

Michigan

---

# Being Black at University of Michigan organizers threaten 'physical action' if demands aren't met

6

Gallery: Photo Gallery: #BBUM rallies at Hill Auditorium



By **Ben Freed** | [benfreed@mlive.com](mailto:benfreed@mlive.com)

[Follow on Twitter](#)

on January 20, 2014 at 1:15 PM, updated January 26, 2014 at 9:37 PM



**Editor's note:** A statement from a University of Michigan spokesman was added to this article.

**Correction:** Robert Greenfield's name was changed to his correct name, he is not Eric Greenfield. Also, Erick Gavin's name has been changed to correct the spelling from Eric.

Activists on the steps of Hill Auditorium Monday said that University of Michigan officials have seven days to meet seven demands addressing lack of diversity and inclusion at U-M or 'physical actions' will be taken on campus.

Speaking after a speech inside the auditorium by civil rights activist Harry Belafonte, representatives of the University of Michigan Black Student Union — the group that started the **Being Black at University of Michigan** (#BBUM) movement in the fall — issued a set of seven demands that they see as vital to improving life for minority students on campus.

- **Related Stories: [University of Michigan promises to 'take action' and improve racial diversity on the Ann Arbor campus](#)**
- **[University of Michigan students talk #BBUM movement on webcast](#)**

On Martin Luther King Jr. Day, the student speakers linked their campaign to historical efforts of the Black Action Movement, which temporarily shut down the university's campus in 1970.

"What brings me here today is not that social action is done," junior Robert Greenfield, the Black Student Union treasurer, told a gathered crowd of about 75 people.

"It's the unfinished business of the first three fights of the Black Action Movements. I am a single voice in a sea of voices that yearns to get away from the sea of isolation on this campus."

The #BBUM movement gained national attention in the fall after the hashtag trended nationally on Twitter. The university administration has responded to the efforts, helping sponsor forums for increased dialogue on issues of race on campus.

Also on Martin Luther King Jr. Day, President Mary Sue Coleman **unveiled a three-pronged** approach that she said she hopes will help further grow the minority student presence on campus and empower those already there.

"After climbing a great hill, [Nelson Mandela] once said, one only finds that there are many more hills to climb. That is the work of developing a diverse inclusive campus. It is ongoing, one victory at a time, with more hills to climb," Coleman said, speaking inside Hill Auditorium before Belafonte's talk.

"I want to thank our students for sharing their angst and their concerns. The BBUM campaign, as difficult as it was to hear, has been incredibly insightful. We hear you, and we are making changes."

Outside the auditorium, the students said they expected platitudes from university officials but that they expect immediate action to accompany the words.

"We have heard the phrase 'we are listening' since 1970, and I am tired of waiting for a response," senior Shayla Scales said.

"... Without action, alternatively, we will be forced to engage as an entire community in ways to implement the changes we request. We will allow the university seven days to end negotiations and come to conclusions on our seven demands. If negotiations are not complete we will be forced to do more, beginning to increase valiantly our activism for social progress and take physical actions on the University of Michigan's campus."

The group's seven demands were read by senior Erick Gavin:



- We demand that the university give us an equal opportunity to implement change, the change that complete restoration of the BSU purchasing power through an increased budget would obtain.
- We demand available housing on central campus for those of lower socio-economic status at a rate that students can afford, to be a part of university life, and not just on the periphery.
- We demand an opportunity to congregate and share our experiences in a new Trotter [Multicultural Center] located on central campus.
- We demand an opportunity to be educated and to educate about America's historical treatment and marginalization of colored groups through race and ethnicity requirements throughout all schools and colleges within the university.
- We demand the equal opportunity to succeed with emergency scholarships for black students in need of financial support, without the mental anxiety of not being able to focus on and afford the university's academic life.
- We demand increased exposure of all documents within the **Bentley (Historical) Library**. There should be transparency about the university and its past dealings with race relations.
- We demand an increase in black representation on this campus equal to 10 percent.

President Mary Sue Coleman addressed some of these demands in the framework she laid out Monday, efforts to improve the Trotter Multicultural Center, now located at 1443 Washtenaw Ave., but others are not part of her plan. Greenfield said that informal dialogue has been attempted with the university but no formal negotiations have taken place.

"We are hoping to negotiate with the executive, with the president of the university and with the regents," he said.

"We fully expect to see action on these seven demands by the end of the seven days."

Students were reluctant to give details about what physical activities on the university campus might entail.

"We're hoping it doesn't have to come to that," Scales said after the rally.

A group of students representing the group By Any Means Necessary marched down North University Avenue, briefly blocking traffic.

Blacks accounted for 4.6 percent of the freshman class at the University of Michigan in 2012, down from 6.8 percent in 2008, not including international students. Last year 3.9 percent of freshmen identified as hispanic, compared to 4.4 percent in 2011, 3.6 percent in 2008.

University of Michigan spokesman Rick Fitzgerald issued the following statement in response to the demands from BBUM organizers:

"Provost Pollack's message to the University community last Thursday provided an outline of very specific steps. University officials at the highest level share the concerns of our students, faculty and staff. This morning you heard President Coleman reiterate the short-term action the university has taken, and the long-term commitment to continue to talk with students as well as work with them to address their concerns."

*Ben Freed is a general assignments reporter for The Ann Arbor News. Email him at [benfreed@mlive.com](mailto:benfreed@mlive.com) and follow him on twitter at [@BFreedinA2](https://twitter.com/BFreedinA2). He also answers the phone at 734-623-2528.*



Registration on or use of this site constitutes acceptance of our **User Agreement** and **Privacy Policy**

© 2018 MLive Media Group. All rights reserved (**About Us**).

The material on this site may not be reproduced, distributed, transmitted, cached or otherwise used, except with the prior written permission of MLive Media Group.

**Community Rules** apply to all content you upload or otherwise submit to this site.

**Ad Choices**

