Apart from churches, fraternal and benevolent societies have long been the largest and most durable organizations in black communities. The founders and leaders of these organizations were in the vanguard of social change and made significant contributions to the widespread liberation, political, moral, temperance, and social reform movements that characterized the nineteenth century United States.

African American history has been greatly influenced by the emergence and development of Historically Black Greek Letter Organizations (HBGLOs). To say that the major advancements in education and civil rights were influenced by these groups is an understatement. A cursory review of the status of Black America will quickly reveal that the past contributions of HBGLOs were significant in elevating the African American condition both domestically and abroad. Consequently, it seems particularly appropriate that the 2006 centennial celebration planned by the first of these organizations, the 100 year old Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, took place in the summer of 2006 in Washington, DC. In keeping with its central mission, this celebration took place amid a flurry of activities planned by the organization in order to draw attention to the status of African Americans -- a topic that HBGLOs have used as their platform since their inception.

To fully appreciate the impact of HBGLOs, it is important to understand the political and societal climate in the United States that prompted their development and their subsequent mission. Specifically, HBGLOs were envisioned and created in the early 1900s during a period in which the national climate upheld racial injustice, inequality, and separate but "un-equal" doctrines that marginalized the existence of the African American. During these times, those who dared to forge new boundaries and occupy spaces that had historically been occupied by whites, faced the formidable task of navigating a space that was many times hostile and unwelcoming. Additionally, for the limited numbers of African American students who were enrolled in predominantly white institutions (PWI) of higher education, the experience of being treated as the "other" or as a non-entity by their academic peers, were all too familiar. Yet, conversely, with the formation of HBGLOs, African American students had stable connections to organizations that served to provide safe havens in terms of refuge from hostile institutional climates experienced on campus. As well, students now had common ground in which they could foster meaningful relationships with their African American peers (Patton & Bonner, 2001).

The students' college lives and experiences and the lives of those they serve, were enriched by HBGLOs. The Historically Black Greek Letter Organizations (HBGLOs), often referred to as The Divine Nine, include five fraternities (Alpha Phi Alpha, Phi Beta Sigma, Kappa Alpha Psi, Omega Psi Phi, Iota Phi Theta) and...
four sororities (Alpha Kappa Alpha, Delta Sigma Theta, Sigma Gamma Rho, Zeta Phi Beta). These fraternities and sororities helped students find their place in a hostile climate and make a way for continued success.

Notes


3. Alpha Phi Alpha was initially conceived as a study and support group to its members who were facing pressures of educational and social racial prejudice while attending Cornell University.

Lesson Plan
The Historically Black Greek Letter Organization: Finding A Place and Making A Way
by Fred A. Bonner, II

National Council for Social Studies (NCSS) Standards:
The goal of this lesson plan is to enable students to identify the contributions that Historically Black Greek Letter Organizations (HBGLOs) have made in improving the status of African Americans. Through this lesson, students can explore and ask questions about the nature of culture that provide a wider range of cultural universals and in-depth study of the specific aspects of particular cultures in similar and different places, times, conditions, and contexts. Teachers can encourage learners to consider the direct and indirect connections between the assumptions, beliefs, and values of a culture and its actions, policies, and products in multiple situations. They can help them analyze the ways that a people's cultural ideas and actions influence its members. Additionally, this lesson fulfills key elements for U.S. history teachers outlined by the National Council for Social Studies (NCSS):

History
- Guide learners in practicing skills of historical analysis and interpretation, such as compare and contrast, differentiate between historical facts and interpretations, consider multiple perspectives, analyze cause and effect relationships, compare competing historical narratives, recognize the tentative nature of historical interpretations, and hypothesize the influence of the past;
- Help learners to identify issues and problems in the past, recognize factors contributing to such problems, identify and analyze alternative courses of action, formulate a position or course of action, and evaluate the implementation of that decision;
- Enable learners to develop historical understanding through the avenues of social, political, economic, and cultural history, and the history of science and technology.

Culture and Cultural Diversity
- Enable learners to analyze and explain the ways groups, societies, and cultures address human needs and concerns;
- Guide learners as they predict how data and experiences may be interpreted by people from diverse cultural perspectives and frames of reference;

Introduction
The origination and history of Historically Black Greek Letter Organizations (HBGLOs) is critical in understanding the influence that these groups have exacted on the African American condition in the United States. Students will learn the history of HBGLOs with a special focus on the emergence and history of each one of the constituent groups. Each lesson will require students to focus on broad as well as specific issues germane to the development of HBGLOs. Additionally, members of HBGLOs who were instrumental in the African American historical movement will be identified. These lessons will focus on the contributions of the HBGLO—the Divine Nine—from both a historical and contemporary perspective.
Lesson Objectives

The student will:
1. Trace the origins and history of the HBGLO.
2. Develop a timeline of the founding of each of the nine HBGLOs
3. Demonstrate an understanding of the purposes of the HBGLO by listing the factors associated with its founding.
4. Identify historical leaders in the African American community who were members of HBGLOs.
5. Gain a factual and more positive historical perspective of the HBGLO.
6. Enhance classroom interaction skills by participating in small-group projects and in classroom discussions.

Activities and Strategies

Students will engage in a number of activities and strategies to complete the lesson objectives. Activities and strategies are designed for both individual and collaborative group effort.

I. Lesson One (Students will work independently to identify and review sources and then work collaboratively to create poster timelines. Collaborative groups may be established to work on either the HBGLO timeline or the African American history timeline).

1. Identify and review sources (articles, books, film, video) that trace the origins of the HBGLO. See list of “African American Sororities and Fraternities” listed in the teacher resources section.
2. Create a timeline on poster board that traces the founding of each of the HBGLOs (i.e. who founded the organization, at what institution, and in what year).
3. Create a timeline on poster board that traces African American history in general from the time in which the first HBGLO was founded until the present.

II. Lesson Two (Students will read material provided by the instructor to identify the factors associated with the founding of HBGLOs. Students will be divided into teams to debate whether factors that necessitated the founding of HBGLOs are applicable in current contexts).

1. Identify the factors that necessitated the founding of the HBGLO.
2. Debate whether historical factors that necessitated the founding the HBGLO are valid in current contexts.

III. Lesson Three (Students will identify at least ten African Americans who are members of HBGLOs and identify their contributions to the African American condition in the United States. Students are required to work individually to identify HBGLO members in the areas of business, education, medicine, politics, and entertainment).

1. Identify key HBGLO members who have played a significant role in improving the condition of African Americans—past and present.
Teacher Resources

Related Websites:


4. Information about African American Sororities and Fraternities: http://www.learningtogive.org/papers/index2.asp Click on “Organizations”


African American Sororities and Fraternities:

- Alpha Phi Alpha -- http://www.alphaphialpha.net/
- Alpha Kappa Alpha -- http://www.aka1908.com/
- Delta Sigma Theta – www.deltasigmatheta.org
- Zeta Phi Beta – www.zphib1920.org
- Sigma Gamma Rho – www.sgrho1922.org
- Omega Psi Phi – www.omegapsiphifraternity.org
- Kappa Alpha Psi – www.kappaalphapsi1911.org
- Phi Beta Sigma – www.pbs1914.org
- Iota Phi Theta – www.iotaphitheta.org

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