

This is the transcript of a recording created by David Michael '13 about the events surrounding the racist graffiti in Prospect House in November 2011.

Michael: Far in the Northwest corner of Massachusetts, in the heart of the lovingly named Purple Valley, lies Williams College. While its bucolic surroundings and humble 2000 student enrollment might seem obscure Williams is anything but. It's consistently rated the No. 1 college in the country by magazines like *Forbes* and *US News and World Reports*. Like any other college it has its share of annual traditions — the homecoming football game, mountain day and a third unfortunate tradition. Hate crimes have occurred almost every year for the past five years. Formerly called "bias incidents" by the campus administration, they cause a familiar cycle of grief, response and moving forward. One of the worst in recent memory happened on homecoming weekend, specifically Saturday, November 12, 2011. Between 12:00am and 12:30am that morning, graffiti was written on a bathroom wall. While I cannot repeat it verbatim, it almost read, "all n***** must die."

Michael: What do you think happened?

Parker: I think she went in there and wrote that graffiti.

Michael: While the case remains publicly unsolved, Parker McQuillan, a student at Williams, had a unique perspective on the event.

Parker: So I lived in Prospect dorm on the 4th and a half floor. I lived a ways down the hall from the bathroom that the graffiti was written in.

Michael: While most students were out partying, Parker, a varsity Basketball player had to stay in .

Parker: I was just watching TV, you know, waiting to get tired so I could go to sleep.

Michael: Then he saw something that would come to haunt him in the upcoming weeks.

Parker: I saw a girl up there that I knew, umm, I knew quite well actually, because of connections she's had with people on my Basketball team, and I saw her up at the end of that hallway near that bathroom, umm, I thought it was a little peculiar that she didn't come down the hallway to say hi to me or you know, just exchange any casual greetings, because that's what I think I would have normally expected to happen with a friend who was up on my floor. But she just went down the further stairwell away from me after we made eye contact.

Michael: He's describing a student who won't be named in this report. She self-identifies as a woman of color and was highly involved in minority group advocacy on campus. Many students believe she's the prime suspect. At first, this didn't seem important.

Parker: I didn't make anything of it. I figured it was homecoming, people were out, you know, drinking, partying, here and there. I didn't make anything of it.

Michael: But once campus safety and security interviewed him, he sent the student a text message warning her that he had mentioned her in an affidavit.

Parker: In reply to my message she said, “Ohh, haha, I forgot I was up there smoking with you that night.” Basically that she forgot that she was up there doing something with me. And this was probably a week and a half after the night I saw her up there, she said she forgot seeing me up there, she mentioned that she forgot that we were doing something together, which we weren’t doing, hanging out or doing something together, smoking was what she said, which wasn’t the case, didn’t happen that night, so I was kind of confused by that at first.

Michael: The confusion continues to this day. When I contacted the Williamstown Police Department about what he had seen, they sent the following statement. “The Williamstown Police Department, Federal Bureau of Investigation and the Williams College Safety and Security have conducted numerous interviews with individuals regarding this matter. At this time, there are no persons of interest.” Williams College Safety and Security director Dave Boyer refused to comment directly on this story. I also contacted the student in question. While she did reply to message with some choice words, she refused an interview. While we do not know for certain what happened for certain that night, we still do know a few facts that can paint a picture of what might have happened. This student was seen drinking alcohol and smoking marijuana with her friends earlier that evening. Then, after being placed at the scene of the crime by Parker, she was seen at the nearby Red Herring bar shortly before 1:00am. The investigators interviewed residents extensively. They examined door opening and card access logs and even WiFi access points cell phones connected to. They concluded that there was “a narrow window of time” which leaves either this student or “a lone gunman” who unaffiliated with the college, entered and exited the building completely unseen.

Michael: Ultimately, says Parker.

Parker: Because of everything I saw that night and the fact that I know that she lied to security in her statement about ever coming above the basement of Prospect dorm that night, I believe that she did it, there's no other reason I can imagine for her being up on that floor at that time, and it struck me as very odd that she didn't approach me and exchange some sort of greeting that night when we saw each other.

Michael: As for why.

Parker: I think she wanted everyone to see her as part of a victimized group, in which she considers herself a powerful person. It puts everyone else in the position of sympathy for people in marginalized groups, and that benefits her.

Michael: No-one was ever charged. It simmered on campus. Eventually, another student who also knew what happened couldn't take it anymore. He posted disparaging, but intentionally vague remarks about the suspect in response to her post on the all-campus

online forum. Almost immediately, he received a summons from the Dean's office. I spoke to Tim Kylie by phone about that experience.

Kylie: All I did was write a simple statement which at its core was a criticism of the Office of the Deans for taking unilateral and unjustified action against a single student, in favor of another student. And then I was convicted of a rule that didn't exist, I was placed on academic probation with no justification. After I appealed that case, later on, I was found to have all charges dropped.

Michael: I asked Kylie that if she did it, what might have motivated the student he spoke out against.

Kylie: If I were to guess, she was the type of personality that wanted to take radical action, to see, to get what she saw as positive change pushed through what she saw as an oppressive environment. At the end of the day though, she began to feel that, or she was encouraged to feel that, by elements within the administration within her mentors and whatnot, that if she made big enough lies and emotional enough lies, that she could pretty much convince anyone of anything she wanted. And one lie just fed into the next lie, and she thought she could get away with something as drastic as that, as committing a hate crime in order to get more attention.

Michael: He was similarly cynical about the quality of the investigation.

Kylie: I mean we sort of knew that didn't we, when we, when the investigations were called off when the evidence was squashed, when we had inspectors and security officers telling us that they had to "run things up the flagpole" before they pursued legitimate leads. I mean we knew what that meant. So it doesn't surprise me.

Michael: Even though Kylie had personal reasons to dislike the student, this is consistent with what Sergeant Scott McGowan thought about the motive as well. In an email he said, "I believe one of the motivating reasons the responsible persons wrote the message was to instigate and ignite tensions among people, which regrettably, was successful. However, I was impressed with the entire college community's response to stay united against intolerance." And things went on from there, like following a scripted ritual for how Williams deals with an incident like this. Students marched and occupied the police station. Students hurled profanities at the president and protested against the administration, who then apologized emphatically for their failures. Classes were canceled, and an all-campus forum and an open mike were held. And, these moments were pretty moving. Kerry Tribble, co-chair of the minority coalition recalls that day clearly.

Tribble: I initially was thinking, this is such a horrible event and it's so horrible that it happened, and really hoping that there is going to be a way for us to deal with it, and to talk about it in a productive way.

Michael: Steve Klass, Vice-President for Student Life, agrees it was a productive moment for the campus. But, he's disappointed the perpetrator wasn't found.

Klass: Williams never ceases to amaze me, and even as we go through this stuff, I mean having, again, been through an incident or two like this elsewhere, the response that we've had here I think gives me a lot of hope that we're further along the continuum of understanding one another and responding in a very supportive and holistic community way. You know, you have your own personal reasons for wanting to catch somebody who did something that did so much damage to the fabric of the community, that's just pure... that's the Old Testament side. On the New Testament side, I would love to, I think it is an absolute, one of the most basic, fundamental forms of... the beginning stages of healing is to know what your, what happened.

Michael: I asked Klass about a case that occurred in January of 1993, where a student affiliated with the Black Student Union wrote a similar phrase to this incident on the front of the Black Student Union house. In this case, the individual responsible claimed to do so to provoke a campus conversation.

Klass: Absolutely. There are people whose pathology, you know, there are firemen who like fires, right, or arsonists, right. I mean there are people who will, who, their own pathology leads them to do these things, even though they are in the victimized group. I don't think that's very common but it obviously happens. But I don't, I don't think that we're going to make that more likely by addressing things the way we've been addressing them.

Michael: The Dean of the College, Sarah Bolton, was satisfied with the thoroughness of the investigation. She described it like this.

Bolton: If someone acts in a way that violates the Code of Conduct, which certainly this kind of crime that happened in November of 2011 did, that is something that we must take seriously that we must investigate fully, and that we have a process for holding people accountable and figuring out a disciplinary sanction. That process is a private one. It is a private one for students who commit any violation of college standards and it is one that students have an absolute right to know: "How do we go about doing such things? What does it mean to do such an investigation? What does it mean to hold someone accountable?"

Michael: And Klass would ask that the college be judged on the quality of the investigation.

Klass: The degree to which you really really work on these things shows how important we as a community hold it.

Michael: So some are convinced that the investigation was thorough and others have serious doubts. Maybe there is a crucial piece of evidence that is yet to be revealed publicly that rules out the student Parker saw. Maybe they suspected her but didn't have sufficiently strong evidence to file charges. Whether or not the burden of proof depended on her identity is still an open question. In the worst case, the administration knew that she did it but decided not to take disciplinary action because they feared the consequences of their own apparatus. A decision like this would need to come from the Board of Trustees, or senior staff, but it could possibly be related to a desire to avoid the negative federal and media

attention that would arise from a fiasco of that level. Until more information is given to the public, we can't know for sure.

What we do know is that bias incidents are occurring on a regular basis. Oriana McGee, former student leader and close friend of the student described earlier had this to say about the tensions on campus.

McGee: Looking back on it, there were other things that those groups should be fed up with... And getting funding, just generally every year: the things that they have to deal with the administration, it is kind of a thing on top of a thing on top of a thing that now they really had to speak out against it.

Michael: As for what motivated that students' activism.

McGee: I have no idea. Really. She was just doing what Williams students do. We all get really involved, so I don't really know beyond that. She was passionate about things so...

Michael: Orianna echoed the common sentiment of the time, that these incidences force minority issues into the spotlight of the campus.

McGee: People don't believe it, sometimes. People don't even believe that like affirmative action is necessary, sometimes. And you're like: "Okay, well I guess something drastic has to happen for you to know that people are still racist."

Michael: Kerry Tribble has seen more than a few of these incidences during her time at Williams.

Tribble: I think that these incidents bring into light a lot of issues that certain groups have had for a while. I know that in my experience being a member of the Queer Student Union, when that homophobic incident occurred my freshmen year, it was not... our response was not to just that one incident. But it was a response to a series of incidents that have been occurring throughout people's times at this college. And it was a response, it was a rallying point for us to say: "Listen this happened, and this is horrible, and this happens to people on micro levels on a weekly or day to day basis and that is also horrible." And it was a chance for us to organize within ourselves and to come up with solutions that we wanted to put forward. I don't think that people sit back and say: "Listen, we had this really big publicity thing happen to us, now let's think about asking the college for more money."

Michael: I asked her what she saw in common between these incidents.

Tribble: The actual bias incident changes in terms of what population it targets. But what doesn't change is sort of how students are always hurt and there is generally a need for communication between the student body and the administration.

Michael: But despite the frequency of these events, she's hopeful about the future.

Tribble: It's hard because we haven't really... it is a little... it's a little upsetting to think about how many incidences have happened and how often they happen. But I do believe that

things can improve and that they will improve as long as people keep fighting for what they believe in.

Michael: Is change possible? Even if these hate crimes go unsolved? I asked Parker what he thought about the investigation.

Parker: I don't think there's any excuse to be brushing things under the rug when it's that serious, and I don't think anyone should be receiving preferential treatment or harsher treatment than someone else who committed an act like this. I think it's a horrible thing to do.

Michael: How do you feel about the fact that people don't know who did it?

Parker: Well I think a lot of people have the same belief, hold the same belief, that I do. But, yeah it makes me angry to think that someone, who I've seen commit a lot of very selfish acts, can get away with something like that because a lot of other people wouldn't have gotten away with it and I don't think that's fair.

Michael: And so the pattern repeats itself, like clockwork. Some graffiti is discovered, then the president emails the text to the entire student body, the relative identity group mobilizes and releases its list of demands in response to the incident. Depending on the amount of political capital they have, some of those demands will be met, in a never ending cycle of Claiming Williams, piece by piece. It's happened before and it's going to happen again.
David Michael, class of 2013.