

## **What If the NPHC 1990 Ban On Pledging Was Not Successful? A Critical Examination**

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Between the 1920's and 1990, pledging historically Black fraternities and sororities was a mode of cultural expression that became more violent over time (Kimbrough, 2003). The pledge process often consisted of walking in lines, dressing alike, and taking direct orders from older members. Kimbrough (2003) acknowledges it was clear pledging members were second-class citizens as early as the 1930s. In February 1990, the national presidents and leaders of eight of the nine major Black fraternities and sororities met and with consensus, banned the pledge process. After the ban, each organization established a membership intake process (MIP) which focused on an intensive education period streamlined and implemented by the national organization. National organizations also took on the responsibility of accepting applications and the selection of potential new members, thus removing the responsibility of developing new members almost completely from local members in hopes of curbing risk. However, violence and risk continued to plague the membership process. Crenshaw (2004) & Kimbrough (2014) concluded the membership intake process was largely a failure as the majority of members continued to participate in pledge activities in addition to the membership intake process activities.

There are three main implications of the ban regarding membership development in historically Black fraternities and sororities. These implications will be explored through the lens of college students, fraternity and sorority staff, and college administrators:

### **Underground Pledge Activities**

The ban did not truly rid Black fraternities and sororities of pledge activities, they just became more dangerous and risky as they simply moved from mostly open activities to completely "underground" pledge activities. These underground pledge activities are not monitored by older/alumni advisors or university administrators, so membership development in these organizations has become even more mysterious. Instead of college administrators knowing who is pursuing membership into fraternities and sororities, fraternity and sorority life advisors are challenged to know who is pursuing membership while maintaining discretion to the rest of the campus community.

### **Decrease in Value to Potential New Members**

Second, with the mysteriousness of these organizations' membership processes, college students who are interested in these organizations may opt out of these experiences given the constant negative attention and reputation of membership development and the mysterious underground nature of the experience. As colleges and universities promote outcome based co-curricular opportunities, potential new members may want more clear directives and understanding of what to expect and what they will get out of a membership intake/development process.

### **Increased University Scrutiny**

Universities are being challenged like never before to hold students accountable for misconduct in fraternities and sororities. Increased scrutiny of fraternities and sororities has brought about a greater need for more seamless partnership between colleges and universities and Black fraternities and sororities in order to help diminish risk and promote positive outcomes of the membership development of not only Black fraternities and sororities, but the entire fraternity and sorority community.

### **Conclusion**

It is not an option to advocate for a return of the culture of pledging as we knew it pre-1990. A return to the earlier era is too risky for institutions, fraternities and sororities, and most importantly, students. However, after considering the implications of the ban, there is evidence that easily leads to the question about whether the NPHC 1990 *ban on pledging* was successful in helping to better develop the memberships of historically Black fraternities and sororities while also mitigating the risk pledging brought about prior to the ban and inescapably after the ban up to the present day.

## References

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