

THE BOULÉ BEYOND: A CASE FOR EVOLUTIONARY CHANGE

***BY ARCHON LOREN R. DOUGLASS
GRAND SIRE ARCHON-ELECT***

Society has changed dramatically since the fraternity was founded in 1904. Although government sanctioned segregation no longer exists in America, the country remains divided in important ways. This fact may, in part, explain why the fraternity has endured for 120 years as the need that motivated the fraternity's founding has stubbornly persisted for well over a century.

The fraternity has seen its way through World Wars 1 and 2, the Great Depression, the promise of prosperity of the New Deal and through the turbulence of the Civil Rights era. The Boulé remained grounded during the heady days of the Apollo 11 lunar landing and never wavered during Watergate and the Vietnam War induced disillusionment in government that affected the country for a generation. We remained confident in ourselves during the apparent loss of American hegemony as evidenced by the Arab Oil Embargo of the 1970s and Archons served honorably as we've always done during America's emergence as the unipolar hyperpower during the dazzling liberation of Kuwait. We also mourned with the rest of the world during the shocking 9/11 attacks on New York City's World Trade Center.

As Americans, we were affected by all these past events and were profoundly shaped by their aftermaths. It can be argued that the election of Barack Obama was one of the most consequential events of American history. At the time, America was brimming with optimism as if it felt it had finally solved what Archon WEB Du Bois presciently wrote in his famous book, "The Souls of Black Folk" (1903) ***"The problem of the twentieth century.....the color line."*** In hindsight, it seems that President Obama's election may have unexpectedly set off a chain of events, most notably the undermining of long-established constitutional rights and protections that have since shaken the pillars of the United States of America to its very foundations.

Today, Black Americans find themselves in unfortunately challenging similar circumstances parallel to those of post-civil war reconstruction era. What we, as the talented tenth, do now could have a profound impact on how much history reflects the future.

In more recent generations, Archons and Archousai have started families later in life as more career opportunities have become available to women from which they were once excluded. Managers, professionals, tenure track faculty have all taken longer routes to career progress than past generations for one reason or another. Many dual career families must juggle the demands of two careers while raising a family. The professions have found themselves evolving substantially as technology, changing business models, and industry dynamics have made it harder and take longer to reap the same rewards as in the past. Globalization, rapid technological changes, and

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deregulation created fundamental changes in the world's economies resulting in the changing nature of work and our individual relationships to it. As the concept of retirement has evolved, Archons are working longer into their traditional retirement years and fortunately living healthier, more productive lives much later in life than in the past. All these demographic changes have driven the need for a Boulé that responds to the changed personal and professional needs of Archons in all stages of life. With 21st century technology, corporate downsizings, globalization, mergers, and acquisitions, gridlocked tenure tracks, and other macro-economic and demographic trends, there has been great interest in self-determination through entrepreneurship. Disruptions caused by the pandemic have created a sense of urgency as it exposed vulnerabilities in the economic safety net of Black Americans at all levels. Likewise, Archons are looking to invest what little precious time that they have into value-added pursuits that help them address their most pressing needs and those of their families. Archons will "vote with their feet" if it's perceived that there is nothing to be gained by being involved with Boulé activities.

During the campaign, my team conducted an online survey and learned that Archons wanted five things:

- **Tighter bonds through fellowship, tradition, and values regardless of location;**
- **Assertive, bold leadership in everything we do;**
- **Innovation through technology, wherever possible;**
- **Wealth creation for each other and the Boulé Foundation; and**
- **Greater stake in each other's success through active networking and business collaboration**

It is timely to account for these preferences as we contemplate the Boulé's future if the fraternity wants to remain relevant and competitive for an Archon's time and attention. I heard many of the same themes as I traveled the country, so there was no obvious correlation by region, by profession, or stage of life. These themes proved universal and resonated across all five regions.

With current membership at over 5,600 Archons across five regions and with two "international" member boulés (London, UK and Nassau, Bahamas) we've grown larger and have become more complex given that our business processes must now accommodate other laws, currencies, and business practices. We now have member boulés in Europe and in the Caribbean which have drawn in Archons reared in countries other than the United States but with similar exclusionary life experiences as American Blacks. The fraternity has become more complex as the needs of the regions and member boulés became an even higher priority during the pandemic which were addressed through enhanced engagement, multi-channel communications and virtual collaboration capabilities. Working across boundaries -- geographical, regional, and member Boulé -- became the norm and the fraternity has organically divided labor and achieved synergies through cost-sharing, sponsorship opportunities, and other forms of leveraging each other. Each

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region has a distinct culture, prominent industries, leading institutions, and professional landscapes which feed the wonderful professional diversity that we find in the Boulé. What works for one region may not work for another, so a one size fits all approach to conceiving, organizing, and executing events is suboptimal. The need has developed for a more flexible environment that accommodates the larger size, diverse needs, and cultures of today's organization. Regional collaboration was largely born from the need to leverage the collective energies and share resources but with the flexibility to "do their own thing." It's a well-known fact of organizational development that as organizations grow, they may need to change their structures, processes, or culture to effectively manage the increased scale and complexity of operations and the demands placed upon them.

Innovation in the Boulé is one of the desired attributes that Archons identified when surveyed. Specifically, Archons are interested in innovation through smart application of technology. Capabilities such as being able to locate professional expertise within the Boulé and having a mobile phone app of our directory for ease of communications are among the types of capabilities identified by Archons. There is no reason for Boulé innovation to begin and end with technology applications, we can adapt our organization to accommodate the new realities of a globalized society and post-pandemic economy. Expanding our reach through strategic partnerships and coalitions will help optimize our resources and extend our networks as described in my previous Boulé Journal article entitled, ***Strategic Coalitions: Extending our reach***. Unleashing the creativity and enterprising spirit of the Boulé by connecting each other through technology as referred to by my networking article. (***Let's Make a Deal: Creating Archon Wealth through Innovative Collaboration***) can spur innovations with new modes of collaboration that may make location and other constraining factors irrelevant. Change can spur innovation if faced head-on. The conditions are present, Archons want it, we have the means to do it, then why not do so? When? How about right now! With significant growth has come increased operational complexity. More member boulés generate more data that needs to be managed and processes that need to be coordinated and harmonized.

As the Boulé is decentralized by its very nature and is organized in a hub and spoke structure, our information systems are more critical than ever. The increasing complexity and cost of operations has created the need to rationalize costs and streamline processes. Our long overdue investment in technology along with our current state of broken and disconnected business processes make critical tasks like maintaining an up-to-date accurate master directory an extremely difficult task. Recent changes in the Office of the Grand Boulé have set us in the right direction as we modernize the fraternity for today's needs and for future demands. With the hiring of Archon Executive Director Gaines, we are well on our way to addressing some of our most pressing operating

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challenges. He has brought decades of corporate and professional experience and knows how to scale operations and improve productivity by streamlining processes and eliminating redundancies. Our ability to be virtually connected, efficiently share information, and collaborate regardless of location is related to efficacies of our technology backbone. Without a solid technology infrastructure, creating spaces for intensive networking, on demand connections, and functioning collaboration channels would simply be too costly and complicated to execute. Many of the tools that can facilitate our new capabilities are readily available and off the shelf. That being said, the fraternity must engage in significant process analysis and optimization before implementing technology solutions. Failure to do so simply speeds up broken processes or simply makes them easier to break down. Likewise, if we want to modernize our technology infrastructure, some level of organizational change must occur.

Assertive and bold leadership has been part of our culture from the fraternity's founding. Since 1915, the fraternity has recognized its need to be involved in shaping policy issues that directly affect Black people and our communities. For over one hundred years the fraternity has experimented with various iterations of a central body whose objective is to harness the collective energy and expertise within the fraternity for this very purpose.

Starting in 1915 with the **Public Welfare Committee**, to the **National Policy and Action Committee** in 1946, to the **Public Policy Planning Committee**, the precursor to today's **Public Policy Committee**, **the fraternity has evolved to meet the moment**. It was Past Grand Sire Archon-Elect Eddie Williams, in the late 1990s who made the persuasive case for the fraternity to be more directly and consequentially involved in the policy making process in a non-partisan and solution-oriented manner. It was Archon Williams who provided the original framework and vision for our work on behalf of Black America. Given this well-established history, it is neither new nor unprecedented that the fraternity actively engages elected leaders and policy makers on its own terms. Likewise, Archons need not be concerned that the fraternity is veering off course when it does so. We've been doing it for over a century.

Recent policy setbacks in areas like affirmative action, voting rights and other policy evolutions are motivating the vigorous drive towards creating more opportunities for self-determination. This effort requires us to build networks and establish coalitions that extend our reach beyond our existing purview. Accruing influence through collaborations will broaden and deepen our impact in those priority areas that we choose. Highly ranked organizations, according to the **S.C.A.N.** strategic partner selection paradigm to which I originally referred in a past Boule Journal article (***Globalizing the Boule and Why it Matters***), will need an established channel with which to coordinate if we are to make consistent progress in the coming years. Unfortunately, without

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the ability to establish and build long term relationships given our relatively short office tenures, our strategic initiatives risk perpetually stalling in start-up mode as administrations come and go. Establishing relationship continuity will go a long way towards strengthening our ability to conceive, develop, and execute medium to long range plans with organizations with congruent objectives and cultures. Additionally, having the ability to maintain consistent focus will enable execution over extended time periods and not be subject to the shifting priorities of changing administrations.

In tandem with helping to shape public policy and impact in their communities, Archons have expressed a great desire to have what was described as “extrinsic” and “intrinsic” connections with other Archons. In addition to the intimate personal connection through tighter fraternal bonds forged while “getting to know the best of one another,” Archons also wanted the means to build business and networking relationships that fulfill the “collective action” part of our credo. Succinctly stated, Archons wish to do business together (e.g., wealth creation) along with the emotional affirmation that comes with our sacred fellowship. Having surveyed and spoken with Archons across all five regions, delivering on these preferences would drive greater Archon satisfaction and contribute to Archon retention. Either enhancing or clarifying the value-proposition for membership in Sigma Pi Phi would surely help promote more Archon engagement in Boulé activities. The good news is that we do not need wholesale change. With the right tools, the fraternity can evolve to accommodate these emerging needs and wants.

The Boulé Pillars

At each stage of the Boulé’s evolution, the organization has erected a pillar upon which our values and priorities are manifest. The fraternity was started as a sacred fellowship with the enduring purpose of providing a professional and social refuge for men of like minds and tastes. **The Boulé Foundation** was founded as the fraternity turned outward to project its gifts for the benefit of our communities. Our social responsibility is in part greatly enabled by the existence of the Foundation and with the brilliant stewardship of Past Grand Sire Anthony Hall and the Boulé Foundation board. The Boulé 1904 PAC has been the vehicle through which the Boulé has channeled its efforts to influence the policies and processes that impact our communities and our priorities. As Boulé PAC Chairman, I am working extremely hard to extend the reach of our bipartisan committee that creates relationships and pathways in the corridors of power where we either have limited or no presence. In my estimation, there is one more milestone in our evolution for us to reach and that is an efficient and impactful way for Archons to engage in collective action. For us to **Seize the Future**, we must organize for the future, using modern methods and techniques and utilizing the tools available to us. As the “dream and glory of our ancestors” we have an unprecedented opportunity to advance the agenda by harnessing the creative energies

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and unleashing them for innovation and dynamism of which our esteemed fraternity is capable.

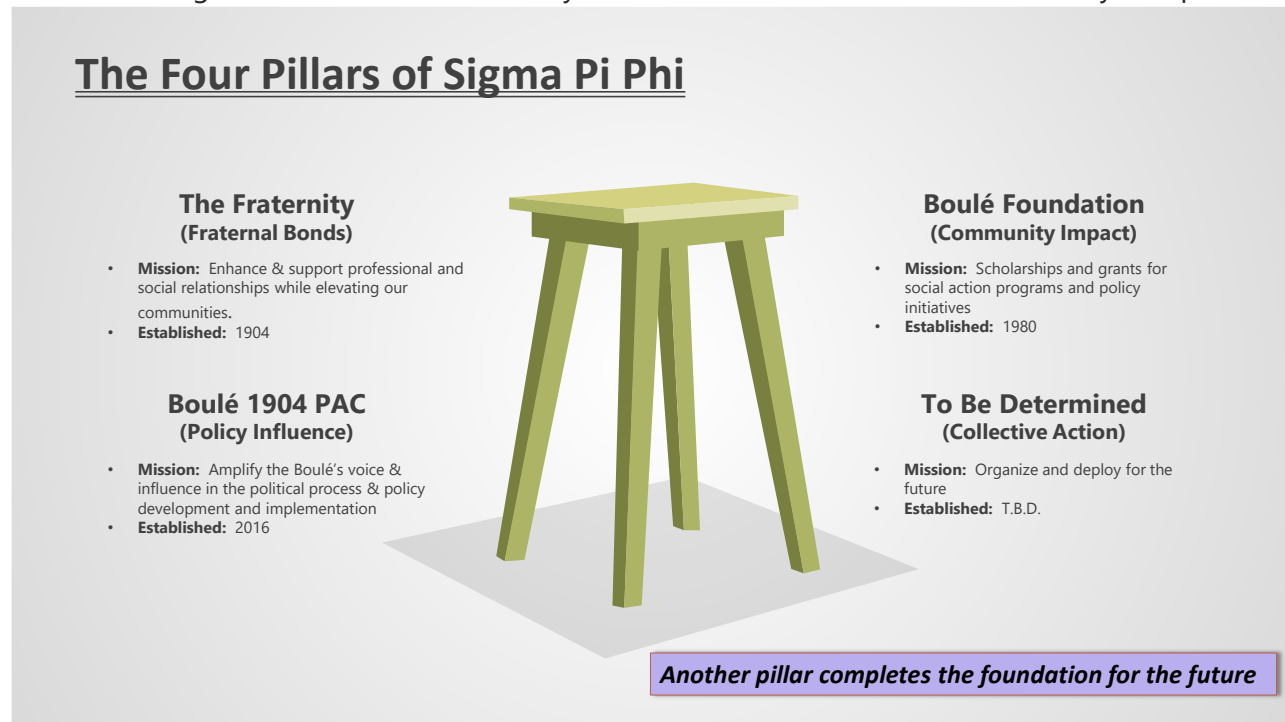


Figure 1: The way forward.....

Adding another pillar completes the foundation and gives everyone a lane in which to connect. In fact, it changes the way we look at the fraternity itself. If one wants the social benefits of fraternity, there's a lane for you. If policy impact is your thing, the PAC offers an avenue for your engagement. Same for the Boulé Foundation as it relates to one's commitment to community engagement. Should an Archon want to get involved with one's area of interest, there is an avenue for him. There is no organized venue in the fraternity "for collective action" that is part of the second half of the Credo. This is an opportunity for creating an entity that provides a structure that can organize, fund, and deploy resources in an efficient and cost-effective manner. During the campaign, my team surveyed Archons, nationally, and found strong demand for an avenue offering professional development, networking, and wealth creation.

With this additional pillar, Archons who desire these attributes will see and feel the value proposition for which they have sought and thus will remain active. Those that have gone inactive due to frustration of feeling unfulfilled may be reclaimed.

The fourth pillar will create a framework for the fraternity to efficiently collaborate with other organizations with similar goals and objectives. Given the changes in policy and macroeconomic factors such as rapid technological change, globalization, and deregulation have so profoundly

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changed life in the US, self-determination is now more important than ever. Having the capability to efficiently deploy resources towards priorities that extend our capabilities and networks in pursuit of economic and social empowerment, the fourth pillar provides the platform to do so with purpose and flexibility. In a world of “it’s not what you know, it’s who you know,” extending the Boulé’s reach via the fourth pillar is a natural evolution. In fact, it’s a physical embodiment of our founder’s values and priorities in the same fashion as the other three pillars. The fourth pillar is the organic outgrowth of the expressed wants and desires of Archons for the ability to work together, do business together, bring down barriers impeding mobility to “the next level.”

Since 1904, Sigma Pi Phi has been the paragon of resilience. We’ve adapted to the tectonic changes in the world around us while staying true to the traditions and values upon which we were founded. Standing at the precipice of a new era and having traversed nearly one quarter of the twenty-first century, our challenge is not only one of adaptation, but also one of leadership. We must adapt so that we can lead in the manner that will be required of us in the coming decades.

My campaign theme of “**Seize the future**” is reflective of the pent-up energy and enthusiasm in Archons in all regions, and in all generations, professions, parties, and points of view to get going on leading from the front as we confront some of the biggest issues facing us in the 21st century. Many things are already happening as Archon and Archousai self-start and take the initiative and lead in their respective regions, cities, and member boulés. It’s time to organize, build, and unleash that energy and creativity on a global scale in unprecedented ways.

Past Grand Sire Archon Harvey Russell said in his inaugural address at the 1978 Grand Boulé, “**As we have a collective duty to each other and to all those who have gone before us, to the traditions and history of Sigma Pi Phi, We also have a clear duty to be effective not only as individuals, but as an organization – an organization that is clearly in a position to affect change instead of react to it.**” Past Grand Sire Archon Russell led us boldly during his tenure, and his words and actions defined the Boulé’s agenda during the 1980s. His leadership led to the chartering of the first international member boulé (Beta Theta, Liberia) and the establishment the Sigma Pi Phi Foundation, the precursor to the Boulé Foundation and the second pillar of the fraternity. Past Grand Sire Archon Russell sensed the moment and seized it.

In the Fall Boulé Journal, my article ended by stating, “*Let the innovation begin!*” Given all that is happening in the fraternity, the recent success of the regional and national Boulé Economic Empowerment Summits, and the reawakening of the spirit of the founders and their original intent, it’s safe to say...” the innovation has already begun.

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