

## A TREE WITHOUT ROOTS....

### AN ARCHON WHO DOESN'T KNOW BOULÉ HISTORY

BY ARCHON LOREN R. DOUGLASS

GRAND SIRE ARCHON

This year, 2024, Sigma Pi Phi celebrates its 120<sup>th</sup> Anniversary. Few organizations can boast of that kind of longevity. The Boulé's strength and resilience consistent with that of our ancestors who have endured unspeakable trials since arriving on southern shores from Africa, in 1619. The fraternity has survived and thrived through the entire 20<sup>th</sup> century and well into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. As I've mentioned in previous articles, we've reached yet another inflection point in our evolution. We are well positioned to spring forward into a more energetic and vigorous future of fulfillment and self-determination. One cannot possibly appreciate the dignity and majesty of our fraternity without knowing from whence it came, its values, priorities, and lessons learned along the way.

The quote "***Someone who does not know their history is like a tree without roots,***" often attributed to Marcus Garvey, the early 20<sup>th</sup> century Jamaican political leader, activist, and proponent of the Pan Africanism movement, has broad applicability to many types of histories be it personal, national, industrial, and so forth. The point is that knowing the past and knowing it well can assist one's abilities to extrapolate the future by understanding the context, circumstances, and outcomes of the past. My article, ***The Power, and Privilege of Protocol*** (Fall Boulé Journal 2022) is the first call to action for Archons to intentionally and enthusiastically learn Boulé history, traditions, and values so that they will be equipped to demonstrate and convey the highest standards of an Archon.

During my campaign for Grand Sire Archon-Elect, I had the wonderful opportunity to fellowship with Archons in all five regions. My firsthand learnings about Archon views and preferences formed the basis of my platform. In other words, my travels amounted to one huge focus group discussion. Throughout the fraternity, there is lots of complaining about "Archon Quality." Based on the specifics of the complaints, that term means different things to different Archons. It has been used to describe men who have been inducted without the expected level of leadership, accountability, and level of responsibility, those who seem to either rarely or if ever comport themselves as men of taste and distinction, those who marginally share Archon character traits such as honesty, integrity, and respect, and even those who show absolutely no interest in the Boulé and what it means let alone have a desire to be in service to it. These descriptions are purely subjective, of course, and certainly can be reflections of personal preferences and biases. Rather than dismiss these criticisms as either unfair or overwrought, one may want to contemplate their underlying significance. If an Archon says to oneself, "I've never observed or met Archons that fit those descriptions," he may, in fact, be one of those Archons that others are complaining about.

Although we are comprised of **five regions**, we are **one fellowship**. Our cohesion and longevity are based on shared values and principles; likewise, divisions by age, geography, profession, either club or undergraduate fraternity affiliation (if any) have no place in Sigma Pi Phi. The intensity and prevalence of the complaints across the five regions suggests that something has clearly gone wrong in our culture, and it warrants immediate attention.

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A logical starting point in search of root causes for the problem is the candidate selection and induction process. Although unlikely, it is quite possible for a newly inducted Archon to not possess the qualities expected of an Archon. Such an outcome is possible if one or several of the below conditions is present:

- Flawed candidate selection process
- Incomplete or faulty Archon assimilation and indoctrination
- Lack of involvement of the sponsor(s) post induction
- Lack of sufficient sponsor knowledge and preparation
- Permissive member Boulé culture regarding protocols, values, & traditions

Membership in the Boulé is only as rewarding as the culture that defines it. A culture that deviates from its founding principles and values runs the risk of splintering and being exploited by those who seek to use the organization for purposes other than the common good of its members. While our overall cohesion is still intact, cracks are forming in our social and cultural foundations. Many have referred to the creeping and increasingly divisive influence of Archons who are overly reverential about their undergraduate fraternity affiliation or some other organization to which they share affiliation with other Archons. Increasingly, terminology, practices, paraphernalia adaptations from other organizations, posed photos with undergraduate fraternity hand signs, and other inappropriate gestures are finding their way into Boulé publications, social events, personal interactions, and other intrusive ways that are negatively impacting the tone and character of our culture. In the domain of the Boulé, we are not either Alphas, Kappas, Omegas, Guardsmen, or any other external organization. We are all Archons of Sigma Pi Phi Fraternity, bound together in a higher order of manhood. While one can be and should be proud of one's external affiliations, they simply have no place in the hallowed halls of Sigma Pi Phi. Going forward, we will reinforce our culture through deliberate practice of our protocols and traditions while engaging in careful study of our history. Also, we will firmly call out violations of our codes of conduct to protect the cohesion of our sacred fellowship.

We will strengthen our culture with positive energy while focusing on the future. We will bring dynamism, active learning, and positive engagement that will draw Archons inward rather than repel them. We will provide the tools and resources necessary to establishing a solid foundation for newer Archons who want to improve their knowledge of the fraternity or for longer tenured Archons who either simply want to refresh their memories or study unfamiliar territory. Our history is more than just "dates and places." Through careful study, one can learn the context and nuances and underlying influences that brought about certain outcomes. It is through that careful study that the significance of our rituals literally comes alive. It is through deliberate practice gained through participation in member Boulé, Regional, and Grand Boulé activities where the meaning and significance of our history, values, and protocols are reinforced.

It is never too late to start learning. In fact, I still pick up our history books and access Boulé Journals for reference. However, it's best to start an Archon on his own historical journey upon his induction when he

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is likely most inquisitive. Member Boulés have the primary responsibility for educating new Archons and for providing an environment where rituals and protocols are taught correctly. Member Boulé officers are accountable for learning the rituals and protocols and demonstrating them to everyone with fluency. Starting with recitation of the test oath from memory, Member Boulé officers should exemplify Boulé values and demonstrate unwavering commitment to them on an ongoing basis. Mentored by his sponsor who bears significant long-term responsibility and accountability for his candidate's development and behavior, a new Archon will surely flourish under this cocoon of support. Other Archons in the member Boulé can be of service to new Archons, also, through casual and member Boulé sponsored fraternal bonding as they get to know the best of one another. Overall, a newly inducted Archon is a blank sheet of paper that can be taught our values and protocols, properly, as he finds his place among our council of nobles. The sponsor can and should seek out the assistance of others as he mentors his sponsored Archon. Our history is vast and deep and no one person knows it all.

The office of the Grand Boulé is taking immediate action to improve the depth and breadth of our knowledge base. We will provide leadership, direction, and resources in assisting Archons on their respective journeys to greater knowledge of our history and protocols. The new administration has four committees whose charters are designed **to strengthen the fraternal bonds** in the fraternity. Two of those committees are specifically targeted towards training and strengthening the Archon induction process. The **Grand Boulé Induction Lifecycle Improvement Committee** and the **Grand Boulé Archon Development Committee** have been organized and launched and work is vigorously underway. Schedule of their deliverables will be published, widely. The mission of the **Induction Lifecycle Committee** is to *drive Archon quality enhancement through candidate selection & intake improvements*. Working across all five regions, the committee will develop a high-quality set of guidelines for organizing and managing the member **Boulé** candidate intake process. The hope is to harmonize and improve intake results without infringing upon the autonomy and prerogatives of member **Boulés**. The mission of the **Training Committee** is to *improve Archon knowledge base through online education and training*. Surveys indicate that Archons have a great desire to learn more about our history and traditions but have no systematic way of obtaining such knowledge. The Office of the Grand Boulé is developing these tools and resources in collaboration with Archons who are experienced educators, trainers, and the **Grand Boulé Technology Committee**. We will roll them out in phases and will include short examinations designed to reinforce the learnings.

We have learned through surveys and intensive interviews that Archons are ready for a deeper and more intimate relationship with the fraternity. They are looking for an experience that provides the extrinsic benefits of networking, career enhancement opportunities, and access to professional expertise. Archons are also seeking intrinsic benefits such a connection, fellowship, and greater sense of purpose that comes with being part of an organization of high standing and deep roots.

Sigma Pi Phi is an elite organization whose history is a testament to excellence achieved through perseverance and purpose. The intentionality of our founding, our principles, and the rituals that

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propagate them demonstrates the ethos upon which we must continue to select, induct, and indoctrinate new Archons and grow existing ones. **Seizing the future** requires us to strengthen our present. We must be firmly rooted in the totality of our credo so that we don't metaphorically tumble over due to a lack of grounding in the knowledge that made us great, in the first place. In other words, the challenge I put forth to all Archons of Sigma Pi Phi Fraternity...don't be a weak link by being a **"tree without roots."**

