

Morehouse Dress Code Contains Surprises

Contributed by Ashlei Williams -- Black College Wire
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New policy at all-male school discourages women's clothing, headwear, sagging pants

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In early October, Morehouse College administration enacted its new "Appropriate Attire Policy." Based on President Franklin's conceptualization on the Renaissance Man, specifically his expectation of the "well-dressed" man of Morehouse, the policy sets a campus-wide standard for students' attire.

The policy outlines 11 expectations pertaining to what students should not wear while on campus. Instead of requiring certain articles of clothing, as a typical dress code would, the policy details those articles of clothing deemed unacceptable for students. They include "sagging" pants, women's clothing and headwear. The policy will be distributed to students electronically through Tigernet and the school website. The policy will also be outlined in the student handbook and discussed in Crown Forums for students.

While some students disagree with the policy, others agree with the purpose behind it.

"I would say that about 95 percent of the students on this campus feel that appearance matters to them," said Dr. William Bynum, Vice-President of the Office of Student Services. "We are not trying to isolate anyone that falls under a category, you can just look at it like it's one out of eleven things being addressed."

Dr. Bynum explained that students began voicing concerns to administration about attire on campus this semester. In turn administration partnered with the SGA to work with the student body on an attire policy. Some students feel that the anticipated policy lacks proper planning and investigation.

Safe Space, a gay/straight alliance student campus organization, has been vocal about the issue.

Co-president Michael Edwards said, "Creating this policy was easy and quick. But the energy and effort put into something determines the greater result."

Some students feel that the policy will not cater to the modern man of Morehouse.

Sophomore Morehouse student Michael Leonard said, "I understand that the dress code may represent the great leaders of our community from our past who helped change our world through conforming and appearing mainstream with a suit and tie. But let's not forget about the Spike Lee's of Morehouse, who are continuing to make great strides through unconventional methods."

Many students question exactly what it means for the Morehouse Man to be "well-dressed." Does he wear the suit and tie? Does he wear the high-end designer fashions? Or is he of moderate dress, simple and refined?

"The perception of the "well-dressed" man may not be shared by everyone that attends the college," Leonard explained, "Students should take this pillar, do the necessary work, and apply it to their lives as they see fit."

Edwards said, "The concept of being well-dressed is a concept of interpretation." He added, "The five "wells" are character supplements. To build the complete character we should be working on all of them instead of focusing on just one."

Those students that view attire as a form of self-expression find the policy to be a violation of personal freedoms.

"The very opposite of change is uniformity; freedom of expression lives at the root of individuality," Leonard stated. "We have obviously strayed away from the core values fought for by our ancestors to be free, and have instead opted to conform to the very standards that have crippled us and our society; the very standards that continue to deem us unworthy," he added.

Some students feel that the standardization of appearance required by the policy will have adverse effects. With attire stipulations students could begin to resort to rebellious forms of self-expression.

"Outward appearance assists with how you carry yourself, but either way you cannot change someone's mindset," Edwards explained.

Administration hopes that the policy will promote leadership and allow students to become easily recognizable, a factor they believe will indirectly assist with campus safety through student identification.

“We see men of Morehouse as leaders and we feel that should be seen in appearance,” Dr. Bynum explained. “This policy will help to set a standard for college students that many other places do not meet, and Morehouse will lead in that.”

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Ashlei Williams, a Spelman student, writes for the Maroon Tiger, the Morehouse College student newspaper, which originally published this article.