

Collective Statement

To the Board of Trustees of Morehouse College and to all people of conscience within the Morehouse community:

We, the undersigned alumni, faculty, staff and students of Morehouse College, write this letter out of love and heartfelt concern for our beloved institution.

"Et Facta Est Lux" is the motto of Morehouse College which in Latin means: "And there was light." This of course comes from the book of Genesis: "And said God let there be light, *and there was light.*" We believe that a healthy dose of *sunlight* is what is called for at this time in the Morehouse community. While it may be painful, we believe it is in the long-term best interest of Morehouse to address our problems head-on, for we don't believe they can be solved in a vacuum.

With respect to the tension now bubbling to the surface in the Morehouse community, we feel as fellow alumnus, Dr. King, wrote in his *Letter from a Birmingham Jail*:

Actually, we ... are not the creators of tension. We merely bring to the surface the hidden tension that is already alive. We bring it out in the open, where it can be seen and dealt with. Like a boil that can never be cured so long as it is covered up but must be opened with all its ugliness to the natural medicines of air and light, injustice must be exposed, with all the tension its exposure creates, to the light of human conscience and the air of national opinion before it can be cured.

So is the case with Morehouse today. To ensure survival, prosperity and continued relevance in the long term, the following themes must be honestly confronted:

- 1) **Is "Social Justice" still a part of the Morehouse tradition?** Dr. King, Howard Thurman, Benjamin Mays and others are revered as paragons of the Morehouse tradition because of their values and commitment to bettering humanity. Many of us fear that this value of service to others is disappearing and a crude materialism has become the ethos of the College. We know that this parallels a larger social trend. However Morehouse in the past has stood apart precisely because it was willing to pursue the road of producing ethical leaders. Many Men of Morehouse (student) and young Morehouse Men (alumni) today are exemplifying the very best of the Morehouse tradition. However we need more of an institutional commitment to the process that creates such young leaders. The College needs to have some very frank discussions about how students are advised, curriculum development and pedagogy.
- 2) **What is the value proposition that Morehouse offers its students?** We believe Morehouse should seriously examine the value proposition it offers to its students. Morehouse cannot rest on its legacy or the fact that Dr. King was a student of the College forever. While certainly important, this legacy is ancient history for a young man growing up today. To be exact, it is not enough to compel a top-notch

young high school student to attend. We are living in a very different world than we did just even a decade ago—especially given the changing landscape of American higher education. Elite schools now offer the best minority students generous financial packages. In short, the competition has become quite fierce for the best and brightest male students. Morehouse should be able to articulate a compelling argument as to why the academic environment at Morehouse is the best choice for a young man who also has other elite options. The current “one size fits all” academic approach has impeded faculty development and places major limits on students’ freedom to explore new ideas. Morehouse must be able to prove that it is not merely vestigial, but rather that it is relevant in the modern era.

- 3) **Are Morehouse’s resources being allocated most effectively?** Currently the Morehouse faculty is out of balance, with a number of junior faculty members who are on the cutting edge of their fields while being grossly underpaid with respect to their older peers. Likewise, the allocation of resources between departments is such that a disproportionate amount of the resources of the school goes to the business department, while other departments are withering on the vine. At many colleges, business departments make money while areas like philosophy, for example, do not. However, leading liberal arts colleges do not allow that fact to cause them to deprioritize the humanities. Liberal arts colleges offer students an opportunity to explore a wide-range of subjects. The idea is to produce a well-rounded person of ideas and to resist premature specialization and professionalization. But, for some at the College, the ethos of the liberal arts has been supplanted. Business dominates. We even see its effects in the area of health professions. Morehouse sends only about half the graduates into health professions that it did just 10 years ago according to data from the Morehouse Office of Health Professions. Morehouse was established as a liberal arts college and continues to present itself as such. To maintain its ability to produce a strong liberal arts education Morehouse must ensure that resources are allocated fairly amongst faculty and also that resources continue to be channeled into the social sciences, humanities, sciences and other departments.
- 4) **Is transparency important to Morehouse?** Stories and evidence abound which emphasize the dire need for financial transparency, good governance, best practices and accountability at Morehouse. However, the transparency should not stop at finances but should extend to all of the many other operations and decisions of the College that seem shrouded in secrecy. This affects the College’s ability to fundraise. Without a minimum of financial transparency, there are many Morehouse Men who refuse to give to Morehouse. Likewise, how can other donors be confident in their giving without the kind of best practices and safeguards that one would expect from a well-run, modern-day college?
- 5) **How rigorous is Morehouse?** We are concerned that Morehouse has made major compromises around the bar of admission for both students and faculty members. Further, there is generally a lax enforcement of academic

honesty rules and many quietly confess a concern about the academic rigor of Morehouse. While it certainly is possible to obtain a rigorous education at Morehouse, it is also possible, as they say in the vernacular, “to skate through.” Certainly college life in general may not always be the most focused time for young people. However, if young men are to be prepared for post-graduate education and life, it is more important than ever that they receive a rigorous education and Morehouse should ensure that every path to graduation is hard earned and therefore worthwhile.

- 6) **Is Morehouse College genuinely committed to being an open and diverse campus?** Any true liberal arts college strives to be a place that values diverse students, faculty, and a plurality of viewpoints, religions and ethnic backgrounds. Morehouse should do the same. This is especially true with regard to questions of sexuality. Our community should be one where any student or faculty member, no matter their sexual orientation, should feel comfortable expressing themselves and their views. In light of some recent events, a robust conversation about gender identity and sexuality is needed on our campus. Not so much to debate the question of gay Morehouse Men, but to express our commitment to valuing diversity on our campus.

Instead of running from these questions, Morehouse should run *towards* them and embrace the future. *To not become an anachronism, Morehouse needs to become a Thought Leader.*

To achieve this, firstly, and critically, we believe the Board of Trustees must democratize itself and should immediately *stand for election*, vesting every alumnus with the power to nominate and vote for trustees of his choice at periodic elections, as is the case with many leading institutions of higher education.

The new president should be appointed with a mandate to “clean house” and aggressively address the issues above. Further we request the appointment of an independent “Inspector General” vested with broad powers to ferret out corruption and wrongdoing wherever it exists.

In the long term, we the stakeholders of Morehouse must ensure that the College embraces a direction that allows it to continue to provide a world-class education for its students. Many students, alumni, faculty and staff have indicated their willingness to respond to the call and address these challenges. We pray Morehouse will let us do so.

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Initial Signatories/Lead Authors:

[Listed on the following page]

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