



## DRAKE LPS ALUMNA KENNEDY MITCHUM (BA '20) SUCCEEDS IN CHANGING THE MERRIAM-WEBSTER DICTIONARY DEFINITION OF RACISM

### What attracted you to the LPS Program?

The opportunity to delve deep into law, politics & society. The way these realms interact impact us in real time, I was interested in learning more about this type of cause and effect. I hoped that this multifaceted program would allow me to better strategize in my journey to create the equitable world I want to see.

### What experiences in LPS were the most enjoyable or influential?

My favorite part was my ability to partake in classes that covered a wide variety of topics, included works from diverse writers and consisted of students from all walks of life. This variety helped further advance core skills needed to be successful; critical thinking skills, cultural awareness and navigating important conversations.

### You got Merriam-Webster Dictionary to change its definition of racism. Tell us about that.

During the 2020 Covid Pandemic and shortly after the death of George Floyd, I sent in a request to change the definition of racism. This is a time where racism could not have been more visible. There were racial disparities seen by the number of people of color affected by the Covid-pandemic compared to their white counterparts. There were racial disparities in policing, seen by the brutal attacks on Black individuals, the latest victim being George Floyd.

Yet, many were still focused on the individuals instead of the systems at play that allow these racial disparities to continue to prosper. People would still point to the definition of racism and deny that racism exists in any of the scenarios discussed. They would say that racism is a derogatory term or thinking you're better than someone else because of the color of your skin. But racism is much more than that. So, I reached out to Merriam- Webster dictionary for them to update their definition.

I wrote to them in an email to include the systemic aspects of racism to the definition as there are active systems in place designed to keep certain races of people behind. I urged them to create a definition that acknowledged that institutions - everything from healthcare to our prison system - give people of color a disadvantage.

The belief that one is superior or inferior based on their skin color is one part of the definition but the way racism is still active is shown in our systems that inherently discriminate against people based on the color of their skin. Historically, this is seen by instances like the Tuskegee experiment or the implementation of Jim Crow Laws. Racial inequality is rooted in systems that serve us and I expressed to editors to do their own research, look into books by people of color and add their works into the definition instead of utilizing a definition created by individuals who have never and will never experience racism.

After emails going back and forth with the editor about the definition, two days of silence commenced then they reached out stating they would update the definition to include the systemic parts of racism. This win prompted notice from sources like the New York Times, NPR, Rachel Maddow, etc. It was a win during a time of constant defeat but a win nonetheless.

### What have you been up to since graduation? What are your plans for the future?

Since graduation, I've been heavily focused on work within the public sector. I work for a public university in the department of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion to help students of color gain access to both on-campus and off-campus resources. I work with a local nonprofit in Columbia, Missouri whose goal is to gain access to educational and enrichment programs for marginalized K-12 youth in the area. Lastly, I started a Masters of Public Affairs program and aim to finish by May 2024! In the future, I want to get more experience in the political field, working to change policy and conducting research on solutions that will lessen racial disparities.



*Kennedy Mitchum (BA'20)*

## LPS STUDENT PAPER AWARDS PRESENTED AT HONORS CONVOCATION

Congratulations to Aria Fisher and Preston Miller, who attended the College of Arts and Sciences Honors Convocation on April 20, 2023.

Aria won the LPS Student Paper Award, Lower Division. Aria's paper explores the narrative that the law is unbiased and alienated from society, inspecting the aesthetic focus of that ideology, the legal ideals upholding it, and the socioeconomic inequities that it perpetuates.

Preston won the LPS Student Paper Award, Upper Division. His paper examined how the Juggalos, followers of the Insane Clown Posse, used multiple legal avenues in an attempt to remove themselves from the FBI gang designation.