

“YOUNG, GIFTED AND READY”

Too frequently we hear Archons rationalize away the absence of younger Archons among our ranks by asserting that “they are not yet ready for the Boulé.” Personally, I find this rationale not only unpersuasive but also inconsistent with the very foundation of our Fraternity. Today the average age of Archons exceeds 60 while the average age of the Founders of Sigma Pi Phi Fraternity was 32 and a half. They ranged from 25 to 58 years old, with all but one being under 40. A century later, some member boulés rarely, if ever, initiate an Archon under 40. They do not consider such men, because of their age, worthy of membership in the Boulé. They forget that the youthful vision of our Founders has anchored us solidly for 105 years. I suspect that if our Founders were with us today, they would be baffled at the “graying of the Boulé” and would ask, “Where are the young men? Where have they gone?”

Rather than remaining the youthful Fraternity our Founders established, we have evolved into a Fraternity of “senior” Archons, with limited opportunity to experience the vitality of youth in our ranks. We thus deprive ourselves of the talent and energy needed to make the Fraternity more viable, energetic and vibrant as we meet the challenges of the twenty-first century. Although some Archons firmly disagree with me, I fervently believe age is not a material factor for membership in the Boulé. Frankly, it is time to move beyond excuses and face the realities of today. We need younger members!

I applaud the leadership of those member boulés that are moving rapidly to ameliorate the age discrepancy. How have they done it? One of many examples is Beta Mu, which recently inducted an entrepreneur and a college president who were both in their mid-forties. Gamma Mu, Beta Upsilon, Chi and other member boulés in every Region have made age diversity a core value and done likewise by inducting some members who are under 40. And yes, I recently met an outstanding 30-year-old Archon who was inducted into Upsilon Boulé in September 2008. This age diversity is being achieved because Archons and membership councils, I am sure, are making it a priority, if not a requirement, to affirmatively seek out talented younger members. There is a natural tendency to artificially impose age as a barrier to leadership. Recall the incredible campaign of Barack Obama for President of the United States. As soon as he announced his candidacy, he was assailed by many who argued that he was too young for the office and should “wait until he was older” and more “experienced and seasoned.” This same argument is frequently made when a younger man is nominated for membership in the Boulé.

This argument ignores the fact that many significant changes—ultimately leading to desegregation and the attainment of civil rights for African Americans—were actually led by very young people. Let me reference, for example, Archons Fred Gray (Phi Boulé) and Martin Luther King, Jr. (Kappa Boulé). Archon Gray at age 24 took on the awesome task of representing and counseling Rosa Parks in 1955 when she refused to give up her bus seat to a white man, thus igniting the Montgomery bus boycott, which was pivotal to the Civil Rights Movement. Archon King, about the same age as Gray, was the young pastor of Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery who became the leader of the Montgomery Bus



Grand Sire Archon Robert L. Harris

Boycott and a major voice of the civil-rights struggle. Archon Gray subsequently became Archon King’s lawyer even though he was “fresh” out of law school. Yes, there were more senior lawyers and preachers who could have asserted themselves as the leaders of this struggle, but it was these two energetic young men who took center stage in changing the course of U.S. history. For Archons who have not yet read Archon Gray’s book *Bus Ride to Justice*, in which he details his early struggles for civil rights, I urge you to do so. And when he was assassinated at age 39, Archon King had achieved more than most men ever achieve. My point is a simple one: Our Fraternity suffers when we ignore the young. Vision, professional achievement, talent and a demonstrated commitment to community service should be the relevant factors for membership, not age. Every city is blessed with gifted young men, and they are ready for the Boulé.

I am delighted with the number of member boulés that are actively seeking out younger men for the Boulé. For those who hesitate, please join us. It is energizing and rewarding. This does not mean that older men should be excluded. Rather, integrating age diversity into our membership makes us a stronger, more viable Fraternity that is better positioned to get to know the best of one another. In so doing we honor our Founders, who understood that there are many men who are “young, gifted and ready” to become “Boulé men doing great things.” Ω