and the work you are doing to build upon the diversity of your schools, and also assess how comfortable you feel in your settings. And lastly to the outside viewership, think to yourself how liberating it can be to attend a diverse institution where your voice matters, which it does at Milton and many other schools involved in *The Tavern*. Think about the power behind your freedom of speech. This is the final message of the (almost) mad black woman, who, I guess, now is a little less mad and a little more hopeful.