Dear Penn Community,

We, the IDEAL Committee, are writing to you all as a coalition of student leaders committed to making this campus a safe and equitable space for everyone. For those of you that are not aware, IDEAL stands for Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, Access, and Leadership (http://www.gapsa.upenn.edu/affinity-groups/). Our organizations work constantly to provide programming, resources, and support for our members, and recent events have shown us that the support of our peers is needed now more than ever. We believe that allyship is critical to building a campus community that meets the needs of all students. We feel that it is our responsibility to share with you the events of this past weekend if we are to move forward as a community that supports and values all of its members.

This weekend, a large group of Black first year students were involuntarily added to a GroupMe called “MudMen.” The group called for “daily nigger lynchings” and displayed racist images of Black people and pictures of lynchings. As a result, many of the students are experiencing a heightened sense of fear for their safety despite the University’s claim that it does not tolerate such acts of discrimination and is committed to diversity. Although the GroupMe attack has been attributed to students at the University of Oklahoma, the treatment of the organized peaceful protest on Friday evening, November 11th, clearly demonstrates that Black students do have reason to fear for their lives and a right to be skeptical of the support the University says it offers.

In a peaceful march to Franklin Field, contrary to University policy, Penn students were denied access to the stadium by Penn police and staff, even when in possession of a University issued ID. Additionally, students were also harassed walking to and from the field, by students yelling, “we hate you,” “this is why we shouldn’t have affirmative action,” and “Trump! Trump! Trump!” We recognize that while in this particular incident Black students were exclusively targeted, other marginalized groups have also been subject to similar experiences.

We want to emphasize that these are not isolated events, but rather are part of a larger atmosphere on campus and beyond that normalizes hatred, intimidation, and oppression. What we are seeing now is people feeling empowered to act on an existing undercurrent of racism -- one that has remained inadequately addressed by the University. Not everyone on campus is a target, but every single one of us is affected by oppression, and every single one of us has a responsibility to create a culture where everyday bigotry is unacceptable. Inaction is acceptance. There is no such thing as a silent ally. We encourage you to speak out against the bigotry you witness in your daily
lives, whether committed by family, friends, or strangers. You can also break your silence by becoming involved in the different affinity groups that comprise the IDEAL Committee. Please reach out to us for information about upcoming events and organizing. We hope that this letter will inspire you all to mobilize in support of marginalized students on campus.

Yours in solidarity,
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