

Attn: President Martha Pollack, Vice President Ryan Lombardi, and other members of the  
Cornell University Administration  
300 Day Hall  
Ithaca, NY 14853

President Martha Pollack and Vice President Ryan Lombardi,

“I would found an institution where any person can find instruction in any study”. With this bold statement, Ezra Cornell declared an idea of a diverse and inclusive school, far ahead of its time. However, 152 years later, that university struggles to uphold this ideal. While Cornell University takes pride in its academic and demographic diversity, the campus environment does not reflect these views.

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.

The Interfraternity Council and Panhellenic Council both present a system that not only excludes people of color, but exudes white supremacy. The verbal and physical assault of a young black student, committed by members of the Chi Chapter of Psi Upsilon cannot go unpunished and the Cornell administration can no longer stand silent while we are under attack. The fact that it has taken the administration far too long to realize the extent of the systemic issues that exist at our school is unacceptable.

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.

In light of the recent events and past events that have occurred on Cornell University's campus, we make the following demands. Our voices will no longer be silenced. We will not stand by while our rights and personal safety are being infringed. We are here and we will be heard.

Our demands are outlined as the following:

*We demand that 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, assembled by professional diversity consultants and student leaders. Every Dean of every college should implement this requirement, and hire faculty to teach this work who are well equipped to do so.*

We believe that our community has a responsibility to 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 demand that 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 demand that the Chi Chapter of Psi Upsilon Fraternity, Inc. at Cornell University is permanently banned from campus, in addition to their letters being taken off of the fraternity house. We also demand that all students involved in this heinous hate crime be expelled from this University immediately.*

This fraternity has a legacy of racism, discrimination, and disrespect on Cornell's campus dating back almost fifty years. At the Willard Straight Hall Takeover in 1969, members of the Chi Chapter of Psi Upsilon Fraternity broke down the barriers of the building and verbally and physically assaulted black students participating in the takeover. Forty years later, the then President of the Chi Chapter of Psi Upsilon Fraternity, Inc., Wolfgang Ballinger, plead guilty to a misdemeanor after being accused of sexual assault. Following that incident, members of the fraternity were on a probation period for two years, where they could neither be active on campus, nor accept new members; however, the fraternity was still participating in underground pledging, as well as membership intake despite Cornell's discipline. And lastly, their members participating in a racial physical and verbal assault on campus is simply despicable. Their racist legacy does not deserve a space on this campus.

*We demand that the university to provide an adequate and appropriate space for the people of the African diaspora to utilize for programs of any kind, in perpetuity. We propose that this space be the Psi Upsilon house after they are expelled from campus.*

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. Often black organizations have to rent space, which causes them to have to hire police security. This is expensive and unfair, as students of color should not find themselves policed when they gather to celebrate. 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 demand that IFC/ Panhellenic and MGLC organizations have required and sustained diversity and inclusion, race-based training prior to entering the fraternity or sorority and every year they are in that fraternity or sorority.*

Time and time again, minority students are subject to racist treatment by members of IFC/Panhellenic organizations. A few years ago, members of Sigma Pi Fraternity threw bottles of beer while yelling “Trayvon” as Black students walked up Libe Slope. Last week, members of Zeta Psi Fraternity shouted in front of the Latino Living Center, “Let’s build a wall around LLC”. And a little over a week later, members of Psi Upsilon beat up a black man and called him the n-word. Clearly there is a lack of education when it comes to the respect of minorities on Cornell’s campus. By having a diversity and inclusion race training prior to entering IFC/Panhellenic organizations, members will be educated about the complexities of race, and the importance of positive race relations not only on campus, but also throughout their lives as they enter the graduate school, the workforce, etc.

*We demand that a Minority-Liaison at-Large position is created for the University Assembly so that the Assembly reflects our marginalized perspectives.*

Whereas the student assembly has two appointed Minority Liaison at-Large positions to emulate the diverse views of Cornell’s marginalized community. We want the University Assembly to add a minority liaison at-large position to make sure that we have more representation in decisions that affect our safety and ability to thrive at Cornell. This should go into effect immediately as part of the upcoming election cycle. A Minority Liaison has proven to be effective on the Student Assembly and we would like the University Assembly to follow in this precedent.

*We demand that Cornell Health to hire at least two more psychologists and psychiatrists of color in the next two years. We also want Cornell Health to hire at least one more physician 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 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. Students should be able to have a direct say in the punishment of their peers. Student Honor Boards allow for the 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 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.

*We demand that Cornell Admissions to come up with a plan to actively increase the presence of underrepresented Black students on this campus. We define underrepresented Black students as Black Americans who have several generations (more than two) in this country.*

The Black student population at Cornell disproportionately represents international or first-generation African or Caribbean students. While these students have a right to flourish at Cornell, there is a lack of investment in Black students whose families were affected directly by the African Holocaust in America. Cornell must work to actively support students whose families have been impacted for generations by white supremacy and American fascism.

*We want the creation of a permanent Presidential Task Force for student community leaders to have bi-annual meetings with the current President of the university.*

In 2014, the Cornell Administration released the “Hurtado Report,” and in-depth study of Cornell’s campus climate. This report concluded with several requests of the administration, based on the results of the study, to improve campus climate. Cornell has not acknowledged these requests, and the report was forgotten as the students involved in the report graduated. There is a loss of institutional memory as students become leaders in their community, identify issues and come up with appropriate solutions, and then graduate. The permanent creation of this task force will allow for Cornell to stop taking “One step forward, two steps back” when it comes to ending white supremacy on campus.

*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 Program, Engaged Cornell, the Skills for Success program and other are important, but if Cornell is going to commit to changing campus climate they must create a centralized department or program that has the explicit purpose of fighting racism.

*We demand that the University hires a position in Engaged Cornell to ensure Cornell is supporting the local black community in Ithaca.*

Cornell has a history of not giving enough back to Ithaca community. Ithaca is a segregated city, and it is imperative that Cornell puts as much efforts and resources into supporting the African American population in Ithaca that began with the Underground Railroad as it puts into the white community just below our hill.

We appreciate what has been done already but continue to fight for the betterment of this institution. We implore the administration to act swiftly and stand on the right side of history.

Black Students United