



GLOBALIZING THE BOULÉ AND WHY IT MATTERS

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Globalization and rapid technological change have had a profound impact on the American political economy, our institutions and on the American psyche. Lower prices, greater cultural awareness, speedier travel, online shopping, instant access to information due to the internet, mobile computing and social media among other benefits have spawned new industries, new markets, and an overall feeling

of connectedness and human progress. While each has, together and separately, produced undeniable benefits to the black community, as they have for the rest of America, they have also produced starkly negative cultural and political consequences that are being felt disproportionately by black and brown people nationwide. Although Archons and our families have largely been on the winning side, re-

cent trends may threaten hard-won 20th century gains and render our fraternal values more important than ever. This article attempts to restate the case for international expansion, taking into account our current circumstances and the disturbing trends that create the need for a stronger, more global Sigma Pi Phi as a resource for black advancement.

Globalization's first wave, starting in the 1960's, was the culmination of U.S. economic dominance post WWII as U.S. commercial, agricultural and industrial enterprises increasingly sought trade opportunities with sovereign nations. Through the Marshall Plan, the U.S. helped rebuild those war-ravaged Western European and Japanese economies and turned them into prolific trading partners. Additionally, African decolonization and the opening up of China during the Nixon administration provided even more fertile ground for American capital investment, goods and services. Firms moving production to low-cost foreign locations forced countless blue-collar manufacturing jobs overseas, leaving those without college degrees out of work and with fewer prospects (Johnson, Burtney and Ghorm, 2008). With technological innovations in communications, networking technology and computing, knowledge-based white-collar jobs are now being exported to Asia and other locales, thus bringing financial insecurity to sectors previously thought of as immune to outsourcing (ibid). Resulting from these systemic advances, white-collar workers in low-cost countries became, in effect, direct competitors to white-collar workers in the U.S., thus it became profitable to move these jobs at the expense of the American worker. Politically, globalization's profound effects have produced reactionary political leaders (e.g., Trump, Le Pen, et al.) around the world and have triggered tribalist instincts among those non-blacks that have found themselves vulnerable to the ex-

cesses of a globalized economy unfettered by the counterbalance of regulations and organized labor forces.

While Sigma Pi Phi's 114-year mission of "binding men of like qualities...that they may know the best of one another" and engage in "concerted action" is still highly relevant, necessary and desirable, the Boulé must globalize in order to strengthen our ability to be a counter-balance against the alienating cultural and political forces largely still at work since our founding in 1904. Fortunately, Sigma Pi Phi is uniquely positioned to leverage the collective talents and resources of peoples of the African Diaspora as a bulwark against increasing hostility to black progress, our humanity and our legitimate claim to equal opportunity.

Impact of Globalization on the American Economy

After a period of economic security and prosperity, challenges for black professionals and their families have intensified as globalization and technological innovation have increasingly forced high-skill white-collar jobs overseas and the associated prosperity along with them. The first wave of globalization began in earnest in the early 1960's and continues to this day (Johnson, Burtney and Ghorm, 2008). Nationally, 7.2 million jobs have been lost in the U.S. since 1979 (Bureau of Labor Stats, 2005). By 2009, the number of manufacturing jobs declined by almost 50 percent from 1979 peak levels (ibid). Because of the unskilled nature of mass production, particularly in the automotive and steel industries, sectors at the leading edge of the economy starting in the 1930's, workers with relatively little education could earn a living wage. As African Americans did not have equal access to education with whites, blacks were especially dependent on the manufacturing sector for upward social mobility (Persaud and Lusane, 2000). When the

manufacturing jobs went offshore to lower-cost locations, the black unemployment rate (10.8%) was double the national unemployment rate (5.4%) and 6.2 percentage points higher than the white unemployment rate (4.6%). Additionally, the unemployment rate rose faster for blacks (3.2%) than it did for whites (1.1%) (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2005). Clearly, the exodus of jobs due to offshoring hit black blue-collar workers especially hard.

The shift from manufacturing to services and knowledge-based industries meant that educated blacks had access to relatively secure employment, higher pay and more benefits. Additionally, such jobs provided access to better avenues to wealth accumulation such as credit, stocks, bonds and mutual funds (Persaud and Lusane). The upper rungs of the service sector, which include professionals in information technology, consultants, executives, upper-level managers, medical, legal and other knowledge-based professionals, were fortunate to experience the increasing incomes and wealth as compared to the stagnation experienced by the less fortunate contingent service workers (e.g., security personnel, food service workers, unskilled personal services, drivers, etc.) (ibid). As the security restrictions imposed after the 9/11 terrorist attacks restricted the flow of vital foreign talent into the United States, U.S.-based firms began shifting white-collar functions offshore, where talent resided and markets were growing. Initially, starting with significant portions of their research and development (R&D) activities, the new facilities in the developing world were as sophisticated and productive as those in the U.S., if not more so. Although it remains unclear how African Americans have been affected by the offshoring of white-collar jobs, occupational niches with large numbers of black workers (e.g., human resources management, sales, marketing, etc.) are particularly vulnerable (Johnson, Burthey and Ghorm, 2008). Business Process Out-

sourcing – a range of business functions including supply-chain management, operations, sales and marketing – moved offshore starting in the 1990's. More recently, the trend is moving up the value chain to higher order knowledge-intensive functions such as banking and finance services, legal services, animation and design, medical services, and research and development (Bhandari, 2003, and Wiki: Knowledge Process Outsourcing). There are no verifiable data on how these trends have impacted the black community generally and the pool of qualified Archon candidates specifically. Undeniably, a worsening wealth gap and a shrinking middle class has created hostile reactions to black and brown advancement, thus giving rise to reactionary leaders, voter suppression, gerrymandering and other actions designed to disenfranchise minorities.

Wealth created by globalization and the tech revolution has almost entirely excluded black Americans. In fact, a 2016 report by the Institute of Policy Studies concludes regarding the wealth divide, “[I]f left unaddressed and not exacerbated over the next 8 years, median black household wealth is on a path to hit zero by 2053 – about 10 years after it is projected that racial minorities will compose the majority of the nation’s population.” By comparison, median white household wealth will climb from \$86,100 (2016) to \$137,000 and to \$147,000 by 2073. Being the majority with zero median wealth could likely result in an American version of apartheid, where one can clearly envision previously unthinkable modifications to “one person, one vote” and voter suppression being further institutionalized as barriers to black influence. Although it’s uncertain how globalization is impacting the professions and other knowledge-based corporate and university jobs, worsening adverse wealth patterns could possibly render education opportunities exorbitantly expensive and out of reach for many, and depress the likely talent pool

from which future Archons will be drawn in the latter half of the 21st century.

What We Should Do About It

It is entirely reasonable that Sigma Pi Phi respond to globalization and technological change in the same way that American corporations responded – globalize and innovate. American corporations led the way by diversifying supply chains, thus seeking cost and logistical advantages that made sourcing materials and labor better, cheaper and faster. Additionally, these firms increasingly cultivated technical and management talent wherever it could be found, thus saving the cost of relocating American expatriates and other advantages. The Boulé is poised to copy this response in cultivating talent and ideas wherever they can be found, thus following the same trends that have already profoundly changed America. This is especially strategic since, increasingly, immigrants are a growing share among black Americans (Pew Research Center, 2013). Roughly a third of blacks (34%) living in the Miami metro area are immigrants. In the New York metro area, that share is 28 percent, and in Washington, D.C., it is 15 percent. Nationally, the black immigrant population has quadrupled while its percentage share has tripled since 1980 (ibid). Clearly, the composition of the U.S. black community is changing along with the economy and is increasingly foreign born.

Discussion of expanding the Boulé outside of the United States actually started in 1968 when Grand Grammateus George N. Redd reported that an inquiry had been received relative to setting apart a new boulé in Liberia (THE BOULÉ JOURNAL, Fall 1968). Africa and the Caribbean (e.g., U.S. Virgin Islands, Puerto Rico, Trinidad and Jamaica) were the first locations that were proposed. Archon Raymond Pace Al-

exander (Alpha Boulé) at the 30th Grand Boulé (Miami Beach, Florida) specifically challenged the body during the Memorial Address for the first foreign-soil boulés to be established in Nigeria and Liberia (THE BOULÉ JOURNAL, Fall 1968, p.23, and Fall 1970, p.5).

The conceptual case for international expansion was originally made during the 31st Grand Boulé by Archon John W. Davis (Zeta Boulé). He recalls how “from the beginning...the key of Sigma Pi Phi [is] to open doors to let the future in, to give reality and recognition to its pluralistic nature and to establish and perpetuate quality in brotherhood.” He further observes that “this fraternal dimension includes the terms of our own interest and concern and also the aspiration of like-minded men of an international concourse of lands and nations far from our own national and regional boundaries.” (Reed, pp.369-370; THE BOULÉ JOURNAL, Summer 1972) It was during that biennium that the Grand Boulé Executive Committee was specifically given the authority “to study and advance a new international dimension of Sigma Pi Phi Fraternity” (ibid).

With the intellectual and practical foundation established by 1974, the effort ran into immediate roadblocks to progress. Upon reflection of the happenings in the world during the mid to late 1970’s, it’s understandable that the environment was not conducive to international expansion. Geopolitical instability characterized by multiple coups d’état in Africa, radical nationalism in the Caribbean and Latin America, Arab oil embargos, two U.S. recessions, hyperinflation in the U.S. and abroad, the Cold War, and the growing cynicism citizens in the West had toward their respective governments and institutions (e.g., Watergate) all had a muting effect on Boulé expansion efforts (THE BOULÉ JOURNAL, Summer/Fall 1974, pp.63-64; Summer 1976, p.56). Also, an indifferent U.S. foreign policy to-

wards Africa, African people and their countries didn't help, either. It took little over a decade from the original stated intent to develop the necessary relationships, contacts and infrastructure to charter the first *boulé* on foreign soil. Ten distinguished citizens of Liberia were inducted into Beta Theta *Boulé* (Monrovia, Liberia) on December 2, 1978 (THE BOULÉ JOURNAL, Winter 1978). While Beta Theta *Boulé* became inactive due to unfortunate circumstances of the Liberian coup in 1980, undeterred, the Grand *Boulé* chartered Delta Lambda *Boulé* (Nassau, Bahamas) on February 5, 1994. As further demonstration of the Fraternity's commitment to global reach, the 55th Grand *Boulé* will be hosted in Nassau, Bahamas, which will be the first Grand *Boulé* held outside of the United States.

Archon Davis, chair of the International Expansion Committee, states in his report to the 33rd Grand *Boulé* that international expansion strengthens the "understanding of the common elements and destiny...a call for the unity of mankind...for sharing creatively in the emerging destiny of people not set apart by delimiting and demeaning words of separation and description" (ibid). Seeking out those of the African Diaspora who share our values and have achieved professional distinction in their home countries is an idea whose time has come.

Epsilon Xi *Boulé* (London), set apart by Zeta *Boulé* (New York City) in 2016, has quickly established itself as the hub to blacks on the European Continent. Composed of distinguished Archons from a broad array of industry sectors (i.e., government, finance, publishing, the arts, fashion, law), Epsilon Xi *Boulé* provides the richness, the depth and breadth of experience for their Archons that is befitting of the future we will build for our fraternity. The current Sire Archon, Ian Greenstreet, has invested tremendous time and effort integrating Epsi-

lon Xi into the Northeast Region and into the Grand *Boulé* framework. Zeta *Boulé* and Epsilon Xi *Boulé* have a very close relationship as New York Archons and London Archons routinely traverse the Atlantic on business and vacations only to be met with warm receptions, brunches and dinners by the host Archons and Archousai. Recently, Zeta *Boulé* Archons hosted Archon Andrew Ramroop, profiled in the fall 2018 BOULÉ JOURNAL, for a fellowship-filled dinner, where we learned about his unique experiences and his plan to help spur development in his home country, Trinidad. Zeta and Epsilon Xi officers routinely attend each other's events, share local *boulé* news, and phone and text on a regular basis as we vigorously build a robust foundation for transmitting our values and strategies for global collaboration. Looking forward, Epsilon Xi *Boulé*'s proximity to Africa provides strategic and logistical advantages as we evaluate re-establishing an African presence for Sigma Pi Phi.

Benefits to "Globalizing the Boulé"

The Grand *Boulé* International Committee, which I currently chair, will be a catalyst for building an international network of black professionals from which we can build mutually beneficial relationships. Depending on interest and sustainability, we will charter a *boulé* in a foreign country as foundation for deeper and permanent engagement. Aligning our efforts along the SCAN paradigm (e.g., Skills, Credibility, Assets/Access, Networks), a framework that I've developed to help guide our efforts, we hope to build a global network of high-achieving black men, brought together by shared values, united in purpose and motivated by self-improvement and intellectual curiosity.

Besides the lofty ideals of shared destiny and pooling of resources, globalizing the *Boulé*

at this point in history just makes sense. While global conditions are much more conducive today, forty years after establishing our first international *boulé*, we face troubling challenges to 20th century civil rights gains here at home. Through global expansion, we will strengthen the following:

- **Skills:** Promote resource accretion (e.g., expertise, experiences, frameworks)
- **Credibility:** Build alliances that provide a seat at the table of the global agenda and a counter-balance to tribalism and exclusionary politics
- **Assets/Access:** Secure access to broader inventory of ideas, approaches and channels to possible bi-directional investment
- **Networks:** Enhance collective action through access to broader networks and promote relationship development and social connections (social and cultural capital)

“Scanning” the globe for network and brand building opportunities is the organizing principle of the current thrust to our international expansion. Connecting the African Diaspora will allow the *Boulé* to act locally while thinking and acting globally through building connections and familiarity through collaboration on common issues. An infrastructure that enables smart global thinking and action while getting to know the best of one another can help our people reverse the troubling wealth and political trends that threaten our future fraternal growth here in the U.S. Furthermore, as American companies can no longer be counted on to provide long-term security, globalizing the *Boulé* could help facilitate incubation, support, future growth and prosperity of black-owned businesses, which are far more likely to em-

ploy African Americans than white-owned firms in the same business niches (Boston and Ross, 1997).

It’s fair to wonder how we would execute on our mission of globalizing our brand and our relationships. First, we would strategically target those countries that have a critical mass of black influencers (e.g., public sector, private sector, clergy, the arts, etc.), where Sigma Pi Phi’s values are a natural fit with those demonstrated by their own policies and initiatives. Where there is black wealth, whether it be financial, cultural, political or intellectual, there is black influence. Given that institutions (i.e., churches, non-profits, think tanks, etc.) require considerable access to wealth in order to build and sustain themselves, target countries are likely to be those with significant black financial wealth that also satisfy several other important criteria. Likewise, we will have access to candidate prospects beyond corporate and entrepreneurial types and will include all of the professions as well as technologists, scientists and other academics. It is through constructive interaction that we’d build personal relationships, identify and vet the talent, give life to the initiatives/relationships, and create the impact by pursuing initiatives that make sense for them to partner with us and vice-versa (Bender, 2018). Chartering a *boulé* would happen organically as purposeful and intensive collaboration would establish a strong personal and professional foundation from which a sustainable *boule* could be built. In those countries where the conditions are already mature, we can charter a new *boulé* under the sponsorship and mentorship of an existing *boulé* that is willing to commit the time and resources necessary to successfully complete the task.

Concluding remarks

In the words of Archon Davis in 1972, “Our international colleagues and the Archons of Sigma Pi Phi Fraternity will enjoy the values of close association and mutual cultural exchange, which will result from the cross-fertilization of ideas and the currents of inevitable change (Reed, p.370). He further asserts that “Internationalism is only a rhetorical expression of long established human relationships and an acknowledgement of the common destiny and kinship of mankind. We no longer belong to a small class but to a corporate body of great dimensions” (ibid). Although spoken nearly forty years ago, Archon Davis’s views are more relevant today as globalization, affordable travel and technological innovation have reduced the globe’s physical space through virtual means of global production, communication and collaboration. Although globalization has resulted in persistent and worsening income inequality for all Americans and citizens abroad, it has not resulted in the global geopolitical instability that we witnessed in the 1970’s, at least not yet. Additionally, hyperinflation is no longer a concern as global productivity gains and a globalized labor force have kept commodity and labor prices in check. In fact, deflation may be more of a concern in some countries. Smart use of collaboration and communications technologies along with leveraging the existing global reach of Archons and their public sector and private sector networks can effectively reduce the cost and the risk of venturing into foreign locales. Additionally, boulés in gateway locations (i.e., New York, Bahamas, London, etc.) are an indispensable resource as we develop our country entry strategies. Each would provide critical expertise, relationships and resources that would be useful in executing our global ambitions.

In response to our need to extend Sigma Pi Phi’s reach beyond our current borders, the Grand Boulé has made specific provisions for our international expansion by firmly establishing the imperative in our strategic plan. Goal 2 of the plan explicitly states: [to] Enhance the International Presence of Sigma Pi Phi Fraternity. As such, the International Committee will deploy the S.C.A.N. framework in seeking out opportunities to enhance the international prominence of the Fraternity while also recommending initiatives designed to have a positive impact in selected African Diasporic countries consistent with the expertise and interest of member boulés and groups (Grand Boulé Strategic Plan, 2018). The strategic imperative for expansion has been established and our priorities have been aligned to the mission. All that is left is for us to execute with care, forethought and discipline.

In a March 1913 address before the American Historical Society, Archon Henry Minton, one of the Boulé’s illustrious founders, concluded his formal remarks by stating that “our salvation as a race depends more upon commercial success than upon any other one factor” (Minton, 1913). Given the disparate effects of the economic globalization’s powerful forces, Archon Minton’s assessment of the African American condition in 1913 holds equal, if not greater, weight today (Johnson, p. 893). Globalizing the Boulé, with its enhanced networks, access to global resources and social connections, is a necessary pillar in the framework upon which we can build our future. Cultivating talent and ideas wherever they can be found and assembling the Diaspora’s best and brightest in fraternal union responds to the fundamental shifts that have taken place since our founding in 1904. Establishing a global footprint will harness our collective talents as they are sorely needed in these times of social, economic and political uncertainty.