



Erasure of Student Mural at Marquette University

The Consortium was disappointed to learn of the dismissal of Susannah Bartlow, our colleague at the Marquette University Gender and Sexuality Resource Center, and the related erasure of a student-created mural at the Resource Center. We are particularly concerned about the message sent by Bartlow's dismissal and its impact on students at Marquette. [Bartlow's departure stems from a mural project in the student union depicting Assata Shakur](#). In late May, Marquette officials learned of the existence of this mural and removed both the mural and Bartlow from campus.

The mural was painted by students on one wall of the Gender and Sexuality Resource Center in March of 2015. Students, including members of Alpha Kappa Alpha sorority (a historically Black Greek Letter Organization), intentionally chose Assata Shakur as a subject for the mural in order to highlight the life of an activist Black woman. By erasing the mural, Marquette officials are erasing an opportunity for Black women to feel represented on campus.

Shakur is a controversial figure because of her alleged involvement in a number of violent acts, including murdering a state trooper in 1977, and later escaping from prison in 1979. At the same time, Shakur is also an author, an activist, and a scholar. Her philosophy and actions continue to shape higher education through inclusion in many academic courses, particularly in the realm of Critical Race Theory. For example, a student group at the City University of New York (which Shakur attended) is currently [fighting to retain the name "Guillermo Morales/Assata Shakur Community and Student Center" on a student lounge](#). Her legacy is one that deserves discussion, debate, and academic inquiry, rather than censorship.

We are concerned that removing the mural will have a chilling effect on the spirit of academic inquiry on campus and on the ability of educators to teach challenging topics. Students deserve to delve deeply into the U.S.'s complicated racial history by learning more about individuals involved in the struggle. Educators deserve the trust of their employers to talk about this history in a way that engages students. Instead, the choices made by Marquette officials foreclose this type of inquiry, and leave educators with the sense that they should avoid controversial topics. Quotes from Shakur's autobiography were included as part of the mural.

One quote perfectly summarizes the importance of the mural project: "Nobody is going to teach you your true history, teach you your true heroes if they know that that knowledge will help set you free." We stand in support of the students, staff, and faculty at Marquette who work to teach difficult, important, and underexamined history.