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# 'Affirmative Action Bake Sale' leaves sour taste

BY SPENCER SOPER AND GENEVIEVE MARSHALL

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**KUTZTOWN, PA.** // When Ahmirah Cottman walked into the student center at Kutztown University this month, she was appalled by the insinuations she thought were being made by members of the college Republican club standing behind a table with cookies, brownies and cupcakes.

Prices at the so-called "Affirmative Action Bake Sale," which was actually against affirmative action, varied depending on the race of the customer, with whites paying more than minorities.

"The sign said \$1 for whites, 25 cents for blacks and women got a 25-cent credit, so they told me, 'Go ahead and take it, it's free for you,'" said Cottman, a black woman.

Kutztown University College Republicans, the group that organized the bake sale, said it was trying to emphasize that affirmative action is unfair. But many students found the bake sale, and the alleged behavior of some of its organizers, downright offensive.

"I got here because I'm bright," said Cottman, a junior studying political science.

About 100 students - black, white and Hispanic - marched Thursday on campus to demonstrate their concerns about the

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Feb. 8 bake sale, allegations of offensive comments made by Republican club members, and why the university administration allowed the sale to happen and has not done anything to punish those involved.

They questioned why the bake sale was held during Black History Month, and why the Republican club set up the bake sale table in front of a Black History Month display that featured books about Rosa Parks and Condoleezza Rice and a poster with prominent black leaders such as the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.

University President F. Javier Cevallos, who leads a university that prides itself on inclusion, met with the protesters outside the administration office, and there was a brief face-off between the group and members of the Republican club.

Cevallos said he understood why the students were upset but added the campus has to accommodate a free exchange of ideas and can't silence political viewpoints that some find objectionable. He offered to host a forum Tuesday where all sides could share their opinions and learn about the university's admissions policies, which do not give preference based on race.

"Sometimes things that can be hurtful to some can be a great learning experience for all," he said, facing students who held signs that said "Respect Regardless of Race," "Justice Must Be Served," "Where is the Love" and "Can U Hear Me Now."

University officials said 75 percent of Kutztown students receive financial aid, most of them not minorities, and there is no racial consideration when deciding who receives assistance.

Adam LaDuca, a freshman and public relations director for the Republicans, said the group would not apologize for the event, but it is investigating allegations that some members pointed at black students and made racial slurs during the bake sale.

"As an organization, we don't stand for racism," LaDuca said.

He said he witnessed the bake sale and did not hear any racially charged remarks made by club members.

Dan Brockway, a member of the Republican club, said the group shied away from doing an affirmative action bake sale last year for fear of negative publicity. But the group decided to do it this year to get its name out and expose what it sees as an unfair policy, he said.

The group did not plan to hold the bake sale during Black History Month or in front of the display, Brockway said.

"It was kind of unfortunate, because we signed up for a table in the middle of January and we didn't get a table until February," Brockway said. "We're sitting there doing an affirmative action bake sale in front of the Black History Month display. The way it all was timed and the location - that was unfortunate. It didn't look good. We didn't mean it to happen that way."

Affirmative action bake sales have stirred controversy on campuses throughout the country over the past three years, starting with a highly publicized incident at the

University of California, Berkeley in 2003.

The organizers are usually college Republicans or conservative groups that say the bake sales are political parodies of college policies that determine admissions based on race and sex, and are intended to spark debate about affirmative action.

At least a dozen schools have reprimanded the students involved or stopped the bake sales before they occurred, said Greg Lukianoff, interim president of the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education, a Philadelphia group that tracks free speech violations on campus.

"Our position is that these bake sales are protected as a matter of free speech," Lukianoff said. "We're pleased that Kutztown decided to let it happen and is not going to punish the students involved.

Several marchers at Kutztown said the protest was about much more than the bake sale. They complained about racial tension at the 9,800-student campus, which has the highest percentage of minorities, at 13 percent, of the 14 state-owned universities.

Yolanda McCleary summed up the preconceptions she senses regarding herself and fellow black students this way: "If you're black, you're from the inner city, you're on financial aid and you're getting a free ride."

*Spencer Soper and Genevieve Marshall write for the Allentown Morning Call.*

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