



Jafari Sinclaire Allen, Ph.D.

*Director, Program in Africana Studies  
Associate Professor of Anthropology*

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David A. Thomas, Ph.D.  
President, Morehouse College

Dear President Thomas,

I hope that this finds you well and in good spirits. I trust you will receive my best wishes and high regard for the promising work that you have already begun as Twelfth President of Morehouse College, and my sincere offer of assistance to assist and support you as you lead. I am a Morehouse College alumnus, former adjunct faculty member, and newly inducted member of the Martin Luther King, Jr. International College of Ministers and Laity, writing to you out of deep concern.

Those who sat to research, debate, and compose the new Morehouse College policy governing gender in admission and retention, were faced with a daunting and consequential challenge: to affirm and uphold the Morehouse College mission to “develop men with disciplined minds who will lead lives of leadership and service,” while acknowledging currently shifting and intersecting knowledge on gender. They certainly had to weigh pressures from alumni and current students, as well as community perceptions. National standards of peer institutions—none of which are precisely comparable to our college in terms of demographics, histories and current disposition were, I am sure, also considered. From where I sit, however, the college has made an ethically equivocal statement, which contradicts its laudable intention of inclusivity.

The new policy takes the important and necessary step of recognizing current knowledge about gender and the reality of gender non-conforming (prospective) Morehouse students by considering men for admission, “regardless of their gender assignment at birth.” However, the policy goes on to not only effectively deny the reality of gender fluidity and change, but also more hurtfully, announces to current gender non-conforming (gnc), and transgender Morehouse students that they do not belong. I have faith that this is not the college’s intent. Still, the provision that “(a) student who transitions to a woman or begins to self-identify as a woman during her tenure at Morehouse will no longer be eligible to matriculate...” constitutes a target on the back of any gender non-conforming Morehouse student who may not *look like a man* to anyone wishing to adjudicate their gender. Moreover, the policy names transwomen students as disposable. This is why I write to you today on this urgent matter of ethical responsibility to students in our care. This is not merely an academic or hypothetical discussion. There are current students who are hurt by this policy decision—likely many more than you realize, as ‘gender non-conforming’ and ‘transition’ are dynamic concepts that range widely (i.e. perhaps only in the heart of the individual or ‘in the eye of the beholder’).

To wit, while I have heard some of my classmates laud the policy as “the best we can do,” it simply is not. The fact that a number of other historically “single-gender” colleges have made different choices makes this evident, and by contrast reveals the Morehouse policy situated on the wrong side of history. Spelman College, for example, contending with similar pressures Morehouse must negotiate, announced a policy that acknowledges and reaffirms its historic and current institutional identity two years ago. Their statement cites their “mission...to serve high-achieving Black women” adding “...regardless of their gender assignment at birth.” At the same time, their statement honors their responsibility to Spelman students who discover or determine something different about their gender while matriculating: “If a woman is admitted and transitions to male while a student at Spelman, the College will permit that student to continue to matriculate at and graduate from Spelman.” This more closely resembles that of other elite historically single-gender institutions. For us, this might be put simply as a policy to *admit men* (regardless of their gender assignment at birth) *and graduate students*.

To be sure, a number of my Morehouse brothers vehemently disagree. They fear losing our uniqueness as the only institution of higher learning for Black men, for example. They argue that upholding this tradition is of paramount import. I understand this point of view and do not take it lightly. Still, the central lesson I learned at Morehouse, re-emphasized and charged to me once again as I accepted the great honor to be inducted into the Martin Luther King, Jr. International College of Ministers and Laity and Collegium of Scholars, is that our higher calling and responsibility is to speak truth to power (and to our own ignorance and deeply held fears), to support those most vulnerable, and to lead fearlessly and righteously. We hold these philosophical values of mutuality and responsibility as sacrosanct. They ought to be pillars of our everyday practice as well—especially apropos the way we treat one another *at home*. In my opinion, the choice to deny any student in-good-standing all of the rights and privileges of other students on the basis of an attribute which does not negatively affect others, is morally wrong. Moreover, practically considering our litigious national culture, this seems to unnecessarily place the college at liability risk for innumerable tort claims.

I now see the message that my esteemed colleague Bishop Timothy Joseph Clarke delivered on the occasion of our induction into the International College of Ministers and Laity, earlier this month, as prophetic. You will remember, Brother President, that Bishop Clarke preached on how to “avoid making our landmarks into landmines”—that is, he implored us to prioritize the mission of regard and just transformation as we nurture and grow our most precious institutions, like Morehouse College. This weekend, the words of Dean Lawrence Edward Carter, Sr. reverberated in my mind as I talked with non-gender conforming and trans\* students who work as hard as any of their classmates to “grow tall enough to wear the crown,” while also bearing the sometimes-heavy weight of their difference on our campus. Dean Carter charged the honorees of the College of Ministers and Laity to be “affirmative, appreciative, coherently critical examples for humanity... .” He reminded us that “...our vision is the creation of an inclusive, dignitarian world society in which the full development of each individual’s potential is the central goal.” If we believe this at Morehouse: how can we turn our backs when someone we once called *he* figures out or announces that *she* or *they* is more suitable for them? Moreover, what must we do to support those who are vulnerable and in the throes of figuring out all of this?

Some Morehouse alumni, staff and faculty--- like a wide swath of American society—are unfamiliar with current knowledge about gender and new terms that have come to define trans\* experience. I have learned from reading a number of comments on social media and alumni outlets that many fear and fundamentally misapprehend the very concept of transgender. That a student might harbor or develop something as fundamental as gender identity in ways that may or may not be detectable to one’s eye or to a college application; or that a student may, at some point during the intense personal growth period of college matriculation, decide or feel compelled to express their gender in a different way, is difficult for a number of folks to comprehend. I have come to understand very profoundly that many of our folks do not apprehend the myriad ways the discourse of Black trans\* inclusion is squarely a part of our long civil rights movement, and Black radical intellectual tradition. Various media and some narrowly Eurocentric scholarship may have convinced them of the dangerous lie that transgender is something only for white folks. If you will invite me, President Thomas, I would be honored to assist my alma mater in a long-term series of serious engagements to soberly and intelligently confront these issues (which can literally be life or death matters). Please call on me. In 1990, I was a very engaged and active Morehouse student (for example, as Student Representative to the Morehouse Board of Trustees, and Thurman Hall RA) if not a high-performing one! I was nineteen and in love with a beautiful, smart, and socially-conscious Spelmanite when I came to recognize my gayness. This is to say that my more than twenty-five years of global scholarship and activism on Black LGBTQ issues was born (and painfully borne!) on that hallowed red clay hill in Georgia. I therefore owe it to Morehouse—more precisely to current and future students—to share what I have learned, to help support and transform my dearest landmark, and our communities. Please call on me to help to at least re-think, and hopefully revise, the gender policy announced last week.

Sincerely,

Jafari Sinclair Allen, Ph.D. ‘90