

PREFACE:

It is far too evident that Cornell University has contributed to the fundamental injustice, inequity, and violence that disproportionately impacts Black people. Cornell continuously fails its Black students; it can be fervently argued that very little has substantially changed in terms of racial and cultural responsiveness on Cornell University's campus following the 1969 demands concurrent with the Willard Straight Hall Takeover and Black Student United's demands to President Martha Pollack in 2017. Black students have and continue to repeatedly call on Cornell to change, and it has not. Words of support without meaningful, systemic action make the University complicit in the acts of racism and hate towards its Black students, and Black people writ large. The way in which students at Cornell are punished, especially when it comes to racially charged infractions, does not reflect education or mutual accountability. As such, we are reintroducing Black Student United's demands for the creation of an Alternative Justice Board and an Anti-Racism Institute, as well as other demands oriented towards improving the experience of Black and other (racially) minoritized students, faculty, staff, and community members tied to Cornell.

"We demand that there be a creation of a Student Honor Board or Alternative Justice Board as an alternate method for Cornell's dispute resolution process.

Currently, only faculty have the power to discipline students at Cornell. In order to increase student power, we are demanding the creation of a Student Honor Board who will oversee various judicial cases. Shared governance is necessary for all bodies within any academic institution to feel seen and heard; Cornell is no different. Students should be able to have a direct say in the punishment of their peers. Student Honor boards allow for resolutions of student situations on a case by case basis that the University either does not have a mechanism to resolve or is too busy to resolve. Additionally, most honor boards use suspension, academic sanctions, and/or community service hours as a punishment, which allows the individual or party being punished to resolve their issue without leaving the school, and more importantly force[s] them to contribute back to their community. The creation of the Honor Board will work to restore student trust in Cornell's judicial system and ensure justice in these cases." [1]

This Alternative Justice Board should include a diverse group of students, comprised of at least 50% with one or more minoritized identities [1] and should be allowed to decide what the appropriate punishments are when students are harmed/hurt by other students or student organizations, including but not limited to physical violence, identity-based harassment, assault, abuse, or discrimination (on the basis of race, gender/sexual identity, sexual/romantic orientation, nationality, religion, etc.) and hazing. Student involvement, especially that of students of color, would allow those on the Board to actualize and feel a sense of justice, and to create community solutions, as well as improve trust in Cornell's administration of justice. Knowing that roughly 30% of Cornell students belong to a non-academic Greek organization, the Alternative Justice Board will include six appointed positions for members of the Tri-Council, with each organization (Panhellenic, MGFC, and IFC) appointing two board members from each of their respective memberships. The remaining 21 spots will be chosen through open elections for which no more than three board members with Tri-Council affiliations may be elected to serve.

This board would be a powerful tool for students to formally discipline their peers while still providing due process, and would make students more comfortable in bringing forth allegations of racist and other misbehavior perpetrated by their peers. It would dole out just punishment that would be much more effective in reforming/educating the offending individual than a suspension. This Board could also serve as a learning mechanism for Law students, students interested in restorative justice, etc.

Relatedly, we demand a readjustment in the training for Resident Advisors (RAs). Currently, Residential Life insists that RAs call the police if they smell marijuana in the dorms. If RAs refuse to do this, particularly those who work in Ujamaa or the Latino Living Center, in an attempt to be culturally responsive given the history of police brutality within Black and Latinx communities, their employment may be put in danger. Likewise, we call for more direct funding for Ujamaa and Black Students United, akin to the dispersal of alumni funding the Pan-Hellenic Council and Interfraternity Council receive [2].

"We demand the creation of an Anti-Racism Institute where Cornell can centralize its efforts to educate the campus and community about the horrors of white supremacy and political education.

Cornell has a variety of decentralized efforts to address racial bias on campus. Programs such as the Intergroup Dialogue [Project], Engaged Cornell, the Skills for Success program[, the Center for the Study of Inequality] and other[s] are important, but if Cornell is going to commit to a changing campus climate they must create a centralized department or program that has the explicit purpose of fighting racism."

We envision this Institute as both an academic and student centric space, where advisors and student leaders could find employment opportunities, and where faculty and staff members could coalesce and share their work in a centralized manner, while maintaining their department and research's own individualistic integrity. An Institute could create a University-wide streamlined approach to confronting racism and discrimination through the creation of a diversity coursework requirement [3] along with ongoing trainings for staff, faculty, and student leaders. It could provide resources for student groups, educators, Greek Life, and the administration. This Institute would be the catalyst for change on campus inside and outside of the classroom. Working with existing programs like the Intergroup Dialogue Project, the Institute could require that all staff, faculty, and student leaders go through diversity training, which could help reduce discrimination and racism on campus. While reducing racism and discrimination amongst all members of the Cornell community is necessary, it is especially important for those who serve as gatekeepers to clubs, courses, and academic opportunities. The Institute could be an immensely powerful change agent at the University. Such an Institute could be home to a standing Presidential Task Force, helping preserve institutional knowledge amongst student groups and long-term campaigns that outlast the typical four-year student cycle. This would also limit the redundancy of a lot of administrative work in setting up committees, and would allow more effective work to be done more quickly. It is indisputably in the Administration's best interest to set up a permanent anti-racism structure.

The Anti-Racism Institute would help the University build a more direct approach to recognizing and amplifying Black voices and Black stories of the past to better help inform the student body and greater community about how we reached our present. Upstate NY, especially in the areas near Ithaca, is home to rich amounts of Black history that is tied to the Underground Railroad. There are AME churches and Underground Railroad artifacts and important historical buildings, like Harriet Tubman's home and final resting place, that are struggling to stay funded because of their location. If Cornell made a stronger effort to support and publicize these monuments and if more people knew that Cornell was near this rich area of Black history geographically, these irreplaceable monuments could receive the necessary support to stay afloat. Moreover, the Cornell University Library system has a fairly large collection of Black American artifacts, like an original copy of The Narrative of Fredrick Douglass, which very few students know about, but many of these artifacts of Black American history live right below our feet in the Olin Library basement [4].

We also call for more funding for the Africana Library, such that it can expand its collection of books, resources, and events held, as well as any renovations to the building or technology it may need to be on par with the other libraries in the Cornell University Library system, and a better location. The current location is literally and metaphorically ostracized from the rest of campus, and reflects a dismissal of Africana scholarship.

Another way in which the University can begin to hold itself more accountable is the creation of a Cornell University Police Department Oversight Committee. The persons on this Committee should not be appointed by CUPD. This Committee should be composed by a majority of undergraduate students, but should also have members from the graduate student, faculty, and staff populations at Cornell University. This Committee should reside within the Anti-Racism Institute, in the case that there are faculty or staff members interested in participating, and due to the Alternative Justice Board being made up exclusively of students [5].

CONCLUSION:

As you actualize these demands, it is essential that the Cornell community be updated continuously every 30 days and that any website or materials be dynamic. Cornell must present the changes it makes and the demands it fails to meet in a way that is easy for the public to access. Burying the work of its students behind a pile of hyperlinks on a never-updated site not only reduces the work that they have done, but denies the Cornell community the ability to realize the fierce urgency behind the action items and denies the Cornell community the ability to hold the University accountable. Updates on the University's progress and regarding the initiatives above must not be squashed into a website with no regard for continually updating the community, or at the very least, making status updates compelling and visible. PDFs hyperlinked and stored away on old, hard-to-navigate websites, which may have fallen out of use since their creation, does not indicate the anti-racist stance Cornell presents to the public and allows the avoidance of responsibility.

Cornell University must do better at conceptualizing and carrying out actionable, non-performative solutions and making its progress (or lack thereof) visible to the community. This petition serves as a starting point and a foundation for subsequent demands, including the defunding, disarming, and disbanding of the Cornell University Police Department, to be met. It is not exhaustive nor is it

comprehensive of the innumerable changes that Cornell needs to make. This petition does not negate the need for the University to actualize subsequent demands regarding racial and cultural responsiveness that may be presented to it; specifically, we support the demands requiring the University to mobilize against racist, transphobic, and misogynistic actions in the upcoming Fall 2020 semester. The University's current and prospective students, alumni, faculty, and staff, as well as concerned community members, are watching how it responds, and we will notice empty platitudes and false promises. The University must meet these demands to ensure students, especially Black students and other students of color, feel welcomed, safe, and embedded in Cornell, and will fortify the accessibility and truthfulness of "Any Person, Any Study." Black lives matter. Act on this. President Pollack's repeated words of solidarity for the Black community must be met with action! To prevent the repeated inaction and offenses Cornell has continued to perpetuate, the University must meet these demands. Now is the time to support our Black community members and meet their requests and needs.

FOOTNOTES:

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1kSHNEIXLsHEDLA2ez4yXp6MpE2TVHsg2e9b0iHIDR1s/>