The notion of community and identity within the black ethos has centered around the concept of homogeny often in the past. From the Civil Rights Movement to the rallying cries of Black Panther protest, for African Americans ingroup belongingness and identity has traditionally been determined by the success of how well one assimilates into the unified front.

Thus, it would seem somewhat contradictory that in a gathering that boasts one of the largest collections of black, male intellectuals in the country that one might observe such an eclectic array of diversity, beliefs and lifestyles. The aforementioned “gathering” is more widely known as Morehouse College in Atlanta, Georgia. Morehouse College is one of the nation’s oldest and most renowned historically black colleges and universities. Since 1867, the mission of Morehouse has been to educate black men almost exclusively.

The way black culture is depicted in popular news media and other outlets, and to some extent in black Greek life within the college, might lead one to believe that homogeny is still the most influential determining factor of black identity. However, it takes only a small sampling of conversations with Morehouse students to realize that this is not the case.

Many Morehouse students have grown up in urban or suburban environments in which they have only been exposed to the isolated black social culture particular to their geography. Some students attended predominately white schools prior to coming to Morehouse. For them, the gamut of the black experience and socialization is a pleasantly surprising and undoubtedly positive culture shock.

One such student is Alex Duckworth, a senior English major who hails from Los Angeles, California. “I guess the fact that I’m from California automatically
makes me unique,” explains Alex. “Then, add to that that I’m from L.A. and I’m extra special.” Alex attended the predominately white Beverly Hills High School in Los Angeles. He says of his experience, “I’m glad I went there because I gained a lot of exposure to different types of music and the arts that I probably wouldn’t have gotten had I gone to a black high school in L.A.”

He goes on to explain, “I try to tell women all the time I’m not like a lot of these other dudes out here. I’m a writer, a music lover. I really appreciate art and the finer things in life. That’s my thing.” His appreciation of the finer things is evident as he peers at a passers-by through an expensive pair of oversized, flamboyant aviator sunglasses. “I guess the most unique thing about me is that I’m me. I’m not some cookie-cutter cut out wannabe from a Soulja Boy video. I’ve got my own sense of style and self, you know?”

Another Californian, Biko Haffar, shares similar views about his individuality. Admittedly, Biko’s vibe is quite different from the stereotypical Morehouse College student. His garb and laidback mannerisms suggest new-age hippy idealism meshed with the proud pro-black sentiment suggested in his namesake.

“A lot of people think I’m some kind of dirty hippy man,” he said. “I listen to old-school rock and roll and have a kind of easygoing persona, so I guess I am different from a lot of the business types you see around campus.” Yet, Biko is proud of his individuality, saying, “I wouldn’t have it any other way. I mean, can you really see me wearing a business suit to class everyday?”

Jeffery Johnson, a sophomore biology major, also represents a sense of individuality that is atypical to the stereotype. He belongs to a party promotion group, Young Kings, and says, “A lot of people would expect me to drink and smoke because of my affiliation, but I don’t do either.”

Instead, he passes the time playing guitar, practicing yoga, and painting. He says of his hobbies, “A lot of people don’t know that and wouldn’t expect that I do stuff like that.” He chuckles as he confides, “When my roommate isn’t in the room though, I put out my mat and put on my yoga video and I get in the zone.”