

# Alexis R Knox-Miller

**Class year:** 2004

**Major:** Political Science

**Current Profession:** Elementary Teacher

I was an accidental Colorado College student. I always thought I would find myself enrolled in Spelman or Howard...not this small liberal arts college smack in the middle of my home city. For a girl with ambitions of attending a Historically Black College, Colorado College was different than what I imagined my college experience would be. Well, sometimes life happens and when I graduated high school, I was eight months pregnant. CC offered me an opportunity to pursue an education because they had a top-notch daycare on campus and a grant for single parents that paid my daycare expenses and provided a big chunk of assistance for my tuition. I was a non-traditional student on a very traditional campus and did I mention I was also black?

Right away, I involved myself in the Black Student Union. I was able to make friends and bring my daughter along to meetings. I didn't feel so isolated when with this group of students. They were so sure of who they were and what it meant to be a black face on campus. My first year, I found it more difficult to be on campus with a child than I did with a black face. I chugged along going to classes, receiving good grades, attending BSU meetings, and daring to prove the naysayers wrong--I would graduate with my baby in tow.

All of that changed one April in 2002. After class, I came across many of my friends on campus who were upset and shaken. Our school newspaper published a racist "parody" article. Any racist stereotype you can imagine was in that article. My world was shattered. I had lived most of my life untouched by major incidents of racism. I attended a liberal college that should have known better. My feelings were beyond hurt. Did the students on campus really think of black students, gay students, any students that were white, straight, and Christian this way? It is in this moment that I was able to see what all the "fringe" groups on campus were made of. We instituted a plan of action that involved press conferences, radio appearances, the NAACP, etc. As a result of our swift and immediate action and outcry, the editors resigned, programs were implemented, and apologies were issued. My perception of Colorado College also changed. It's easy to hide behind the notion of being liberal and the idea that all of the students on campus were holding hands and singing "we are the world." The reality was that there were (and dare I say it, still are) some undercurrents of racism that have long been institutionalized into the system of the college. If something as ugly as the parody paper could be produced at our school, then there was some major work to be done and some attitudes that needed to be shifted. More hurtful than the idea of the paper were those who rallied around the editors and defended their choices and told us that we were being too sensitive. More hurtful than the idea of the paper is the idea that some people actually thought that the garbage they printed was funny. More hurtful than the idea of the paper was the fact that my black face would never truly be a part of Colorado College.

Ten years after graduating, I am able to be extremely clear about how I feel about my college experience. I learned a lot. I learned about myself and my world. I learned about race and how it is truly a real issue in this country. I learned how to lean on people who have like

experiences. I received a top-notch education from a respected institution. Most importantly, Colorado College has a lot of work to do around the issue of diversity and the work must begin now.