

history of the divine nine

The Divine Nine refers to the nine historically Black Greek-letter organizations that form the National Pan-Hellenic Council (NPHC) in the United States. These organizations, established in the early 20th century, were created to provide support, community, and advocacy for African American college students who faced systemic racism and discrimination. Each of these organizations has a rich history and distinct mission, contributing to the cultural and social fabric of African American communities. This article will explore the origins, significance, and impact of the Divine Nine throughout American history.

Origins of the Divine Nine

The Divine Nine emerged during a tumultuous time in American history characterized by racial segregation and the struggle for civil rights. The late 19th and early 20th centuries were marked by the establishment of higher education institutions for African Americans, leading to an increased need for support systems within these schools.

Historical Context

- Post-Civil War Era: Following the Civil War, the Reconstruction era saw a surge in the establishment of educational institutions for freed African Americans. However, these institutions often faced financial struggles and hostility from the surrounding communities.
- Rise of Segregation: The Jim Crow laws that followed Reconstruction enforced racial segregation and discrimination, making it difficult for African Americans to gain equal access to education and social opportunities.
- Need for Community: In response to these challenges, students sought to create organizations that would not only foster academic excellence but also provide social support and advocacy for their communities.

Founding of the Organizations

The Divine Nine consists of the following organizations, each founded to address specific issues faced by African American students:

1. Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc. (1906) - Founded at Cornell University, it was the first intercollegiate Greek-letter fraternity established by African Americans.
2. Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Inc. (1911) - Established at Indiana University, it aimed to promote academic achievement and social change.
3. Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, Inc. (1911) - Founded at Howard University, its mission centers on manhood, scholarship, perseverance, and uplift.
4. Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. (1913) - Founded at Howard University, it emphasizes public service and social activism.
5. Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, Inc. (1920) - Established at Howard University, it focuses on community

service and sisterhood.

6. Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority, Inc. (1922) - Founded at Butler University, it aims to enhance the quality of life within the community.

7. Iota Phi Theta Fraternity, Inc. (1963) - Established at Morgan State University, it was created to provide a voice for African American men.

8. Chi Omega Sorority, Inc. (not officially a part of the Divine Nine but often associated) - Founded in 1901, it promotes sisterhood and service.

9. Lambda Sigma Upsilon Fraternity, Inc. (1979) - Though newer, it aligns with the goals of the Divine Nine, promoting brotherhood and academic excellence.

Significance of the Divine Nine

The Divine Nine organizations have played a pivotal role in the African American community, serving as beacons of support, empowerment, and advocacy.

Social and Academic Support

- Networking Opportunities: Members of these organizations provide a network of support that extends beyond college, often resulting in lifelong friendships and professional connections.
- Academic Excellence: Many of the organizations emphasize scholarship and academic achievement, offering mentorship programs, scholarships, and academic resources to their members.
- Leadership Development: These organizations nurture leadership skills through various programs and activities, preparing members to take on roles in their communities and professions.

Cultural Impact

- Promotion of African American Culture: The Divine Nine organizations celebrate and preserve African American culture through events like step shows, cultural festivals, and community service initiatives.
- Advocacy for Social Justice: Many organizations actively engage in social justice initiatives and advocacy, addressing issues such as voter registration, educational equity, and civil rights.

Community Service and Philanthropy

Each organization has its philanthropic focus, often addressing pressing community needs. Examples include:

- Delta Sigma Theta: Known for its "Five-Point Programmatic Thrust," which includes economic development, educational development, international awareness, political awareness, and physical and mental health.
- Zeta Phi Beta: Focuses on community service efforts that emphasize health awareness, education, and economic development.

Challenges Faced by the Divine Nine

Despite their successes, the Divine Nine organizations have faced numerous challenges, both internally and externally.

Internal Challenges

- Membership Retention: Engaging new members while retaining the commitment of existing members can be challenging, especially as college demands grow.
- Maintaining Relevance: Ensuring that the organizations address contemporary issues and remain relevant to younger generations is an ongoing challenge.

External Challenges

- Racism and Discrimination: While the Divine Nine organizations were created to combat racism, members often still face discrimination in broader society.
- Stereotyping: Misconceptions about Greek life, particularly among historically Black organizations, can hinder their acceptance and growth.

The Divine Nine in the Modern Era

In recent years, the Divine Nine has continued to evolve, reflecting changes in society and the needs of their communities.

Involvement in Social Movements

- Black Lives Matter Movement: Many members and organizations have taken an active role in the Black Lives Matter movement, advocating for justice and equality.
- COVID-19 Response: The Divine Nine has worked to address disparities in health care exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, providing resources and support to their communities.

Technology and Social Media

- Digital Presence: The rise of social media has allowed the Divine Nine to connect with a broader audience, promote their initiatives, and share their successes.
- Virtual Programming: Many organizations have adapted to virtual platforms, allowing for greater accessibility and participation in events and programs.

Conclusion

The Divine Nine has significantly impacted the African American community and American society as a whole. Through their commitment to scholarship, service, and social justice, these organizations have provided a framework for empowerment and advocacy. As they continue to evolve in the face of contemporary challenges, the legacy of the Divine Nine remains an essential part of the history and culture of African American life in the United States. Their ongoing contributions offer a powerful reminder of the enduring spirit of community and resilience in the fight for equality and justice.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the Divine Nine?

The Divine Nine refers to the nine historically Black Greek-letter organizations that are part of the National Pan-Hellenic Council (NPHC), which promote scholarship, leadership, and community service.

When was the National Pan-Hellenic Council (NPHC) founded?

The NPHC was founded on May 10, 1930, at Howard University in Washington, D.C.

What are the names of the organizations that comprise the Divine Nine?

The Divine Nine includes Alpha Phi Alpha, Alpha Kappa Alpha, Kappa Alpha Psi, Omega Psi Phi, Delta Sigma Theta, Phi Beta Sigma, Zeta Phi Beta, Sigma Gamma Rho, and Iota Phi Theta.

Why were the Divine Nine organizations established?

The Divine Nine organizations were established to provide support, fellowship, and a sense of community for Black college students at a time when they faced racial discrimination and limited opportunities.

What role did the Divine Nine play in the Civil Rights Movement?

Members of the Divine Nine were actively involved in the Civil Rights Movement, using their platforms to advocate for social justice, equality, and community empowerment.

How do the values of the Divine Nine organizations reflect their history?

The values of the Divine Nine organizations—such as scholarship, leadership, service, and brotherhood/sisterhood—reflect their historical mission to uplift the Black community and address systemic inequalities.

What impact have the Divine Nine organizations had on contemporary society?

The Divine Nine organizations have significantly impacted contemporary society by fostering leadership, promoting educational initiatives, and advocating for social change, while cultivating a strong sense of community among their members.

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