

President Garret and Vice President Lombardi,

*“All world-class academic institutions recognize that research, knowledge production, and intellectual and operational pursuits benefit tremendously from full engagement with diverse points of view coming from varied life experiences and ways of interacting with and interpreting the world. To be on the cutting edge of our fields and practices, **Cornell is committed to enhancing our culture to provide for the full participation of all members of our community. Recognizing that historical circumstances and social structures produce imbalances in privilege, power, and opportunity, we know that this work in support not just of access, but of deep participation, is a complex, long-term effort.** As an enlightened academic community, we boldly pursue full inclusion as a central component of our values and our approach to each other and the world around us. This initiative, designed to realize the values of diversity and inclusion announced in our statement—Open Doors, Open Hearts, Open Minds—provides the tactical framework that senior leaders, department heads, and the Cornell community can use to achieve the excellence derived from full engagement with diversity.”*

*Cornell University, Toward New Destinations*

The founding mission of Cornell University is that any person can find instruction in any study. Yet, while Cornell touts its compositional diversity, the campus environment is not conducive to the overall success of students of color and many other students whose cultural or socioeconomic backgrounds do not fit the mold of the historically wealthy, white university population. *A Cornell University survey of undergraduates yielded the following results in 2013:* approximately a quarter of Black students answered that the climate at Cornell was at least moderately disrespectful for students like them and students of color disagreed that Cornell demonstrates a strong institutional commitment to diversity; about one third of Black students answered that they are at least generally dissatisfied with the ethnic/racial diversity of the campus; and more than half of Black students answered that they feel they have to work harder than other students to be perceived as a good student.

These numbers tell a very clear story, one that can be found in similar surveys dating back for many years. We attend a university where our professors, who are by all accounts scholars in their various fields, undervalue our intellectual contributions to our coursework; where they teach that communities of color have little or nothing to offer than a brief honorable mention on their syllabus. We attend a university where our peers believe we do not belong here; where they decry the usefulness and necessity of affirmative action; where they claim we segregate ourselves because we lean on each other to survive. We attend a university that is obsessed with the optics of our black and brown faces but is indifferent to the justice we seek. This is not an indictment of white people; this is an indictment of a system that perpetuates white supremacy and shelters our peers under the warm blanket of white privilege - all the while, we are left to freeze in our frigid reality of racist epithets, essentialist curriculum, and apathetic governance. In post-racial America, our classmates call us niggers from their pickup trucks in broad daylight. In post-racial America, we are berated by airborne bottles on our own campus. In post-racial America, we are told we have a chip on our shoulder. We are called everything but our name. Above all else, in post-racial America we are bombarded by the

deafening silence that allows the centuries-old hum of white supremacy to grow louder. Silence is violence.

Our position is a simple one: if Cornell University and the powers who have been entrusted to govern truly believe in an institution that values the contributions of students of color and other marginalized backgrounds and is committed to ensuring their success, sanity, and safety, it will work with all deliberate and appropriate speed to grant the demands of its students who are demanding a fair shot in the game. It is not enough to develop a lackluster “diversity initiative” and spend three years half-stepping toward new destinations.

If this institution truly expects to uphold the values of Ezra Cornell’s utopian institution on a hill, it will realize that “any student, any study” should not be an empty quip, but a promise of a full, wholehearted, and steadfast commitment to ensure that every student in every school and college has the resources, the love, and the support to survive and thrive the rigors of our institution and the trials and triumphs of life. It is time for Cornell to be on the right side of history.

Our attached demands will outline what we want and what we believe. You will find them separated into the following categories. It is our expectation that a representative of the university will respond, in full, with a detailed plan of action for each by Tuesday, November 24, 2015 at 12:00 p.m. We look forward to your collaboration.

- I. Curriculum
- II. Compositional Diversity
- III. Mental and Physical Health and Wellness
- IV. Governance
- V. Support Services
- VI. Symbols

## I. CURRICULUM

**We want all students, undergraduate and graduate, to have appropriate, ongoing, and mandatory coursework that deals with issues of identity (such as race, class, religion, ability status, sexual/romantic orientation, gender, citizenship status, etc.). We want this coursework to be explicitly focused on systems of power and privilege in the United States and centering the voices of oppressed people.**

We believe that our community has a responsibility to be learn about the ways in which systems of power and privilege continue to inform the experiences of people of color both on campus and out in the world. We believe mandatory coursework will provide an initial means of challenging and dismantling the white hegemony that pervades the university’s present curriculum.

**We want all employees of the university, academic and otherwise (including tenured professors), to have appropriate, ongoing training (tied to evaluations and payroll) that deals with issues of identity (such as race, class, religion, ability status, sexual/romantic orientation, gender, citizenship status, etc.). We want this**

**coursework to be explicitly focused on systems of power and privilege in the United States and centering the voices of oppressed people.**

We believe that if the university truly wants to foster an environment of inclusion for all students, we should see this support in the University's commitment to ensuring that those entrusted to guide our academic pursuits possess a meaningful understanding and sincere respect for the cultures, heritages, and backgrounds of their students. We believe this principle holds true across all areas of study, and that this objective is best achieved when educators are, in themselves, reflections of the students they serve. We believe that tenure should not pose a challenge to this commitment, given that these professors should be leaders in the Cornell community.

**We want Cornell University to facilitate the hiring of a scholar who specializes in early African history, predating European contact. We want at least one course offered in this topic by the university, in perpetuity.**

We believe that too often we are taught our history began with slavery and European contact. We know better and we believe this is a false, misleading, and dangerous representation of history. We believe a course taught by an expert in this field would enhance our experience significantly and make an affirmative step toward accurately representing African peoples and history. We also believe that a scholar specializing in this field could benefit greatly from the resources offered by Cornell and make even more contributions to already existing scholarship.

**We want the university to support the planning and development of Latino Studies, American Indian Studies, and Asian-American studies majors by the end of the Academic Year 2016. We also want the university to provide all necessary support and resources to explore the option and feasibility of creating doctoral programs in these departments.**

We believe that it is important to stand in solidarity with our allied students of color. We believe that the Africana Studies and Research Center plays an integral role in our development as individuals and intellectuals. We believe that these communities deserve the same enriching experience. We also believe that by strengthening these programs, their work will become better represented throughout the Cornell community.

## II. COMPOSITIONAL DIVERSITY

**We want an increase in Black faculty, administrators, and staff with a special emphasis on women, scholars who focus on issues of race and racial justice, and professors and researchers in the STEM fields. We also want students to have increased involvement in the hiring process of new faculty in their departments.**

We believe, and research demonstrates, that Black students benefit from seeing professors, faculty, administrators, and staff who look like them. We believe that the university can make no

claim to have achieved an ideal compositional diversity when its faculty and administrators continue to be overwhelmingly white.

**We want Cornell to develop a five year plan, in collaboration with the New York State Division of Minority and Women Owned Business Development, that will substantially increase the number and percentage of contracts between the university and minority-and-women owned businesses.**

We believe that Cornell should make an active and intentional effort to stimulate the growth of business for marginalized communities. We believe this collaboration would underscore the University's commitment to diversity and inclusion in all facets.

### III. MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLNESS

**We want Gannett to hire at least three more psychologists and psychiatrists of color in the next two years. We also want Gannett to hire at least three more physicians of color in the next four years.**

We believe, and research shows, that people of color historically have reason to mistrust medical professionals. We believe that there should be qualified psychologist and psychiatrists of color that can sufficiently address the way that racism affects the mental and emotional health and well-being of black students at a predominately white institution. We also believe that hiring more physicians of color could make students of color more comfortable addressing their physical health while at the university.

**We want consistent support groups, to be facilitated by Gannett and the Dean of Students, for people of color, with specific groups for women of color and queer people of color, with at least one space for each of the aforementioned group dedicated to the issue of sexual assault.**

We believe, and research shows, that people of color experience racism collectively. We believe part of the healing process must include collective spaces to address racial trauma. We also believe, and are backed up by the recent AAU report on sexual assault, that women of color and queer people of color are often targets of several layers of oppression, assault, and erasure. We believe these groups deserve their own spaces to feel safe and provide support for one another.

### IV. GOVERNANCE

**We want standing meetings throughout each academic year with the university president, vice president of student affairs, ALANA umbrella leaders, and support staff in the Center for Intercultural Dialogue and the Office of Academic Diversity Initiatives.**

We believe that in order to stay proactive and progressive in regards to racial and discriminatory issues there must be an ongoing dialogue with those entrusted to represent the students of color on Cornell's campus.

#### V. SUPPORT SERVICES

**We want the university to provide an adequate and appropriate space for member organizations of the Multicultural Greek Letter Council to utilize for programs of any kind, including the evening of Slope Day, in perpetuity.**

We believe that there persists a legacy of displacement connected to the Greek system of this university. We believe that almost 110 years after the founding of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc. on Cornell's campus, it is preposterous that multicultural Greek organizations have to scramble for space and money while majority white organizations have comparatively unbounded resources and access to space. We believe these organizations play a large role in our communities and with more direct support from the university, they will be able to better achieve their primary functions of sister/brotherhood, service, and scholarship.

**We want a staff member in each Career Services office of each college and school directly dedicated to counseling students of color and other marginalized students with structural and institutional barriers to employment. We also want more full-time staff hired in the Center for Intercultural Dialogue and Office of Academic Diversity Initiatives.**

We believe that of the university's support staff, those dedicated to serving the specific needs of students of color are currently overworked and too few in number to ensure those needs are met sufficiently.

#### IV. SYMBOLS

**We want the administration to change the name of the Cornell Plantations as soon as possible.**

**We want a physical commemoration of the old Africana Center on Wait Avenue that was firebombed. This commemoration should come in the form of a plaque, bench, or art installation of some kind.**

We believe too many members of our community are unaware of the racial history of Cornell. We believe that by commemorating the old Africana Center, the university will make clear that it is willing to acknowledge even the negative aspects of our past. In the spirit of Sankofa, we believe that it is crucial to explore this history of suppression and violence in order to move forward toward a more just society.

**We want full support from the administration in the fundraising for a commemoration for Schwerner, Cheney, and Goodman, three men (two of whom were affiliated with Cornell) who lost their lives fighting for racial justice.**

We believe that Cornell should commemorate the contributions of students of color and others who have added to the University's legacy through dedicating their lives to the fight for racial justice. We believe that these individuals demonstrated courage and dedication that serves as a model for us all.