

A Reflection on Justice

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As we look at the word “justice,” there are a variety of thoughts or images that may come to mind. Some may think about the image of blind justice – a blindfolded woman who is holding the scales and a sword. Some may think about laws that govern the land. Others may think about those individuals who make laws or enforce laws. And still others may think about behaviors, actions, or the specific treatment of people.

In considering justice and the work of fraternities and sororities, it is a true statement that each of these organizations has some historical significance and is built on a set of core values. Each of them has a mission and purpose. Fraternity and sorority organizations are a structured group of people with an identity, a common interest, and they have an ability to promote change both internally and externally.

Fraternity and sorority leaders must keep at the forefront of their minds that leadership does not always equate to popularity. As a leader, people are called to do the right thing for the right reason. A chapter leader can help their organization be a powerful tool of action. However, in order to be successful they must seek information, ask the right questions, and challenge the status quo. For college-aged students, this is not always easy. Here is where administrators have an opportunity to help make a difference.

As professionals who work with these organizations either locally, internationally, or somewhere in between, we have a unique responsibility to help develop the collegiate members. We have a duty to challenge our members to look within themselves and answer the call to be change agents. We, as advisors, mentors, and role models are charged with helping the organization members to be responsible and responsive to a changing world. We must assist them in navigating a variety of experiences that in the end provide a transformative experience and prepare them to be global citizens beyond their respective campuses. This challenge takes dedication and is not often easy. As professionals, we must be willing to have those difficult conversations which challenge thoughts and behaviors. We must be willing to confront our own ideologies and worldviews and see through lenses that may be different than our own.

While there are scores of examples of fraternity and sorority leaders and organizations who have been at the forefront of change, the months of January and February provide a good opportunity to think about and reflect on the leadership of a well-known fraternity man and how he took the mantle of leadership, challenged the status quo, and made a difference in the community in which he lived.

In 1963, in his “Letter from a Birmingham Jail,” Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc. member Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. penned these words, “Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.” A leader of the Civil Rights movement, Dr. King was familiar with the conflict between justice and injustice. Having grown up in the segregated South, he saw the struggle of the elders in his community. As a college student, he was exposed to global philosophies and leadership development. As a young professional, he was actively engaged in his community and worked to create a better society for the generations that would come after him.

Dr. King embodied the values of his organization and lived them daily. He connected with the Ritual of his organization’s founders and used daily ritual to lead others in a nonviolent fight against injustice and inequality. While Dr. King has been applauded and celebrated for the work he and

others did, there is still much work to be done. Our values-based organizations have an opportunity to take up the leadership mantle and make a difference.

In recent weeks and months, our nation has witnessed profound injustices. Tragic events have torn the fabric of our society. From Ferguson, Missouri to New York City, we have seen senseless killings. The recent tragedies in Mexico, Paris, Pakistan, Nigeria, and elsewhere show that hate and intolerance are not confined to any national boundary.

These events, fresh in our minds, have saddened and angered us. What should we do with these thoughts and feelings? Hopefully, they force us to seek a better outcome. Hopefully, we work together and emerge stronger. When we bridge these differences, we should seek to do so in ways that are relevant to the world.

How can we make an impact?

- Understand the mission of fraternity and sorority organizations.
- Understand the similarities and differences between Black Greek Lettered Organizations (BGLOs) and predominantly white fraternities and sororities.
- Expose members of fraternal organizations to the historical, cultural, social, and educational factors of race and racism in the United States.
- Assist members in exploring social identities.
- Explore inter-group relations among campus organizations.
- Support intra- and inter-group dialogues.
- Explore issues of power, privilege, and bias within organizations.
- Promote a spirit of collegiality, collaboration, and unity among campus organizations.
- Commit to be agents of positive change.