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Needs of a Woman at Howard University: What I Need Out of the Education System and  
Criminal Justice System

Before becoming an upperclassman, I thought the N-word was just another slang word that everyone used. I never understood, let alone knew that there was a terrible history behind the meaning and use of the word. I realized it was an issue when other students who were not Black went around chanting “I don’t want to be a n\*\*\*\*\*r I want to be free.” I realized it was an issue when our white principal would sing along to songs containing the N-word whenever we were out on college field trips and told us “whatever happens here stays here.” I realized it was an issue when non-Black students would use the word and the only thing they were told by faculty was “hey don’t say that,” while Black students would get in trouble and sent to the office for being “too loud and ghetto.” Coming to Howard I personally did not feel “healthy.” As a Black woman in today’s America, I did not feel healthy in a psychological, biological, spiritual, financial, cultural, nor political aspect. My mental health was at its lowest point and I knew very little about my own culture. To ensure that I have a successful year at Howard, I need Howard to be more accountable and put the health of their students before anything else and for elected officials to bring police reform.

As a woman, especially a Black woman in today’s America, it is crucially important to take care of my health. In my women’s health class, we discussed what defines or constitutes being healthy. Being healthy isn’t just defined by what I eat or how I look, but how I manage my psychological health, political health, historical health, cultural health, biological health, spiritual

health, and financial health. I need Howard to recognize these characteristics and ensure that they are providing the necessary tools to allow me to meticulously manage my health.

To be psychologically healthy, I need to keep my level of negative stress as low as possible. Howard can assist me with this by providing virtual counselors that I can confide in and vent to without judgment. To be historically healthy I need to be in tune with current events as well as historical ones and how they may impact me. In Alice Walker's *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*, she recounts, "Yet so many of the stories that I write, that we all write, are my mother's stories. Only recently did I realize this... something of the urgency that involved the knowledge that her stories-like her life-must be recorder" (Walker, 407). My own mother and grandmother had told stories about how different social and political settings were in their time. I have used their stories to shape my own and form the story that I want to tell my own family down the line. Their past stories shape my future stories in the same way past political events shape current and future events. Howard does a fair job of sharing some of these stories and events. The African studies classes that Howard provides in a way allows me to stay in tune with past and current events. However, Howard could do more to share and bring awareness to more current events.

To be politically healthy I need to be well informed with the current state of American policy and laws, while also knowing how it pertains to me as a Black woman. I need Howard to continue to push for voter registration and offer courses that better help us students understand the political landscape we currently find ourselves in. To be culturally healthy I need to be able to preserve the memory of my ancestors and the social norms, myths, and practices they passed down and continued from generation to generation. I among many other Howard students are

unsure of our roots. We are unsure of our family history traces and our heritage. It would be useful if Howard could provide programs that allow us to find where we come from. From there we students will be able to branch out and join different clubs to explore more of our heritage and customs/practices. To be biologically healthy I need to keep track of my body and how I am functioning. Since joining my women's health class that Howard offers, I am learning more about myself and my body. I am also starting to uncover different myths that were created by society to perceive a certain image of women that is inexistent.

To be spiritually healthy, I want to be able to continue to try and maintain a close relationship with God. Howard can help me with this by having a virtual service every Sunday. There is a church called Jesus House, DC that provided transportation for Howard students to and from the church. They would also hold virtual service even before the pandemic took place. It would be nice if Howard were more vocal and open to sharing these different tools that are available to us. Although I do not label myself with most religions because of their strict rules and customs, I still feel that my connection with God is very important. To be able to feel financially healthy, I need to feel comfortable to the point where I am not worried about how I am going to be able to provide for my family or where I will be receiving my next source of income. Howard needs to host classes on how to manage your money. Most college students are not in the best financial position and, myself included, would struggle to try to find something cheap other than McDonald's every day to eat. There is also little information provided on how to do taxes. The school of business helps its students with this information, but what about the other students? I am at the age where I should start paying taxes, yet I am unsure of how to do

so. Yes, academics are very important, but so are finances and I believe that Howard should also make that a focus for their students to know about.

To be able to have a successful year at Howard, I need for elected government officials to make a real definitive change to police reform or some sort of accountability bill that combats the recent and long history of police misconduct, excessive force, and racial bias. At my high school, police cars would consistently stop Black students walking towards school assuming they were ditching while non-Black students were walking in the opposite direction of the school campus. We need to transform the practices and policies as well as the values and culture within police organizations. The Black Panther Party Ten-Point Program is a great place to examine. These morals especially the seventh point, “We want an immediate end to POLICE BRUTALITY and MURDER of Black people” (Black Panther’s Ten-Point Program, 7), eighth point, “We want freedom for all Black men held in federal, state, county and city prisons and jails” (Black Panther’s Ten-Point Program, 8), and ninth point, “We want all Black people when brought to trial to be tried in court by a jury of their peer group or people from their Black Communities, as defined by the Constitution of the United States” (Black Panther’s Ten-Point Program, 9) need to be instituted into these police organizations. Police by definition are here to serve and protect the people, yet they are killing and ignoring my people. If and when I decide to have kids, they will be Black. I have doubts about even bringing kids of my own into this world because I am afraid of losing one of my own to a gun or jail from a wrongful conviction. How is it that these same acts of abuse of force and brutality continue to take place when people are literally screaming what needs to be done and throwing out ideas towards an ideal police organization? I need to be able to focus on my education at Howard without worrying about

possibly coming across a police officer while walking towards the library and second-guessing whether or not I am doing something wrong.

The Black Panther 10 Point Program and the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) Demand for Black Linguistic Justice were written 54 years apart, yet they are covering similar if not the same points. The fifth point of the Black Panther 10 Point Program reads, “We want education for our people that exposes the true nature of this decadent American society. We want education that teaches us our true history and our role in present-day society” (Black Panther’s Ten-Point Program, 5). Meanwhile, the CCCC Demand for Black Linguistic Justice mainly centers around the topic of education for Black people, one point being, “We demand that Black dispositions are centered in the research and teaching of Black language” (Conference on College Composition and Communication). Elected government officials are elected to represent all voices, not just a specific group of voices. Both points mentioned above are quite simply asking for Black language to stop being treated as though it is worthless, and instead be treated with the respect that it sorely deserves. It is up to elected education officials to push for educational reform in the classroom so that non-Black students are educated in Black linguistic history. Howard as well as other HBCU’s and PWI’s could bring in a Black linguistic history class educating all students, especially those who are not Black, on the history of Black language and slang. A lot of slang and phrases used on social media and in society come from Black voices, but most people are not educated on this. Black voices are constantly being drowned out which is one reason why I believe we continue to hear the same points talked about time and time again.

Until White America as a whole comes face to face with its racist foundations and truly writes into law definitive policy changes on police reform and overt racism, these problems Black people are facing will never truly be resolved. While I believe that educational reform and knowledge on financial wealth will help me with my challenges, police reform and assurance from Howard that they will prioritize mine and other students' health in all aspects will truly be key for me to have as best of a year that I can in these unprecedented times.

## Works Cited

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