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Morehouse's Non-Tolerance for Gays Inclusion

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Morehouse College has a problem with its dress-code offenders.

These dress-code offenders wear baggy pants, du-rags, flash their "bling bling" like gold chains, and "decorative orthodontic appliances" like gold teeth, and tattoos, bringing too much of black urban ghetto life to an elite college that fashions itself as the paragon of black manhood.

In Morehouse's effort to "get back to [its] legacy" Dr. William Bynum, vice president of the office of student services discussed with Safe Space, the school's gay, bisexual transgender, and queer (GBTQ) organization, the school's new "Appropriate Attire Policy" banning dress-wearing.

"And if anyone sees this policy as something that is restrictive then maybe Morehouse is not the place for you," Cameron Thomas-Shah, student government co-chief of staff told the *Atlanta Journal Constitution*.

Since its inception in 1867, Morehouse College is noted as the bastion of black male leadership and masculinity. Embodying W. E.B. Dubois's theory of The Talented Tenth, where "exceptional black men" would be the ones to lead the race, Morehouse College has produced unquestionably a pantheon of noted black men; its most famous alumnus Martin Luther King, Jr., graduated from Morehouse in 1948

And its alums maintain the "Morehouse mystique" the college is renowned for - "images of strong black men."

However, nowhere in its development of strong black men were LGBTQ men included in its elite vision of brotherhood. And now, more than a century later, LGBTQ Morehouse men are still struggling to be accepted.

The new dress-code policy is discriminatory because it's aimed at keeping its LGBTQ population in the closet.

However, non-tolerance of LGBTQ men at Morehouse is not new, but rather it exposes the school's milieu of institutionalized homophobia, ranging from the president's office to the student body.

For example, last month Morehouse fired one of its employees for circulating via the school's work e-mail account her disapproving views of wedding photos of a black gay couple. The employee worked as an administrative assistant in the president's office.

She wrote:

"I can't believe this wedding. It's 2 men... Black women can't get a break, either our men want another man, a white woman (or other nationality that's light with straight hair), they are locked up in jail or have a 'use to be' fatal disease. I'm beginning to believe Eve was a black woman and we Black women are paying for all the world's sins through her actions (eating the apple)."

Since becoming president in 2007, Robert Franklin has expressed his views on tolerance and discrimination. He said, "As an all-male institution with the explicit mission of educating men with disciplined minds, the great challenge of this moment in history is our diversity of sexual orientation."

And with more and more students arriving on campus openly LGBTQ, Morehouse's administration continues to lack the cultural competence and sensitivity to address the issue, fostering students to think there is only one way to be a Morehouse man.

For example, Devrin Lindsay, a junior, stated in the May 2008 *Los Angeles Times* article "Morehouse College faces its own bias - against gays." that an effeminate man who "swishes down the campus like he's on a runway" damages Morehouse's image for both parents with students looking to attend the college.

But it is Morehouse's highly publicized 2002 gay-bashing incident that has no doubt taught the administration very little.

On November 4, 2002, a Morehouse College student sustained a fractured skull from his classmate, sophomore Aaron Price, not surprisingly, the son of an ultra-conservative minister. Price uncontrollably beat his victim on the head with a baseball bat for allegedly looking at him in the shower.

In the 1980's and 1990's it was more dangerous to be openly LGBTQ on Morehouse's campus than it was on the streets in gang-ridden black neighborhoods. And throughout the 1990's, Morehouse was listed on the *Princeton Review's* top 20 homophobic campuses.

But these homophobic incidents at Morehouse speak to a larger issue plaguing men of African descent not only at black colleges but also in their communities - safely acknowledging their sexuality.

With homophobia running as rampant in historically black colleges and universities as it

is in black churches and communities, there are no safe places for them to openly engage the subject of black LGBTQ sexualities. Black LGBTQ sexualities within African-American culture are perceived to further threaten not only black male heterosexuality, but also the ontology of blackness itself.

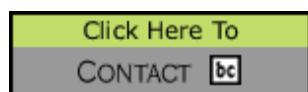
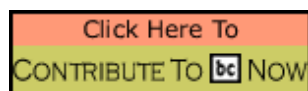
Morehouse is lauded as the jewel of black academia. Founded two years after the end of the Civil War by William Jefferson White, in the basement of Springfield Baptist Church in Augusta, GA, Morehouse continues to confer degrees on more men of African descent than any institution of higher education in this country.

However, if Morehouse is to continue to be the jewel of black academia nurturing the talents and gifts of its exceptional black men, then it must ask itself to what degree does its tradition hinders its goal?

BlackCommentator.com Editorial Board member, the Rev. Irene Monroe, is a religion columnist, theologian, and public speaker. A native of Brooklyn, Rev. Monroe is a graduate from Wellesley College and Union Theological Seminary at Columbia University, and served as a pastor at an African-American church before coming to Harvard Divinity School for her doctorate as a Ford Fellow. She was recently named to MSNBC's list of [10 Black Women You Should Know](#). Reverend Monroe is the author of [Let Your Light Shine Like a Rainbow Always: Meditations on Bible Prayers for Not-So-Everyday Moments](#). As an African American feminist theologian, she speaks for a sector of society that is frequently invisible. Her website is irenemonroe.com. Click [here](#) to contact the Rev. Monroe.



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