

Al Qalam

The Pen

Read in the name of thy Lord Surah 96:1



Safar 1442
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Volume 2

IN THE NAME OF GOD, THE MOST GRACIOUS, THE MOST MERCIFUL



This is the second issue of Al Qalam (The Pen) magazine by Howard University's Office of the Dean of the Chapel Muslim Students' Association. We would like to thank Dr. Nisa Muhammad, Office of the Dean of the Chapel Assistant Dean of Religious life and our editor, Khadijah Ceesay, our MSA president, Cherelle Muhammad, our MSA Community Outreach Coordinator, Tariq Touré, award-winning poet, our Board of Advisors, our Staff, and all of our brothers and sisters. You made this work possible. In this issue, we welcome the Class of 2024 and our transfer students. Read Khadijah Ceesay's piece on what you can expect from your MSA as you begin your Howard journey. For some tips on navigating college life over the next few years, read Sultan Diego Sulayman's piece, in which he asks some alumni about what they wish they knew before coming to Howard. If you're a transfer student, check out Cherelle Muhammad's testimony on transferring and what you can do to get the most out of your experience. I would like to take this opportunity to say that it is important to remain connected while we are unable to be physically present on campus. Stay in touch with your brothers and sisters, and ask for help if you need it. Keep up with online classes and stay in communication with your professors. This year has seen intolerable brutality and injustice towards Black people from the police. George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Jacob Blake, and many other innocent people were murdered in what can only be described as racist terror. This has led to a massive push for justice in the form of protests and activism. It is important for us as Muslims to be at the forefront of this struggle, as our religion commands us to stand for justice. Let us continue to stand strong and support each other through these difficult times. May Allah be with us and aid us. Amin.

Ismail Allison
Editor-in-Chief



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Welcome HU24 and transfer students!



An MSA meeting in progress

My name is Khadijah Ceesay. I am a Civil and Environmental Engineering Major from Gambia, West Africa. I have the great honour of serving as the 2020-2021 President of the Muslim Students' Association. It is rather unfortunate that we are meeting virtually this semester but nevertheless, I would officially love to welcome you to Howard University and to this exciting new journey of yours.



You have worked so hard to get to where you are today and it has surely paid off. This is just the beginning. These next four years of your college life are going to be very crucial in your future. Your college years will shape you into the young men and women you dream of becoming. Your minds are about to blossom with knowledge.



MSA members at the 2019 CAIR gala



Food distribution at Masjid Muhammad

You will meet amazing people on your journey who will all become a part of it with you.

College life is not easy but you are not alone and will not be alone. As Muslims, our faith is the most important part of us and our identity. That is why the Howard University Muslim Students' Association is here for you. The MSA is a family. We are friends with an immense bond, and we each hold dear.



Jummah khutbah at Howard

We help each other to succeed and to attain our set goals. We believe every goal is reachable. The MSA always has its doors open to everyone. We will always be available if you need someone to talk to or just friends to laugh with. We also do a lot of community service work as well as always advocating for justice. Everyone is welcome and we hope to see you in our future meetings!

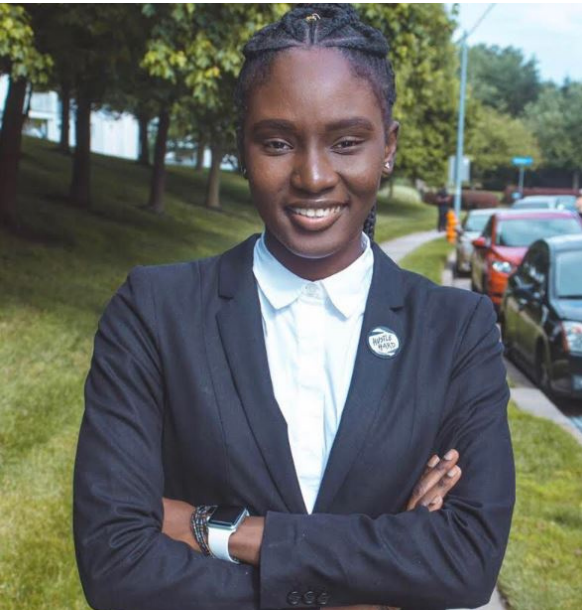
Congratulations and Welcome HU24 and Transfer Students!

Khadijah Ceesay

Advice From Alumni

by: Sultan Diego Sulayman

I asked some Muslim alumnus what advice they wished they had been given before coming to Howard. I hope our incoming Muslim freshman and transfer students can take benefit from their words.



My name is Bintou Doumbia, and I am a May 2020 finance major from Alexandria, Virginia by way of Mali. During my undergraduate years at Howard University, I was a member of the Muslim Student Association (MSA), then became secretary during my senior year. Some advice I wish I was given before coming to Howard are:

-Get involved early with the organizations that you are interested in. The MSA really made me feel at home at Howard and looking back I wished I joined much earlier. Religion really brings people together.

-As you start college, the first thing you should do is sit down with your counselor and make a clear calendar of all the classes you need to take to graduate on time. I was told some wrong information my freshman year and it cost me a semester. (I was supposed to graduate at least a semester earlier).

-Don't be afraid to ask for help. Whether it's from your classmates, professors or Resident Assistant.

-Don't let the freedom go to your head. Just because your parents are not there to tell you to go to school or do your work doesn't mean you can do anything you want because it can cost you your GPA. Be disciplined as much as you can. You're independent now and only you are responsible for what happens to you and your grades. Make wise decisions, whether in your school or your personal life.

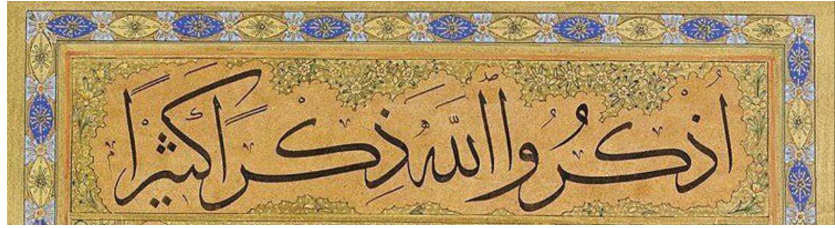


And hold fast to the rope of Allah and be not divided. (3:103)

-Don't feel pressured to have your life figured out completely. I just graduated and I am still not 100% sure on what to do with my life.

-Seek out those internships your very first year, don't be afraid just jump in there even if you have zero previous experience, you still have to start somewhere.

-Enjoy, have fun, be safe and don't fall victim to peer pressure. Always remember God, in everything you do. No matter what happens, do your best and let God do the rest, He is the best of planners. You are here for a reason, put your trust in Him and everything will be fine.



Remember Allah often.



My name is Jamann King Coles. I am a Class of 2019 graduate, TV and Film Major, English Minor based in PG County Maryland. I reverted to Islam during high school and fully came into my own as a Muslim while at Howard. I was able to learn more about Islam and how to properly implement my deen into my every day life. My mind was opened to the fact that Islam is so much wider and diverse than I initially thought; and as a Black Muslim, it reminded me of my inherent history, connection and right to Islam that I had.

During my time at Howard I served on the MSA e-board as Vice President to assist in the growth of the MSA. I am an author, screenwriter and a video editor by trade, hoping to use my creative interests in creating powerful story-driven media.

While I loved my experiences at Howard and with the MSA, my only regret was that I didn't do enough and I did not take full advantage of the opportunities, events and programs offered. I wish I heeded the advice of taking advantage of the 4+ years I was there. They truly do go by in the blink of an eye. Do not be afraid of joining different clubs, doing different programs like study abroad (which I really wish I took advantage of), and taking more opportunities to develop yourself as a person. I also wish I took the time to better my time management skills. How much time you spend or waste makes all the difference in the world. Most of all I would say to not come into Howard without the fire and determination to make something of yourself. There is a strong spirit of determination and excellence at Howard, and the only way to take advantage of it is to believe in yourself enough to seize opportunities when they present themselves.



My name is Ganiyat Balogun, I'm a December 2019 graduate of Howard University, where I majored in Psychology and served on the MSA e-board as events coordinator.

Some advice I would give to new Howard Students is to try to surround yourselves with a community that encourages you and also supports you in your faith. The college experience can get really stressful but having a community of people around you can help ease some of that stress. I would also advise you to take advantage of the resources that Howard provides. There are so many resources that are available to you at Howard if you know where to look, so don't be afraid to ask for help and resources when you need it. Good luck on your Howard journey and InshaAllah it will be an amazing one for you all.



My name is Eric Lamont Powell Jr. (Fard Ali ibn Hanif-Allah) and I am a 2019 graduate of Howard University's School of Communications from P.G. County, Maryland. I'm a striving Muslim, Husband, Father, Hip-Hop Artist, and Manager at Calabash Tea & Tonic. During my time at Howard, I served as the President of the MSA from the Spring of 2016 until the Spring of 2018. During my Freshman & Sophomore Years, I also was named Howard's Hottest Artist twice in a row for my skills as an Emcee. I was involved in WHBC 96.3 HD3 (as a Programmer/On-Air Personality, Producer, and as a member of the Music Department). I also engaged in student service with the Alternative Spring Break Program's Flint, MI Initiative; and activism with the HU Against Hate Coalition and HUResist.

I was extremely blessed during my time as a student to be as involved in the Howard Muslim Community as I was. I learned so much and connected with so many amazing people, networks, and opportunities — locally, nationally, and globally. The key to gaining all of that and more was being open to it in the first place. That is the advice I give to all reading: be open to the right things with the right intentions! I didn't realize when I volunteered to be HUMSA President one day after Jummah in the latter half of my Freshman Year that Allah would lead me to and through all that He did. But when you do things in Allah's Cause and with the right purpose, Allah multiplies the good you had in your heart and manifests it before you in ways you would never have expected. Masha'Allah.

Advice For Transfer Students

by: Cherelle Muhammad



Sometimes you may think that being a transfer student will put you in a perplexing and difficult situation. Switching from campus to campus can be very unpleasant. Fortunately, when I came to Howard University, I had the complete opposite experience. I made friends, learned from my mistakes, improved my communication skills, joined clubs, and developed a lot personally. I was even blessed to get nominated for the Community Outreach position in Howard's University's prestigious MSA. Howard showed me how blessed I was to be a transfer student and what it truly meant.

We must remember that being a transfer means you've completed something and that you're willing to keep going to accomplish your dreams. Transfers perform well academically. When you transfer schools, it shows that you are willing to make a change for the sake of your future, and those changes are always good to make. From my personal experience, I found that my community college prepared me well for attending Howard. I often doubted whether or not I was making the right move. In the end, however, transferring turned out to be the best decision I have ever made.

A piece of advice I'd give to transfer students is to know why you are transferring. Write down and map out a transfer trajectory before you make your ultimate decision. Another thing you must do is take advantage of everything you can. Every chance you get, take it. Howard is an amazing place. Join the transfer club. Get involved.

The Truth Behind Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Justice

by: Aisha Taha



A global pandemic that is ravishing minority communities, police brutality, and inadequate government response galvanized the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement and sparked protest across the nation after another police killing of an unarmed black man. Although the protests started as peaceful, they were met with brute force from the police which led to civil unrest in cities across the United States.



The Black Lives Matter protests came after the anti-lockdown protests that took place in state capitals by groups like the Proud Boys and the 3 Percenters, and other extremist groups and radical anti-government militias. Even though the anti-lockdown protestors held guns meant to intimidate state politicians, they were not met with the same extreme force as the peaceful, unarmed, Black Lives Matter protestors. The response to both protests and their depiction in the media clearly shows that the inalienable rights of “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness” were not meant for African Americans. The white anti-lockdown protestors hid behind the protections provided by the First and Second Amendment. They wore combat gear and brandished their guns while police officers terrorized by enforcing lockdown measures. They were painted as “patriotic” and their portrayal in the media was not vilified as the Black Lives Matter protests were.

The BLM protestors were scrutinized and belittled by the media and many politicians claiming that they were protesting ‘the wrong way,’ the same response Colin Kaepernick received after kneeling during the national anthem in protest of police brutality. It appears that many people view protesting the systematic oppression that plagued African Americans since the birth of the nation is not as patriotic as protesting a virus.





There is a history when it comes to the disparagement of any movements that benefit African Americans in this country. Black leadership was feared in the United States, so much that Martin Luther King Jr. was branded by the FBI as “one of the most dangerous men in America”. Malcolm X was surrounded by undercover agents, and Assata Shakur was put imprisoned for her leadership role in the Black Liberation Army and criminalized in the media. She was portrayed as another “dangerous criminal” along with many other civil rights activists, such as Angela Davis and Fred Hampton.

The representation of African Americans and Civil Rights activists as “criminals” and “dangerous” is sewn into the fabric of this nation’s history. It is the driving force behind the response to the BLM protests and their depiction in the media. When it comes to the oppression of African Americans in this country, police brutality is only the beginning. Redlining in housing inequality, the racial wealth gap, and mandatory sentencing are a few of the legal ways the government sidelines African Americans. Each time there is a movement that attempts to erase an oppressive law, another oppressive law replaces it and once again sends African Americans into permanent second-class citizenship making their inalienable rights unattainable.





Maria Nasir, 2014. Calligraphy illumination with black ink, colored pencils, and markers on parchment paper: The ink of a scholar is more holy than the blood of a martyr.

The Mission by: Maria Nasir

As a new student at the Howard University School of Law, I remember learning about the prestigious history of the foundation on which it is built and feeling the walls speak of their ancestry.

The hallways are decorated with framed portraits of graduating classes from long ago and italic quotes that remind students of the power they carry and the legacy that they must protect. It is the university's social justice mission that calls us to use our education to improve the future of the next generation. By advocating and defending the rights of all, especially African American communities and other minorities, Howard continues to build upon its legacy by producing diverse professionals that will go on to make systemic changes. Being a Muslim student here, this mission also speaks to my mission as a believer.

“

Be upholders of justice.

(4:135)

The importance of scholarship to the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) can be seen in this hadith:

“

**The ink of the scholar is
more holy than the blood
of the martyr.**

The Prophet was a man that anyone could go to for advice and general guidance, even his enemies. The encouragement to increase one's wisdom speaks to the power of scholarship as a mechanism of peace that can overcome war. Whether we do that through contributing to research, writing publications, presenting a speech, or simply educating ourselves to become more aware citizens; we can follow the path towards activism and gain points in the ultimate test of life.



*"Justice is the foundation of authority."
-Umar ibn al-Khattab (May Allah be
pleased with him)*

The drive to pursue my professional studies and excel in the study of law came about from my general desire to advocate for those in need of justice through America's legal system. I have constantly challenged myself in the ways I think about change. The more fields of law I study, the more I realize that there is room for improvement in each realm. The mechanics of oppression can be seen throughout various laws and their implementations. The deep-rooted racism in our society has never left America and it is up to us, now more than ever, to make sure we are tackling the very important questions that have been raised recently. From the Black Lives Matter movement to the Trump administration's handling of the pandemic, there are many issues that need the contributions of youth. The more young, educated people get involved in these causes, the more room there is for the progressive thinking that will enable change.



Howard University School of Law



Lezley McSpadden, mother of Michael Brown, at the Thurgood Marshall Civil Rights Center

Howard University tackles the daunting questions of our time at the forefront of its curriculum, placing the responsibility directly on its students under the supervision of bright, well-rounded faculty. The diversity of the students and the stories they share with each other make the campus more like a family, and bringing the world together becomes one step closer. Study abroad programs, like the one I attended in South Africa, enrich education by not only making our impact on global initiatives more tangible, but by changing the way we think about implementing necessary changes within our nation.

One way I was able to put our mission to practice during this unprecedented summer was utilizing my time by getting engaged in the movement, educating myself, and volunteering. Knowing what is at stake with the important upcoming elections this November, I became a participant in the DNC's 2020 Summer Voter Protection Law School Bootcamp in hopes to make sure that everyone who can vote casts their ballot.

I also took advantage of the opportunity to create reading guides for the Pulitzer Center's initiative to produce a curriculum on The New York Times' 1619 Project. Volunteering at Howard's own Thurgood Marshall Civil Rights Center added to my overall experience and spoke volumes about how Bisons react to current events and their drive to be a part of the conversation. I realized that the free Harvard classes being offered online could help me excel in my legal profession going forward and I enrolled in one of those as well.

The drive to fill my summer with these kinds of experiences stems from my desire to fall in line with Charles Hamilton Houston's vision of law students practicing social engineering. The two years I have spent at Howard University have shaped my understanding of what it means to be a part of the mission that it stands for.



A sign signifying the place at which the first enslaved Africans were brought to America in 1619

Keeping Islam at the top of our priorities while we continue to excel in our studies, we can be guided towards making everlasting change. The social justice mission should encourage us to think about our chosen fields in ways that can leave an impact and secure our foothold in our faith. Being a Bison comes with the added responsibility of representing the Howard community for its values and core principles. As Muslim students, we can further that representation by also showing the world what we can do as followers of our faith.

The Importance of History

by: Ismail Allison



The Islamic World

Growing up, one of my favorite things to do was listen to my grandmother (may Allah have mercy on her) talk about history. She would tell me about Islam's contributions to humanity, the greatness of Islamic civilization, and the evils of Western imperialist colonialism and what it did to our lands. I enjoyed hearing about Muslim heroes and being inspired by their feats. What my grandmother gave to me, I would later learn, was priceless. She taught me our history from our perspective as opposed to the perspective of the oppressor.

Unfortunately for many of us, when we attempt to engage with the most readily available sources on Islamic history we are met with the obstacles of Islamophobia, racism, orientalism, and the 'Western gaze.' This is to say that the way in which Western academics, trained in Western institutions, conceive of and present Islam is in the context of its 'inferiority' to the West. Oftentimes, the traditional narratives of civilizational history we are exposed to in schools and universities are fundamentally eurocentric, and portray history as the story of the West's rise to global dominance.

Whereas the West's history is presented as one of progress, liberation, and enlightenment; the history of Islam and its people is presented as one of staticity, tyranny, and backwardness. Islam's contributions are only discussed in the context of their use by the West. The advancements made in the Islamic Golden Age are only important because the West could use them to ascend. For the most part, Islam has been portrated by Western academia and historiography as the subjugated, submissive, and passive other that is only active when engaged in some kind of barbarism.



Malcolm X, hero of Black liberation

The impact of this conception of Islamic history on Muslims is serious. If we internalize these narratives, our faith itself can be weakened. We will lose our connections to ourselves, our forefathers, and our tradition. We will have no role models and heroes of our own. We will not learn from any of our mistakes, and will be doomed to repeat them. We must therefore abstain from viewing our own history through the Western gaze.



Mohammed Abdullah Hassan, Somali scholar, poet, and anti-colonialist warrior

We must learn Islamic history from its primary sources. Chroniclers and scholars all across the Muslim world put emphasis on recording history, and their books and tomes are many. Those that have not been translated into English we must translate. Let us take inspiration from our heroes, who stood on the side of justice and truth.

If we study our history, we will begin to think historically. We will be able to see ourselves as part of a story beginning with the creation of Adam (peace be upon him). We will understand our need to carry on the legacy of the prophets, the companions, the saints, and our heroes - the legacy of justice and truth. We are living in a period that history will remember. All across the country, indeed across the world, people have risen up against racism and oppression in the wake of the murder of George Floyd. Taking inspiration from our history, we Muslims must be on the frontlines of this struggle.

Haghia Sophia

**'Twas in dreams that on your azan's wings I flew
'Twas through our hearts that separation's wind blew
But o'er our heads now shines victory's bright sun
Ended now is the night of shame and treason
Once more are heard the wisdoms of great men
The black and green banners are unfurled again!
In your grand hall the words of God we recite
Over your domes shines the Muhammadan light
Mount Hira has defeated Mount Olympus
The blessings of the Lord have come upon us!
Fatih's Haghia Sophia, thou art now free
O Aqsa! May we soon reach thee!**

-Adjzi

*Dedicated to all those who made the reopening of the
Haghia Sophia Grand Mosque possible.*

Berries, Moons & Water

She told me

She is the

"Dark(est)

girl

in

the

school."

Darling,

have we ever

asked planets

to apologize?

-Tariq Touré

Award-Winning Author of

Black Seeds and *2 Parts Oxygen*

Art

Fanâ

The goblet of Jem I'll smash to pieces
If by death nearer to You one reaches
I'll disappear into the shoreless sea
To obtain the love that never ceases

-Adjzi

Stop acting so small.
You are the universe in
ecstatic motion.

-Rumi

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