

ACTION – A NECESSITY, NOT AN OPTION

The recent passing in March of Archon John Hope Franklin of Alpha Tau Boulé of Durham, North Carolina, reminds us of the importance of African American history and its role in our quest for equality. Archon Franklin left a legacy of achievement rooted in the belief that education is the foundation of success. Almost fifty years ago, Malcolm X correctly observed, “Education is our passport to the future, for tomorrow belongs to the people who prepare for it today.” He challenged the youth of the 1960’s to understand that “without education, you’re not going anywhere in this world.” Malcolm’s observation was true then and is even truer today.

As the first decade of the twenty-first century closes, we must remind the youth of this century that a young, uneducated black male has no passport to the future. Unfortunately, the lack of education marks him as a prime candidate for the prison system, which has a population of more than 2 million people – approximately 46 percent of them black males. Recognizing this dilemma, the Boulé has supported social-action programs for several decades, and many member boulés have made social action an essential ingredient of their local programs.

While there are many exciting stories from member boulés across the Fraternity, let me briefly cite just one of many examples of what is possible. Kappa Boulé’s “Succeed With CREED” social-action program focuses on a select number of black male seventh graders from three Atlanta middle schools. Both Archons and Archousai participate in the program, which seeks to inspire and motivate these young men by emphasizing five words – Commitment, Responsibility, Education, Excellence and Discipline – that are the foundation of success, educational and otherwise. It matters not that only a few young men in Atlanta will be affected; what does matter is that Kappa Boulé is committed to doing something. Clearly the problems facing them present a substantial challenge, but if we embrace the notion “Each one save one,” we will have an impact if we work with others to uplift young black males. In other words, doing nothing is not an option. Thanks to the Grand Boulé Social Action Committee under the leadership of Archon Perrin Clark, several other excellent models have been posted on our Web site at sigmaphiphi.org.

These programs are commendable and badly needed, especially in our urban centers, where far too many talented young black males are stranded on the road to nowhere. Grand Sire Archon–Elect Rodney Reed, in his recent lecture “The Redesign of Urban Education: Challenges, Options and Vision,” delivered at Florida A&M University, described the status of many of our youths in public high schools. According to Archon Reed, “The graduation rate for black males is below 40 percent in at least thirty school districts throughout the nation, including Cincinnati, Chicago, Atlanta and New York.” In almost all of these cities we have member boulés, and we are proud of the extraordinary efforts some are making to deal with this moment of crisis.

Our opportunity to act is now. It doesn’t matter whether our impact is large or small. But doing something, whatever we can, is what matters. Not doing something is not an option. I recognize that encouraging more of our member boulés to get involved in social-action programs that have an impact on our youth is a challenge. We are all busy and financially strapped.



Grand Sire Archon Robert L. Harris

But don’t we have a responsibility to extend our influence so that our young can see similar possibilities in themselves?

Because of our status, we see many young black males who are on the path to education and success. They are our future, but so too are the boys who are not part of our inner circles – the young men who are marching backward into educational darkness. We must intervene regardless of the magnitude of the problem. Every young person steered in the right direction is a plus for society. We cannot rely on government to rescue them; government is not concerned about their salvation. Consider that California incarcerates youths at an annual cost of \$216,000 each but is unwilling to invest in preventive measures. Thus we and other organizations must intervene. Hopefully we will do so in partnership with others to maximize our collective impact.

Experience teaches that education is the enemy of oppression and the linchpin of empowerment and self-determination. Children, regardless of circumstances, are capable of learning if given the proper learning environment. High, not low, expectations are vital. As we reflect on our own success, we know that someone pushed us, and that was important to our belief in self. When we spend a few moments encouraging our young people to climb the mountain of success, it pays dividends. Many of you undoubtedly recall that over your careers you have spent time with young people who years later mentioned to you how influential you were in motivating them, even though you have no recollection of what you actually did. This is each of us doing what we can to enhance our social-action endeavors. I challenge each member boulé to look in the mirror and ask, “Are we doing what we can to help ensure the educational success of our young?” If we are “Boulé men doing great things,” the answer is apparent. Ω