



► THE BLACK EMPIRE: MAKING AN IMPACT ON ONE OF THE BLACK COMMUNITY'S RICHEST RESOURCES



► E-MAIL FROM AN ATHEIST: POSTMODERN APOLOGETICS BY JESSICA FICK



► Smarter Outreach: USING POETRY AND PAINTING AS A FORM OF PRAYER FOR POSTMODERNS

Deep Roots *big reach*

The Black Greek Empire

Making an impact on one of the Black community's richest resources

Fraternalities and sororities help shape a disproportionate number of world leaders during their university careers. One needs only to tabulate the percentages of those in the House, Senate, and CEO's of America's fortune 500 to see the common thread of Greek life in the past of our leaders. In the Black community, this is no exception. Fraternalities and sororities play a major role in Black culture and history.

Beginning around the turn of the century, Black students began meeting to form Greek letter organizations. Often, Blacks were barred on campuses from meeting in groups publically and from joining existing Greek letter organizations. Fraternalities and sororities were founded in part to provide an opportunity for Black students to gather together both publically and secretly. Often, the purpose to gather was to encourage study and scholarship, to cope with racism and acts of discrimination as a community, and to socialize.

There are nine major Black fraternalities and sororities, referred to as "the divine nine," eight of which were founded in the earlier part of the 1900's. These nine Greek letter organizations consistently produce

world leaders in commerce, sports and entertainment, law, academia, medicine, and government. Their influence on large sections of the Black Church is also unparalleled, with many clergy, church leaders, performers, authors and speakers claiming allegiance to their Greek letter organization. Often, Black leaders in the Greek letter organizations are difficult to reach. Because of the self-sufficiency of Greek life, the competing ideals and lifestyle, and the fact that Black Greek letter organizations were founded because of exclusionary practices make these Black leaders more difficult to reach than non-Greek Black students. As a member of Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity Inc., I came to Christ just after "crossing" over into my fraternity. Throughout the years, I've learned a great deal about reaching Black Greeks for Christ. Here are a few things to know when developing relationships with Black Greeks:

1. Identify the Gatekeepers and working through them: Every community has their own "gatekeepers," people who the community looks to for boundaries and direction. For Greeks, these are often the "makers" of the

organization, those who pledge the new members. These are officers, alumni, regional polemarchs, or academic advisors. When interfacing with members of the organization, simple questions quickly reveal who is perceived to be the gatekeeper. You could ask, "Who would I need to talk to about the upcoming conference in order for your members to feel invited?"

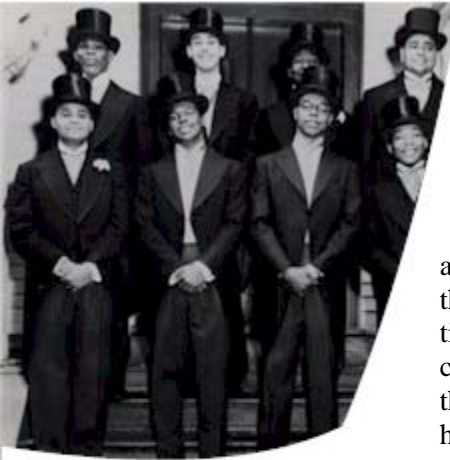
2. Learn a little history: Black Greeks are serious about their history and often act on and discuss organizational ideals set nearly 100 years ago as if they are fresh because for them they are. Young Black men and women in these organizations are often connected for the first time with Black history in a meaningful way through their pledge process and take the history of their own organization very seriously. Reading through on-line entries on Black Greek life such as those found on Wikipedia

or on the organization's websites are a great place to start. You may also consider reading through Lawrence Ross', "The Divine Nine: The History of African American Fraternalities and Sororities in America."

3. Know the big issues: There are several struggles Black Greeks have with Christianity or their own faith amongst Black Christians. First, a large and strong contingent of the Black Church condemns fraternalities and sororities outright. Considered as "secret societies" prone to debauchery, many Pentecostal churches condemn membership in Greek organizations. Often, this leads to feelings of abandonment, alienation, guilt and shame amongst churched Greeks. For non-



Member	Founded	Headquarters	Chapters	NPHC
<u>Alpha Kappa Alpha</u>	January 15, 1908 (age 101) Howard University	<u>Chicago, Illinois</u>	950+	1930
Alpha Phi Alpha	December 4, 1906 (age 102) Cornell University	Baltimore, Maryland	850+	1931
Delta Sigma Theta	January 13, 1913 (age 96) Howard University	Washington, D.C.	950+	1930
Iota Phi Theta	September 19, 1963 (age 45) <u>Morgan State University</u>	Baltimore, Maryland	200+	1997
<u>Kappa Alpha Psi</u>	January 5, 1911 (age 98) <u>Indiana University</u> as Kappa Alpha Nu	<u>Philadelphia, Pennsylvania</u>	700+	1930
<u>Omega Psi Phi</u>	November 17, 1911 (age 97) Howard University	<u>Decatur, Georgia</u>	750+	1930
Phi Beta Sigma	January 9, 1914 (age 95) Howard University	Washington, D.C.	700+	1931
Sigma Gamma Rho	November 12, 1922 (age 86) Butler University	Cary, North Carolina	500+	1937
Zeta Phi Beta	January 16, 1920 (age 89) Howard University	Washington, D.C.	800+	1930



Black Greek Empire (cont)

about connection. For men, the longing for the affirmation of other men is a significant one. Particularly given the absence of fathers and healthy male role models in community, a fraternity for Black men is a strong pull that meets a heart-longing often unmet prior to college. These realities make it obvious that the way to connect with Greeks is in the context of real, authentic, transparent relationships. Greeks are much more open and transparent than other college students. They are used to discussing sex, relationships, feelings, dreams and the like with their brothers and sisters in the organization. They long for deep and open relationships. Unfortunately, many Black Greeks will admit that the longing for true community remains unmet in their organizations. In fact, not long after the “neophyte” stage and associated feelings begin to dissipate, many Greeks begin to see the cracks in their expected utopian brother/sisterhood. Reaching out in love through Christ with a level of risky transparency is necessary to reach those both hungry but also increasingly disillusioned with their community.

5. Connecting with a group, not only an individual: Often, ministry is perceived to happen between individuals but for Black Greeks, community is so important that the relationships we have with any

one person often become “public property.” What we do and say with one or a few members of a fraternity or sorority quickly becomes public knowledge within the Greek community. Personal and organizational integrity therefore is extremely important. Consistently following through on commitments, keeping personal and organizational trust, and demonstrating loyalty are important in establishing a good reputation as an outsider. If there are opportunities to stand up for the Black Greek world or African-Americans in general on campus, you and your organization will be more quickly trusted and accepted, particularly if such acts come at a cost. A more cyclical and planned way to earn trust is to help promote and work along side many Greek activities, particularly service events. Service events are a core component of Black Greek life. Service events often include spending time at nursing homes, serving in soup kitchens, helping out with high school or junior high students, or beautification projects. These events almost always happen in predominantly Black communities and is in part how fraternities and sororities establish and maintain brand equity for a younger generation.

These five starting points are all superseded however by a strong and vibrant personal and organizational faith demonstrated by love and acceptance. Relationships that demonstrate the fruit of the Spirit will be infectious and coupling that with some very simple acts of partnership will go a long way in having an impact on such an important institution of Black life.

E-Mail from a Hungry Atheist

Postmodern Apologetics by Jessica Fick

John and his wife talked about Christianity and politics with the mostly white-haired men and women seated together in the room. John, a former campus minister attending divinity school became increasingly uncomfortable as the conversation took a “nose-dive right” when one of the elderly gentleman shared; “I want to thank our Lord that we have the opportunity to vote for a pro-life candidate this election.” As John pleaded with the group to seek understanding of the non-religious, especially young voters, the elderly gentleman blurted “What are we supposed to do when, from Maine to California, schools are teaching the wrong kind of tolerance? Things are so different now... it's an entirely different country... things are only getting worse... and now, this is not the country I used to know. This is not my country anymore. This is not my country.” In his blog, John wrote “Tears filled his aged eyes and his usual levity drained from his face. I think I caught a plea in his eyes for me to understand him. And insofar as one who didn't fight or lose friends defending his country can, I like to think I tried to understand. It seems that the country for which he and his friends fought thanked him by disowning his values and beliefs.”

Evangelical Christianity is at a crossroads. Many, like this elderly man, are perplexed, indifferent or resentful of this postmodern generation. Others are frustrated by the “so what” attitude postmoderns have towards Christianity. Some refuse to engage the questions of this generation, choosing to criticize postmodernism and posing thoughtful answers to questions many people aren't asking. Still others struggle to know how to meaningfully answer the questions being asked by postmoderns and to create an environment where questions can be asked in an open and engaging manner. We cannot simply disown our country when we disagree or don't understand the changing values of a younger generation. To do so would be to turn our backs on the millions of women and men seeking answers to make sense of our chaotic world. To ignore the questions and pretend nothing has changed in our culture dishonors Jesus and wastes opportunities he's given

us to build relationships and demonstrate his love. Many struggle with how to move beyond traditional propositional evangelism and apologetics and into conversations that move people forward in their spiritual journey. Over the years a few key principles have served me to engage the questions of the postmodern generation while maintaining fidelity to the gospel.

Discern the real question

Different people need different things. Whether he was asked “rabbi, where are you staying?” or “how do you know me?” Jesus was able to discern what was behind the questions of Andrew and Nathanel in John 1. In spiritual conversations with friends or strangers it's important to notice body language, tone of voice and the types of questions being asked. For some, questions are often smokescreens to avoid dealing with their real issues of brokenness and pain. For others, the questions come out of the source of brokenness or pain. To stop, listen to the guidance of the Holy Spirit and to the person in conversation enables us to respond appropriately to the questions.

Allow the questions to direct the response

When Jesus engages with both Andrew and Nathanael in John 1, their questions direct the response rather than the answer. Jesus sensed that Andrew and the other disciple simply wanted to see who he was. They didn't ask him to perform a miracle. They didn't try to stump him with a difficult question. They simply wanted to be with him, and Jesus tells them to “come and see” where he is staying. For many postmoderns being with Jesus in community is an important part of their conversion process. It is with friends and peers that they are able to see if this Jesus really is who he claims to be, and just as importantly, if his followers actually are who they claim to be. I think there are times where we do others a disservice by jumping in too quickly to answer the questions of unbelievers rather than invite them to come and see what Jesus is all about.

Respond to what God is doing now

It was clear to me that Krysta was resentful towards the church and didn't see the relevance of religion in her life. As Krista and I talked, she shared her story of being raised by a single mom and receiving food baskets from local churches when they couldn't afford groceries. “The issue of poverty and hunger is dear to my heart,” she shared. Krista also shared that she was an atheist. As we talked about the gospel, Krista seemed intrigued that Christians in the InterVarsity chapter at U. Pitt would be taking time to raise awareness about global hunger. While she wasn't ready to accept Christ, it was clear that Jesus was filling her with compassion towards others who suffer from poverty. The next day after our conversation Krista sent me this email: “Hi, I'm really glad to receive your email. I am going to be busy in the evenings this week (as I have a trip coming up this weekend) but keep me posted with anything I can do to help poverty or hunger. Both of these issues are of great concern to me, faith or no faith, and despite my own college-induced poverty I would like to do anything I can to help out. Thanks for talking with me, and I will surely keep an open mind as far as Christianity.”

Though she may have not realized it, Jesus was drawing her closer to himself as she responded to the needs of people in her community. For Krista the next step was to sign up for one of InterVarsity's service projects in the Pittsburgh area. For me, the next step in our conversation was to build trust to help Krista, an atheist have a better perspective of Jesus and his people.



SMARTER OUTREACH: Postmodern Prayer



The power of prayer is seldom questioned amongst believers. We believe in prayer or more specifically, in the God who answers prayer. But what about prayer for the non-Christian? Prayer can be a powerful way for non-Christians to encounter the living God. Dialogical prayer, however, may be a big and strange step for postmoderns. When asking audiences to respond to God, I routinely ask them to do so in the form of art. Poetry, painting, coloring, sketching, song-writing are all art forms that are greatly appreciated and celebrated amongst postmoderns. These art forms, however, can be a form of prayer, of connecting and communicating with the divine. Holding gatherings where an artistic expression is encouraged and expected can be a powerful connecting point for many non-Christians. Using the terminology of poetry or painting gives room for non-Christians to enter into an experience with God that the word “prayer” may not.



R. York Moore

National Evangelist
InterVarsity Christian Fellowship
USA
PO Box 87753
Canton, MI 48187
313-610-7860
york@tellyestory.net/

INTERVARSITY

INTERVARSITY CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP/USA
All articles, unless otherwise noted, are written by R. York Moore and are intended for internal use within InterVarsity Christian Fellowship USA. Free distribution and duplication are hereby granted.