

White Professor Targets Black Girls Code

thenorthstar

🔒 Feb 24, 2019



Focused on the least visible and least celebrated gender subset – Black and Brown girls – the nonprofit [Black Girls CODE](#) (BGC) helps young girls and women of color navigate the “cultural isolation” that has become a hallmark of the tech and science fields. Since 2011, BGC has introduced girls ages 7 to 17 to science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) with a concentration on entrepreneurial concepts. But BGC’s mission and vision came under fire when a professor at the University of Michigan--Flint filed a complaint in the Office of Civil Rights

(OCR), citing a violation of [Title IX](#). The formal complaint followed an [11-day program](#) held last summer at Wayne State University (WSU) in Detroit.

Title IX provides that no one can be discriminated against or excluded from participating in educational programs or activities based on their sex by any institution receiving federal financial assistance. WSU, like most colleges and universities, is a recipient of federal funding. BGC's focus on Black and Brown girls, to the inevitable exclusion of others, is at the heart of the Title IX complaint.

For centuries, Title IX-funded schools have brazenly discriminated on the basis of sex – including Barnard, Bryn Mawr, Mount Holyoke, Radcliffe, Smith, Vassar and Wellesley Colleges – and have proudly held to their tradition of gender exclusivity, admitting women only. In recent years, each of the remaining Seven Sisters colleges has adopted policies to admit transgender women. With the exception of Vassar, all continue to exclude men (Smith admits both men and women in the graduate study programs). The cost-prohibitive nature of their tuition has furthered existing racial demographics – that is, predominantly white and Asian students – year after year.

“Title IX is one of those toothless rules,” said Lance John, founder of Gifted Sounds Network, a podcast network dedicated to amplifying voices of people of color. In light of the long-standing gender-exclusive policy of the Seven Sisters schools, this rings true and begs the question: was BGC's 11-day summer camp somehow more damaging than 182 years of explicit gender discrimination under Seven Sisters policies?

Mark Perry, who filed the Title IX claim, is an economics and finance professor at the University of Michigan-Flint and an American Enterprise Institute (AEI) scholar. AEI was founded by Eli

Lilly, Chemical Bank, and other well-known corporations with documented histories of [questionable financial behaviors](#), [racially-biased corporate culture](#), and even [ownership of enslaved African people, with resulting profit](#). He's also a peddler of "fake oppression," said John, and has lodged over 35 similar complaints with the Office of Civil Rights. One such complaint related to financial assistance to students was filed last August against Tulane University in Louisiana and has already resulted in a [resolution agreement with the OCR](#).

According to that resolution "the University will ensure that it is not treating male students differently on the basis of sex by providing different amounts of financial assistance, limiting eligibility for financial assistance... or otherwise discriminating with respect to financial assistance."

As more institutions find themselves on the business end of Perry's complaints and OCR findings of fault against them, there's an increasing probability of negative impact on BGC and organizations that operate in similar ways. Nick Caldwell, a chief product officer at pre-IPO unicorn startup Looker, told *The North Star*,

"For years, technology has been the primary source of economic growth and wealth generation. Yet the ability to access these opportunities have been firewalled to people of color by bias."

As a Black man in STEM, Caldwell said, "I have had to sacrifice immensely, and it has been a lonely and difficult journey. I (and most every large tech company) support organizations like Black Girls Code, which seek to level the playing field by providing affordable, accelerated training and, more importantly, a support network of future engineering leaders who look like

them. I can only think that efforts to hinder Black Girls Code from its mission are efforts to perpetuate bias that prevents people of color for participating in the tech industry.”

Despite Perry’s paper trail of OCR complaints, he still makes time for wide-ranging Twitter commentary, including [medical school admission for Blacks “with average GPAs”](#) and [BGC](#). The latter reads, “Black Girls Code will not be hurt, they can hold their programs in a library, church, community center, business, conference center, etc. if OCR rules that way.”

Nicki Washington, author and associate professor of computer science at Winthrop University, believes that Perry’s actions are based in blatant arrogance. In a passionate statement to *The North Star*, she decried the “audacity that allows a white man who has no interest in computer science or tech to attack a program designed to help encourage Black girls to become creators instead of simply consumers in a field that impacts their daily lives.”

BGC founder Kimberly Bryant [urged people](#) to “imagine the impact that these curious, creative minds could have on the world with the guidance and encouragement others take for granted.”

About the Author

Carla Bell is a Greater Seattle area freelance writer focused on abolition, civil and human rights, reparations to those negatively impacted by social injustice; culture, and arts. Carla’s bylines appear at many Seattle area print and digital publications, and nationally at *Essence* and *Ebony* magazines.

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