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The Skanner Newspaper, established in October 1975, is a weekly publication, published every Wednesday by IMM Publications Inc.

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The Skanner is a member of the National Newspaper Publishers Association and West Coast Black Publishers Association.

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Opinion

Blackonomics: Black Fraternities and Sororities Step Up

Remember the scene from "New Jack City" when Nino Brown (Wesley Snipes) told Scotty (Ice-T), "This ain't personal; this is business?"

And at the end of the movie, Scotty said to Nino, "This is personal," as he proceeded to give him a beatdown. Well, this article is both personal and business. It's a call to the Alphas, Omegas, Kappas, Sigmas, Deltas, AKAs, Zetas, Thetas, Iotas, known as the "Divine Nine," and the fraternity I was apart of back in the 1960's at North Carolina College at Durham (now North Carolina Central University), "Groove Phi Groove."

The latent collective power within these organizations is mind-boggling. Their members are conscientious, which is demonstrated by their friendship and loyalty to one another. They rally around their members during crises; they support one another when they get married and have children; they work together, locally and nationally, on community projects across this country. They even formed a national collective organization, The National Pan-Hellenic Council, Inc.; the group's stated purpose and mission is "Unanimity of thought and action as far as possible in the conduct of Greek letter collegiate fraternities and sororities, and to consider problems of mutual interest to its member organizations."



James Clingman
NNPA
Columnist

I especially like the part about "mutual interests." I know it's a hard question to answer, based on our individualistic and proprietary approach to solving many of our problems, but what are the mutual interests among not only sororities and fra-

“A challenge to each member of the abovementioned Black, proud, historic, and venerable organizations [is] to purchase at least one bag of Sweet Unity Farms Tanzanian Gourmet Coffee

ternities, but all Black organizations? Is there one thing that all of us can and should do together without compromising our various missions and such? I believe there are several things we can do together, but reality tells me that all Black people will never do any one thing together. So in light of that reality, we must come up with something that is simple yet powerful and will demonstrate our collective resolve, not just to the world, but to ourselves and our children. Keep in mind I said, "Simple."

On the business side of things, this is a call — a challenge — to each member of the aforementioned Black, proud, historic, and venerable organizations to purchase at least one bag of Sweet Unity Farms Tanzanian Gourmet Coffee. The coffee is grown by family co-ops founded by Jackie Robinson's son, David, twenty years ago. April 15, 2017 was the 70th anniversary of Jackie Robinson breaking the color barrier in major league baseball; we can break the economic barrier by collectively propelling his

son's company to unimagined heights by purchasing his coffee. In case you didn't know, Jackie Robinson went to work for a coffee company when he left baseball.

On the personal side, Black folks are taking an Ice T beatdown like Wesley Snipes received, only ours is an economic beatdown, much of which we are doing to ourselves by not supporting one another more than we do presently. What could be more personal than family? Again, one simple solution is for our Black sororities and fraterni-

ties, comprising millions of members around the world, to take this challenge personally and buy at least one bag of David Robinson's coffee, a fitting tribute to his father's legacy. By doing so, the world would witness a Black-owned company, operating in Africa and the U.S., become a billion dollar firm virtually overnight, all because a group of conscientious Black folks individually spent a very small amount of money on a Black owned product. A veritable, Black economic renaissance.

After accomplishing that simple goal, we could repeat it hundreds of times with other Black companies, thus, creating larger firms that have so much business they would have to hire more employees. In the words of the soul singing group, Atlantic Star, "Am I dreaming?" Maybe I am, but it's a great dream, and I pray it will come true.

From what I observe among our social organizations, members of sororities and fraternities are the most conscientious; therefore, I am calling on the Presidents of the Divine Nine to spread the word to their members to take this simple action step toward economic empowerment. In addition, I want all HBCU student associations, Greek Letter organizations, and individual students to insist that their cafeterias serve Sweet Unity Farms Coffee. Now that's really a no-brainer, isn't it?

Making the Case for Sustained Investing in HBCUs

UNCF's iconic "A Mind is a Terrible Thing to Waste," advertising campaign remains the gold-standard for shining light on the urgency of investing in Black colleges and universities.

No nation, the stories in the campaign reminded us, can be great if it leaves behind a large portion of its residents. More than 40 years later, the need for sustained investment in historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) remains as great as ever.

With the change in presidential administrations, HBCUs have once again returned to the national conversation, with some openly questioning the need for such institutions, particularly in the face of advances over the past several decades. The conversation is not new and the answer has not changed.

We need HBCU's to continue to exist and they need all of us helping to support their coffers and make the case to decision-makers about the continued value they provide.

HBCUs represent only three percent of all two- and four-year U.S. colleges and universities, but they enroll 10 per-



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cent of all African American undergraduates. They produce 17 percent of all African American college graduates and generate 24 percent of all bachelor's degrees in STEM

“The need for sustained investment in historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) remains as great as ever

fields earned by African Americans annually, according to UNCF's Patterson Research Institute.

Part of the reason is that Black graduates of HBCUs are significantly more likely to have felt supported while in college, according to 2015 data from an ongoing Gallup-Purdue University study.

But statistics are only part of the story. HBCUs have produced influential Americans including Pulitzer Prize-win-

ning author Alice Walker, filmmaker Spike Lee, Oprah Winfrey and many other business, civic leaders and entrepreneurs.

On campuses around the nation, parents beamed last month as newly minted graduates of HBCUs set out to make names for themselves and to fulfill their dreams.

At Howard University, my alma mater, I witnessed U.S. Senator Kamala Harris remind graduates that the world

will not always be welcoming and that they have a duty to serve.

"That is your duty—the duty of your degree," Harris said. "That is the charge of a Howard graduate. So whatever you plan to do next—whether you want to design the latest app or cure cancer or run a business. Whether you're going to be a dentist, a lawyer, a teacher, or an accountant—let your guiding principle be truth and service. At a time

when there are Americans — disproportionately Black and brown men — trapped in a broken system of mass incarceration... peak truth — and serve."

It is advice that we should also — no matter our age — aspire to. And one truth is surely that the nation's HBCUs are as relevant and necessary now as when some of them were founded over 150 years ago. These institutions were an antidote to the racist policies that, in some cases, banned educating Black students.

At a time where college costs are going up, and attacks on Black students on predominantly White campuses are on the rise, the need for Black colleges is greater than ever. As a government, we have to continue to ensure that funding is there to keep this pipeline going. And as private citizens, we have to open our wallets to ensure the long-term viability of the institutions that are working for us.

Rushern Baker, a graduate of Howard University, is the county executive in Prince George's County, Maryland.