

# SFU's Unspoken 2 Year Movement;

# Black Space Matters



## What is the movement all about?

The concern is around SFU Students of African and Caribbean Ancestry (SOCA) losing essential Black space on campus - specifically in the new Student Union Building (SUB). This was due to the SFSS Board's systematically racist decisions to not include and evict Black space while silencing marginalized folk. SOCA's fight was to preserve Black space and actions were taken in the form of a letter campaign to the SFSS Board of Directors, a petition to gain and show support from the SFU community, and a silent protest against the Board was also held. Below is a timeline of the movement and an extension of the movement.

## The 10 Must-Know Events

### 1 Spring 2011 - Summer 2014:

- The Student Union Building (SUB) was confirmed
- Rotunda groups were invited to consult about the new SUB which resulted in a floor plan design with space for student organizations

### 2 Fall 2017:

- The SFSS extends the leases for Rotunda Groups to Summer 2018 which is when the SUB is expected to be completed
- However, in the same iteration, the SFSS informed the same groups that they would not be given space in the SUB and acted as if this was never a part of a previous plan

### 3 Spring 2018:

- Rotunda groups requested a lease extension past the Summer of 2018 or else they would be left with no space on campus (already an issue for marginalized folk)
- Instead, the CEO of the SFSS imposed a **firm eviction** notice for December 2018 leaving marginalized folks and groups with no space in the SUB and a limited time left in current spaces
- So, SOCA started their campaign for space, the initial start of a 2 year movement

### 4 Fall 2018:

- Sept 14th, the SFSS board committed to meet with SOCA after lots of advocacy. However, later refused to meet for a conversation on the matter - Instead, emailing SOCA on November 23rd saying no space would be offered and they would be given a month to month lease
- This undermined folk's fight for adequate and important marginalized spaces but also gave folks the uncertainty that they could be evicted at any month (forming a powertrip relationship)

### 5 Spring 2019-Fall 2019

- (Spring) A new SFSS board was elected where the President brought forth a model to allocate space for Rotunda groups in the SUB
- (Summer) Rotunda groups finally get the chance to discuss space issues with the board
- (Fall) However, the conversation was disregarded and the space motion was voted down, displacing SOCA and leaving folks with no space.

### 6 December 4th, 2019

- SFSS Council votes to condemn the Board and asked them to revisit their decision before December 14th or a referendum would be put forth to the student body
- Council receive an unacceptable response with no feasible action, so plans for a referendum would be put forth at the next meeting

### 7

#### January 22nd, 2020

- Council put forth a motion to a referendum released on Feb 17th asking if Rotunda groups should be in the SUB

### 8

#### February 5th, 2020

- SFSS President puts forth a motion asking if the board would commit to respect and act on the results of the Rotunda Group referendum of the student body - this motion was voted down, going against student democracy

### 9

#### February 12th, 2020

- Council has a discussion about the democratic rights of the students and the impeachment of the board if these rights were not respected as it acts against the interest of the students. By the end, board members agree to act in student interest and meet Rotunda groups. So, Council withdraws referendum

### 10

#### Spring 2020

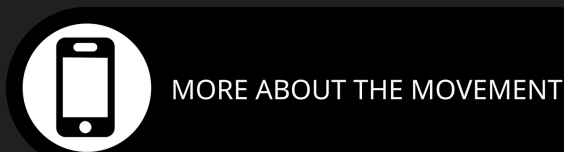
- The SFSS Board approve a motion to allocate Rotunda groups space in the SUB after almost a decade of uncertainty, power abuse, and Institutional racism

## Subgroups and Supporters

There were a number of subgroups in SOCA'S #BlackSpacesMatter Campaign including; the SFU Somali Students Association and the SFU Nigerian Students Association. Additional groups involved with SOCA's campaign like the Rotunda Community and the Independent Student Societies on campus, including SFPIRG, CJSE, FNSA, Embark, Women's Centre Collective, Out on Campus Collective, and SFU's student newspaper, The Peak.

## Location & Size of the Movement

SOCA's #BlackSpacesMatter campaign was focused on the SFU campus in Burnaby, BC. The campaign boasted 621 members on its Facebook page and their change.org petition collected 1,388 signatures. Additionally, there were several SFU organization members who created letters of support. Furthermore, allies and SFSS members even carried out a silent protest at an SFSS meet and greet.



## What came from this?

- Rotunda groups landed essential space in the SUB to continue supporting marginalized folks and space.
- Several SFSS by-Law changes took place in October 2020 at the Annual General Meeting that assured the SFSS Council would legally be bounded to make essential decisions on behalf of the society (and would not just be an advisory board anymore).

IT'S ABOUT  
WHAT WE  
CAN'T SEE.

Dr. Joy Walcott-Francis