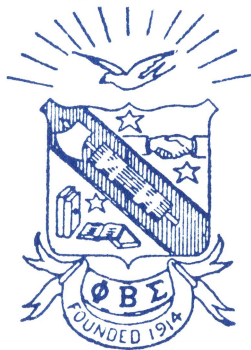


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State of the Region Address

by
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PHI BETA SIGMA FRATERNITY, INC.



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NOSTALGIA AND TREPIDATION --
THE FUTURE'S NOT WHAT IT USED TO BE!

Brothers in Sigma:

I approach this task -- talking with you briefly about Sigma in the Eastern Region -- I approach this task with a great deal of nostalgia and some trepidation. Looking back upon three years as Regional Director, I have some fond memories and a great amount of pride in what we have done. This is such a beautiful setting for our regional meeting. The hospitality extended by the brothers of Epsilon Alpha Sigma has been little short of phenomenal. With all due regard for the brothers of Epsilon Alpha Sigma, I have a feeling that merely being in St. Thomas is half the battle of hosting a delightful meeting. Being here seems to generate hospitality and guarantee happiness.

My feelings of trepidation are rooted in two circumstances: First, I am called upon to address you about the State of Sigma in the Eastern Region. Such an undertaking demands serious, sober and sane reflection . . . all of which can lead to anxiety. Second, any time one is called upon to talk with men of the stature and status of Sigmas, one can be assured of an audience which is apt, rapt, and "dap" - even after a night on the town in St. Thomas. Thus, I have nostalgia for this island paradise and for the memory of three wonderful years of service to Sigma; and trepidation for the task which is mine.

Let me first pay obeisance to our national officers, acknowledging the splendid functions they perform, and expressing personal gratitude for their support and encouragement throughout the years.

Next, may I pay homage to the officers and functionaries of the Eastern Region . . . to all who have played any part in the development and promotion of Sigma in the past few years. Let me say that you have been a grand group of men . . . completely cooperative and consistently striving for excellence in all things. As a result of your diligence, we have added greatly to our numbers; and we have completed projects of general and particular significance. We have made our presence . . . and the standards

for which we stand, known and felt throughout the eastern seaboard. Of this I am quite proud, and I declare that whatever personal accolades I can accept must be shared with the men of Sigma of the Eastern Region . . . who by their words and deeds have supported and challenged the leadership to the extent that we had to reach ever higher. I salute you, men of the Eastern Region.

Yet, while I feel compelled to note our progress and to see excellent projections for the future, there is some trepidation to be dealt with. Sigmas have long prided themselves on their programs of community involvement and community consciousness. Long before it became fashionable to have pride in race, Sigmas were unabashed chauvinists. Long before it was fashionable to talk of black capitalism, Sigmas had initiated Bigger and Better Business. These emphases continue, and in addition, we have sparked other programs of education and social action.

We can be justifiably proud of our accomplishments, but I want to raise some questions with you . . . mostly about the nature of change and how there remains so much more to be done.

It is difficult to plan ahead with any measure of assurance. Whatever resourcefulness or acumen or dedication we offer, we cannot count upon tomorrow to keep its promise. Everywhere we turn there is some disruption or the violence of some deep crisis.

It is not difficult to lapse into nostalgia and wish for the good old days. I can vividly remember my undergraduate days when my total tuition, room and board at Virginia Union was less than what I recently paid for my daughter's tuition at Fisk University. I can also remember when the most important thing was the pinochle score of the "Everynight Pinochle Club", or whether or not the price of hamburgers would reach fifteen cents. Sometimes we were disturbed by a war in Europe, gas rationing and travel restrictions; but it was all accepted as the sacrifice necessary in the name of democracy. How different things are now.

Consider the names of just the past few years, and the dread memories they stir: Cuba, India-Pakistan, Selma, North Korea, Suez, Birmingham, Memphis, Six Day War, Dallas, Nigeria and Biafra, Los Angeles, Cleveland, Vietnam, Lamar, S. C. . . . Several times, we have come "eyeball to eyeball" with

cosmic disaster. All of us keep hearing the ominous ticking of the bomb. All of this is compounded by domestic crises which have mounted: civil rights exploding into riots, statesmen and public figures assassinated, dissent taking forms alien to American life, with abuse and insult, fighting dogmas with stigmas. The mood of our time is reflected in the literature of alienation, in the theater of the absurd, in the increasing meaninglessness of art. All around us standards in taste and expression are undergoing a vast change. With a frankness of language and detail that would have been unthinkable in the past, our movies, books and magazines now delve into everything from lesbianism and drug addiction to sex acts and open confession. Feminine fashions have gone from peek-a-boo to "quick, call a cop". Wine ads ask us if we have "had any lately", and shaving commercials induce us to "take it all off". The latest is an advertisement for a feminine hygiene solution in four delicious flavors. (You figure that one out). The result of this is what Max Lerner has called a sort of "Babylonian society" where almost anything goes.

The world has changed, and it is still changing in some very important ways. The crises that dislocate and disrupt are not crises of disintegration and decline alone. They are the problem offsprings of change. They come because we are in the midst of the greatest and most exhilarating revolution in all human history. These crises come from the release of hope in once darkened continents and in backwoods communities, hope so long shackled by the old slaveries of ignorance and poverty and disease and desperation. They come because millions of humans are beginning to cast off chains in every part of the world, and because while continents are at last reaching for the sun.

Here and there, opportunities are opening up. In the first flush of progress the long suffering disadvantaged are desperate to move faster, to make sure that the first fruits come, to validate their gains. Hope, once kindled, carries impatience in its flame. It spreads from pressure to disruption. We must expect cataclysmic changes to bring disturbance. An old order does not quietly fold its tent and steal away. Revolutions inevitably tear into the valuable, the precious, and the sanctified . . . as well as into the obsolete. What is astonishing is not that there is so much violence, but that there is so little. It is to be regretted. Every precaution must be taken to prevent it. But when violence

and disruption come, we must not be quick to condemn whole nations, whole peoples, for their inability to move to new goals with discipline and restraint. It is now that it is all the more compelling for us to hold to our perspective, to what Yeats called "the ordinary light of ordinary hours".

What I am emphasizing is the need for perspective, mature perspective. We need to understand that periods of fundamental change are periods of turbulence, and it is the obligation of the elite, those of us who have had college experiences and who fill positions of trust . . . to keep our balance, to play it cool, to understand what's happening and help others to understand. It is a great calling, and a greater challenge, but in these days of trepidation we can do no less.

I was saying a moment ago that it is not difficult to be nostalgic, to remember the innocent days of the past when things were simpler and more easily dealt with. This is a great temptation, and one to which we can easily succumb. Too many in our nation look back nostalgically to our earlier history when we did not have to worry about billions in taxation in order to buttress the tottering societies of Europe and Asia; when we could forget who the President of France or the Chancellor of Germany might be, and be unconcerned about an election in Cambodia or Laos. This is an understandable nostalgia, but it is only nostalgia. It is a state to which we can never return, because we cannot forget that America has attained a position of primacy in the world, where our president is the first citizen of the world, the most powerful man in the world, from whose lips fall the utterances which set the tone for world action. Because of this primacy, we must live in a perpetual state of tension . . . to live with and react within crisis.

The parallel is to be found in the black society in which we are the elite. We could look back in absolute nostalgia, remembering the days when our positions were rather well-fixed. As the elite, we were unchallenged from without and within; and even though we could complain about some of the conditions under which we had to operate -- we had reasons to rejoice at what we were accomplishing. This has all changed now. Doors that were shut are opened, and new challenges are coming from without and within. The task of proving our worth is not restricted as it once was, but the promises of the future are not clear. Our young men

and women on our campuses have found issues which are real and compelling. They are no longer content to promote themselves and be impervious to the lot of others. The more militant and aggressive on our campuses and throughout our urban centers have also found compelling issues. In many ways they have caused us all to evaluate and reevaluate our positions and our feelings. We can wish for nostalgia, but the truth of the matter is that both on a national and a community basis we must learn to live in a time of crisis. Life will rarely again be free from tension. Crisis has become normal, and we must learn to adjust to it. Just as we as a nation bear the responsibilities of primacy, we as the elite of a people must bear similar responsibility; and we must remember that responsibility and aggravation go hand in hand.

. This primacy of tension is fraught with difficulty, and subject to all kinds of differences of opinion and misunderstanding.

It is not unlike the story of the farmer whose barn burned down. When the insurance adjuster came, the farmer said, "Well, there it is. It cost me \$60,000 to build and I guess you had just better write me a check. "

The adjuster said, "Well, now, it doesn't quite work that way. That barn is thirty years old, a lot of the equipment is worn out, and the whole thing has depreciated. What we have to do is figure out how much less it is worth today than it was thirty years ago and we will pay on that basis. "

The farmer said, "Well, if that's the way you do it, you'd better cancel that policy on my wife. "

Yes, we must learn to live with crisis. John F. Kennedy learned to do so. He quoted Hemingway, calling it "grace under pressure", and that's the way he lived, and the way he died. Martin Luther King learned to do so. He quoted many sources, but most of all he exhibited love for his fellowmen. That's the way he lived, and that was how he died.

It is not easy to follow such a pattern. We are an impatient and pragmatic people. We look for clear-cut answers. We are revolted by fuzzy edges. We've gone through a process which tells us that when problems come, all we need is enough energy

and enough time and these problems can be solved. We become exasperated by problems that are long and drawn out. Yet, in a world like ours there are no easy answers. Often there are no answers at all. Some problems simply do not get solved, they only get older. It is not easy to live with crisis, to seek difficult accomodation, to move towards objectives through outrage and insult, but the alternatives are far worse.

As the elite of our society . . . as men who have become accustomed to having challenges thrust before us, here is another -- one which demands a special type of courage. The courage to live with crisis is the courage of tensile strength, a quiet courage that waits in the dark and faces the light of a new day unafraid. It includes the determination not to be rattled, not to be driven into impulsive and capricious action.

This is the courage that will bring to this nation a new awareness of Black Authenticity predicated upon Black identity and if the black man is to re-channel the mainstream of our society, he cannot be anesthetized by the world's sensuous frivolities; but rather he must be awakened by the cold waters of reality and become sensitized by the bitter realities of the great society.

I say this because the black man today walks into the 70's with a moral sophistication that is half the battle, for now, he can tell the difference between democracy as a principle and democracy as practiced; he knows what the promises of the Constitution are. He has lived a long time in this chasm between profession and practice; between ideal and reality and between promise and fulfillment.

It is this courage he must carry with him if these promises are to be fulfilled, these ideals become real and these professions congealed into practice.

I believe the Black man's destiny lies not in America's destruction, but in her perfection and the Black man must become an agent in converting our affluence to charity, our power to peaceful purpose and our technology to the humanizing of life on this planet.

This is the courage that will teach him to learn the idiom

and jargon of American business so that we can find our rightful place. For if the Black man is to change the system, he must have influence within; if he is to change America least, he must be a part of the least of America, if he wants to redirect public policy, he must help to make that public policy. In these days of trepidation, this is the courage we must develop.

Now may I add a thought about responsibility and change. It is undeniable that we need discipline as we meet conflict and pressure for change. We are in a volcanic period, and this is especially true on our campuses.

In the first place, we have a far more sophisticated generation in our universities than we ever had before. They are better prepared for higher education. They come out of vastly improved elementary and secondary schools; they are given far more effective kinds of preparatory training; they are worldly and world-minded on a scale that most of us never achieved at that age.

They are from homes of parents who have far better educations than their parents' parents had; they have lived in homes in which the level of dialogue is far more outspoken and covers far more previously prohibited discussion areas than any generation of the recent past.

They are the products of today's mass communications revolution; they are drenched in modern communications; they often think they have seen everything there is to see . . . and I am not very certain that they have not. They think nothing of the miracle of seeing a television program from an outer space capsule; of sitting in St. Thomas and watching a baseball game in Chicago; but they do think about environmental pollution and litter, and about the destruction of life in Vietnam, racial crisis, narcotic addiction crisis, poverty crisis . . . all of which they have seen on television, and in living color.

But today's student generation has also been shielded from the world of work and the idea of work as a means of existence. A large percentage of students have no purpose, don't know how they will live when they leave the campus.

Today's student generation comes from a family whose structure has radically changed. The divorce rate is higher, far different kinds of relationships between the mother and father, and between the parents and children now exist. The source of parental authority is shifting from father to mother, with the result that many of the old ground rules by which we tend to measure the way our children develop . . . have radically changed.

There are also changes taking place in our primary social institutions, not the least of which is the church. The church has traditionally been the great central point from which the moral and the ethical traditions of our society have been transmitted. The continuity of thought from Moses to Jesus . . . calling for moral principles and stated rules for behavior . . . just doesn't work any more. Religious institutions are seeking relevance in the modern world, and forsaking many of the traditional community postures they had previously taken.

These, then are some of the influences which are shaping our young people in an age of continuous pressure and change. These young people have raised questions and are seeking answers. They are not the passive, accepting youngsters that we were . . . and they will never return to that state. They are impatient with the past . . . and with many of the institutions of the present.

Our democratic techniques are slow-moving, and they were established to protect the protesting minorities as well as the conforming majorities. Through much pain and travail, they were painfully created in order to shield minorities, however unpopular or unorthodox . . . from the tyranny of the many or the few. When these democratic techniques break down, then the minorities lose their shield. If violence is condoned to speed up reform it must be condoned for the repressive opposition. If it is condoned for the Panthers, it must be condoned for the clan, the Ku Klux Klan, that is. John Gardner has warned us that anyone who unleashes man's destructive impulses had better stand a long way back. De Tocqueville reminded us that in a revolution, the hardest thing to invent is the ending.

There are many undergraduates gathered here. I'm certain that many have taken part in demonstrations on our college campuses. It's difficult for them to avoid.

What I suggest here . . . is that there must be trepidation for revolution which is rooted in violence. Our young men and women have the right, even the obligation to seek to right those wrongs of which they are so clearly aware. What we call for here, is that the elite would exhaust every possibility for sane and safe negotiation, and to remember that any other way will more than likely lead to difficulty.

In summary . . . we live in an interregnum period. In such a period, the Hebrew poet, Bialik, called the people "Children of the Dusk" . . . one foot in a world that is going, the other foot in a world that is coming. We are going through the inevitable price that must be paid for new freedom and new opportunities.

Then, we who are the elite, must learn to live with crisis and bring mature understanding to difficult and dark days.

Finally, we must meet conflict and crisis with civilized restraint. We must understand our young people and encourage them to follow the democratic techniques which are the basic protection for all.

Of such is Nostalgia and Trepidation -- The future is not what it used to be. We live in a period of constant change where we are wont to lapse back into the good old days. We can't go back. We must face the future and intrepidly as possible, adding new victories . . . defeating whichever foes arise.

I am confident that solutions to the problems which face our society . . . and which face our beloved fraternity will be hastened to solution as we recognize the period in which we live, and seek to construct our approaches along democratic lines.

An early American poet, Sam Foss, once wrote:

Bring me men to match my mountains,
Bring me men to match my plains
Men with empires in their purpose
And new eras in their brains.

Sigma has always produced such men, and Sigma will continue to do so in the years and years to come.

I am proud to have served you in the Eastern Region. I pass on the torch of leadership to the new Regional Director . . . with nostalgia and trepidation . . . knowing that Sigma will move on . . . ever on!!