

In assessing those achievements, however, the highest praise must go to the total effort which brought together many imaginative and dedicated sorors who believed strongly and worked assiduously to strengthen the sorority's goal of social responsibility to the less fortunate black women and children of this nation.

## SOME REFLECTIONS ON THE NATIONAL NON-PARTISAN COUNCIL ON PUBLIC AFFAIRS

BY

**NORMA E. BOYD**

**Founder and Incorporator of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority**

The highlights and accomplishments of Alpha Kappa Alpha leadership in dealing with social action programs have been ably detailed in **ALPHA KAPPA ALPHA: Sixty Years of Service** authored by Soror Marjorie H. Parker (1966). Unique among them was the work of the lobby project created by Xi Omega Chapter as a local activity in 1938 and adopted as the national project that same year. It was a significant venture for the time, for by its efforts Alpha Kappa Alpha focused its attention on the total plight of the disadvantaged eighty percent of the black population whose lives were affected by the most adverse economic and political conditions of that period. In the estimation of many sorors and non-sorors alike, the effort proved to be Alpha Kappa Alpha's most outstanding contribution to social change in this country. Since I was the originator of the lobby and served for ten years as its director, I am happy to provide these facts and comments for the Bi-Centennial on the incidents which led to the establishment of the National Non-Partisan Council on Public Affairs and to reflect historically on the program which catapulted the Sorority into National effectiveness and International prominence.

My early religious training stressed service to others and my experience as a public school teacher led me to the inevitable conclusion that I was responsible somehow for opening doors of opportunity for the less fortunate members of our race. This helped me to accept my responsibility as an Alpha Kappa Alpha woman for service, believing that I was only a channel through whom God could work to make life more bearable for the most underprivileged minority in these United States. I held faith, moreover, that God would guide me and that He would provide the resources necessary to achieve an objective — in this instance, that of an open and fully integrated society with all segments of the population, specifically the Negro, participating equally in the fruits of the American Way of Life.

I was influenced also by the Alpha Kappa Alpha Health Project which had been initiated in Mound Bayou, Mississippi in 1935 and the stories told of the desperate and inhumane conditions which impacted the lives of those living in the Southern Region. These reports spurred me to do something which might alleviate these conditions. The specific incident which



*Facts about SOROR NORMA E. BOYD*

*Bachelor of Arts, Howard University, 1910; Graduate Study, Columbia and New York Universities; School of Languages, Middlebury, Vermont; University of Southern California (Berkeley); George Washington University, Washington, D.C.; The American University, Washington, D.C. Incorporator of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority; First Supreme Epistoleus of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority; Initiator and Director of the Non-Partisan Council on Public Affairs; Founder of the Women's International Religious Fellowship (WIRF). She now resides in Washington, D.C. where she continues to promote international good-will and understanding.*

sparked my interest in a lobby came, however, from an article in **THE NEW YORK TIMES** which revealed that Southern Congressmen were threatening to expose Northern Congressmen, then battling for an anti-lynching bill, for having traded on other legislation. Concern gripped me and, in that instant, I decided that we should have a full-time observer in Congress to monitor the kinds of legislation being proposed if it would seem to hinder the progress of the race.

The day the article appeared, Xi Omega Chapter was having an executive committee meeting to plan for its celebration of the Thirtieth Anniversary of the Founding of the Sorority. On the way to the meeting, I shared the lobby idea with Soror Thelma Bryant and later with Soror Dorothy Ferebee when we arrived at her home.



Office of National Non Partisan Council on Public Affairs. Sorors Norma Boyd, Dorothy Ferebee and Jeanetta Welch (Brown), national representative of the Non-Partisan Council.

By the time of the meeting, the idea had taken concrete form and structure with plans calling for a contribution of \$10.00 from each soror, the use of my home for office space (agreed to by my sister who was not a soror), and the employment of our first legislative representatives. Sorors responded with enthusiasm and among the first contributors were Sorors Norma Boyd, Thelma Bryant, Lillie Burke, Dorothy Ferebee, Mattie Lee, Marie Long, Corrine Martin, Jessie Roy, Bobbie Scott, and Carolyn Welch. With the munificent sum of \$135.00, the lobby project was on its way.

Addressing the sorors of Xi Omega, Beta Lambda, and Alpha Chapters on Founders' Day in 1938, I unveiled the plan, the following details of which are excerpted from that speech. The Non-Partisan Lobby for Economic and Democratic Rights, as it was then named, would

"First — be non-partisan in its efforts

#### A. Establish an INFORMATION BUREAU

1. To become acquainted with the record of Congressmen who are seeking re-election in the Fall.

Purpose: To send out said information to our chapters.

2. To look up legislation affecting the most underprivileged group.

Purpose: To work for favorable bills and against those unfavorable, and to have our own interests protected in these bills when they are written.

3. To try to have bills introduced which will improve the economic conditions of our group, which will greatly aid in taking us out of the criminal class.

Purpose: To make ourselves respectable as American citizens.

4. To interpret to the masses such bills already passed which will be of benefit to them — as, for instance, UNEMPLOYMENT LEGISLATION.

#### B. PERSONNEL

1. Legislative Representative — DUTIES

a. To acquaint our organization with the record of Congressmen.

- b. To visit Congress daily while that body is in session and know what bills are due to come up and acquaint us with them.
- c. To acquaint them with the goals of our group.

#### 2. Committee of Sorors (all members) —

##### DUTIES

a. To send out all information to our chapters and to urge them to make their votes count.

b. To be connected with as many interracial groups as possible and get them to aid us in our work (As example — The Women's Trade Union League).

c. To work unceasingly for our objectives through all civil organizations, sororities, all other fraternal groups with which the masses are affiliated. Get mass action.

#### C. ESTIMATED BUDGET — \$1,000.00

Our goal tonight is to collect at least \$500.00 and the other \$500.00 is to be collected by March 18, 1938."

The first efforts of the Lobby were directed against the discriminatory policy of the United States Civil Service Commission; towards police brutality, suffrage for the District of Columbia, extension of the Public Works Program, the American Youth Act, and mini-



Soror Norma Boyd, a Founder and an Incorporator of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority appears in a March, 1976 photograph.

mum wages for women in the laundry industry. The success of its initial effort was shared with the chapters of the North Atlantic Region who provided some financial support. It endorsed the lobby project and recommended to the Boule that it become a National Program. The Boule adopted the project and provided the initial funding of \$1,000.00. By agreement, Xi Omega Chapter continued to direct the program and so successful was the effort that the funding was increased to \$2,000.00 at the Philadelphia Boule. At the same time, the name was changed to THE NATIONAL NON-PARTISAN COUNCIL ON PUBLIC AFFAIRS. Based on the accomplishments up to that time, a broader activity was envisioned that would extend our efforts to the international scene, cooperating with the State Department, the United Nations, and foreign countries to assure world peace and harmony.

Many dedicated and enthusiastic individuals were attracted to the Council. The first two were William P. Robinson, now an attorney who has served in the Virginia Assembly and Laura Lee, an honor graduate from Mt. Holyoke College. Following them were Sorors Thomasina Johnson Norford and Jeanetta Welch Brown. The volunteers assisting with the implementation of the program were legion, but the sorors who comprised the first Lobby Committee deserve mention. They included Sorors Thelma Bryant, Dorothy Ferebee, Ethel Grubbs, Marjorie Parker, Leanna Johnson, Lois M. Jones Pierre-Noel, Marie Long, Bertha McNeill, Gladys Peterson, Ruth Travers, and Carolyn Welch.

Reflecting on the period during which the National Non-Partisan Council flourished and its relationship to the progress of the Sorority, I feel that this has to be the most far-reaching of the programs initiated by Alpha Kappa Alpha because it encompassed almost every facet of life touched by the processes of legislation and government at every level of its operation. My one regret over the years has been that Alpha Kappa Alpha lost the momentum which the Council had generated when it discontinued the lobby as an independent resource for social change. With the merger into what became the American Council on Human Rights, which aligned us with the other Greek Letter Organizations and the consequent sharing of responsibility with others, Alpha Kappa Alpha's national influence and power in this area became substantially diluted. Now that we have changed our program direction, I fervently pray that the time will come again when Alpha Kappa Alpha will find it possible to reinstitute some form of the lobby idea within the framework of our organizational structure and thus fulfill its promise, the way to which was provided by the Council nearly forty years ago. As long as the masses of black people remain underprivileged in this country, there is yet time for Alpha Kappa Alpha to undergird their efforts to realize the full potential of their lives as full participants in the American Dream.

Send All Copy for the Ivy Leaf to:  
**ALPHA KAPPA ALPHA OFFICE**  
 5211 South Greenwood Avenue  
 Chicago, Ill. 60615

In response to the many inquiries from Alpha Kappa Alpha women concerning the sorority's involvement in Sickle Cell Anemia Research, let the records and our History reflect that Alpha Kappa Alpha was among the first, if not the first, national organizations to focus attention upon the disease: funding a research project and developing chapter educational programs throughout our sisterhood. We therefore salute our past by reprinting the initial article from the IVY LEAF, December 1958. — M.B.R. (Margaret Blake Roach).

## AT MID-CENTURY, ALPHA KAPPA ALPHA LOOKS AT HEALTH RESEARCH: "SICKLE CELL ANEMIA"

by Margaret L. Blake, Chairman  
 National Health Committee

Alpha Kappa Alpha took a giant step "forward to a new era of service" when, beginning its second half century, the 1958 Boule authorized the sum of \$5,000 for research studies on sickle cell anemia.

The project, titled, "The Effect of Sickle Cell Anemia Upon the Growth, Development, and Nutritional Status of Children," will be conducted at Howard University College of Medicine. Dr. Roland B. Scott, Head, Department of Pediatrics, will be director and principal investigator. He will be assisted by Dr. Angella Ferguson, Research Instructor in the department, as associate investigator.

In connection with the new venture, sorors will surely have many questions about sickle cell anemia. We do appreciate this interest, and progress reports will be made through both the "Health Column" and National office releases as research moves forward. This, our first article in the series, proposes to give briefly, a few basic facts about the disease, the research plan, and the method of procedure.

### What Is Sickle Cell Anemia?

Sickle cell anemia is a chronic debilitating disease which affects predominately Negroes. The disease is most often observed in children. Dr. Scott and Dr. Althea Kessler, in their brochure, "Sickle Cell Anemia and Your Child," explain: "It is a condition in which many of the red blood cells are abnormal in shape and contain an abnormal amount of hemoglobin."

Normal red blood cells are disk-shaped. In sickle cell anemia the red blood cells assume a crescent or sickle shape when their supply of oxygen is low and thus the name. It may make its initial appearance in children as young as two or three years of age and sometimes even in infants. It is estimated that 30,000 to 100,000 Negroes suffer from this disease in the U.S.A.

### Disease Characteristics

The disease is characterized by a chronic weakening anemia, an increased susceptibility to respiratory infections, recurrent body pains and poor nutritional

