Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc. member Montel Evans puts on his “grit” during the 2008 Fall Fest at the University of Missouri on September 11, 2008. Fall fest is organized to welcome all incoming and returning Mizzou students and introduces new students to MU academic, cultural resources, and the Black student organizations on campus.

While the concept of the grit cannot be traced back to specific origins, the practice is now common among all Black Greek Letter Organizations as a practice of ultimate masculinity. Interestingly enough, women in sororities have also began to adopt the practice. The history of the grit has not been documented fully but rumors place its origins in the southern region.
Camille Hardiman demonstrates the hand sign of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. to the newest initiates of Epsilon Psi Chapter hours before their 2008 Fall probate. The Delta hand sign consists of the formation of the pyramid which also mimics the greek symbol for Delta. In mathematical and scientific terms, Delta represents change.

That same attitude of change is what led 22 members of the 1912 Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc. pledge class to vote for an increased political presence and reorganization of AKA. Pending no progress, the 22 women left and started their own organization, Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. on January 13, 1913.
Detrez Woods sets out a hop during Fall Fest at the University of Missouri on September 9, 2009. Members of Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, Inc. wear the distinction in the BGLO world as ‘hoppers’ as opposed to steppers. While most of the Divine Nine steps with rhythmic combinations of hand and feet movements to produce sound, the Omegas entertain and hop while singing chants and songs.

Zeta Tau Alpha takes home the first place prize of $100,000 in Coca-Cola’s first annual “Sprite Step Off.” The Step Off, hosted by hip hop star Ludacris, was the largest step competition in history, awarding more than 1.5 million dollars in scholarship money while promoting community service.

Zeta Tau Alpha is actually not a sorority, but a women’s fraternity found in 1898. They shocked the world when they beat out Alpha Kappa Alpha, Tau Chapter in the biggest step show in history winning top prize money and the title of “Best Sorority Step Team.” The Atlanta Civic Center was rocked with reaction. Twitter, Facebook, Blogs, and eventually CNN caught the story bringing in people to speak on the controversy. Sprite’s reaction may be favorable to some but, at least for a moment, Zeta Tau Alpha shocked the world.
Reginald Wilson, 19, bows to accept his cane from a prophyte during probate practice January 10, 2010. Wilson faced extremely tough challenges when his father passed in 2004 due to cancer. “My father was everything to me…I went through some things.”

When Reginald stepped foot at the University of Missouri, he was still finding himself as a man, consciously trying to set a good example for his younger brother. He found some peace in the brotherhood of Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Inc. and was initiated in the Fall of 2009. Reggie’s experiences challenged him to become a better person and man. “I’ll never say anything is impossible again.”
The ladies of Alpha Chapter of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc. gather in front of their plot at Howard University on January 9, 2009. Every Friday, women of the sorority pay homage to their founders by singing songs and praying together on the grounds their founders stood on.

The relationship between both Alpha Phi Alpha and Alpha Kappa Alpha is a microcosm of Lyle and Hedgeman, who would later become husband and wife. These two organizations sometimes refer to their relationship of being the first fraternity/sorority combination on Howard’s campus as “Phrist Phamly.”
Aisha Barnes, left, sits nervously as her prophyte Brittnay Jewett-Hale gives last minute encouragement to her neophytes before their probate January, 30, 2009. The probate is the ceremony in which neophytes, the newest members of a BGLO, are reveled to the community, showing their newly acquired knowledge.

The probate is, above all things, a celebration. While most see the probate as an indicator of hazing, others view the practice as traditional and essential to the right of passage of Black Greek initiation. It is one of the things that makes the Black Greek experience unique and has rarely been questioned in its purpose as other secret societies have similar celebrations.
Members of Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, Inc., Chi Kappa Chapter recited Zeta history during their probate on January 30, 2009. While there are different chapters of BGLOs all across the world, the history and significance of fraternity/sorority life remains the same. Members of these organizations all have the same thing in common: the task to uplift the communities from which they come from.

The probate tradition is just one of many which many campuses regularly experiences. Howard University in Washington, D.C. is the birthplace of five of the nine organizations within the “Divine Nine”.
Charles Ukatu, Jr. mediating while his fraternity brother, Donte Howard, cuts his hair on December 12, 2009. Brotherhood and sisterhood mean a lot of things to BG-LOs. The bond between members is strong and everlasting and more than anything, members will maintain the brotherhood/sisterhood AKA 'hood' at all cost.

The 'hood' is what drives networking among BGLOs giving people opportunities in business, entrepreneurship and employment. The 'hood' is powerful enough to offer preference in job opportunities, yet subtle enough to comfort an ailing widow. The 1900's began the development of a new, more culture conscious Black community.
Ono Ikanone teaches steps during a community service event sponsored by the Sprite Step Off in Columbia, MO. The Columbia Boys and Girls Club also received a special surprise when they were offered a check for $4,500 to help support their programs. Ever BGLO was founded on the aim of service and ideally, should strive to uplift their community.

When Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity was finally established on December, 4, 1906, the motto “First of All, Servants of All, We Shall Transcend All.” gave new meaning to the purpose of the fraternity. Even then, the stated purpose of Alpha Phi Alpha was, “To promote a more perfect union among college men; to aid in and insist upon the personal progress of its members...”
Tattoos are one way to identify if someone is a member of a BGLO. Normally, greek letters, references to ships and sailor terminology are the artwork of choice. Branding is a controversial topic in the Black Greek community. Some organizations, like Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, Inc. are known for their body art.

Getting branded, or getting your ‘hits’, has been scrutinized as an oppressive practice derived from slave owners who would brand their slaves to indicate property rights. Others believe branding is done as an act of empowerment to signify permanence of BGLO life.

One of the major differences in BGLOs and non-Black greek organizations is that once an aspirant has obtained membership through initiation, they are a life-long member of that organization. The organization is not something that ‘I did in college’ but is something that the member continually does.
Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc., Tau Chapter from Indiana University, draws awes as they step on one leg to bring the crowd in the Atlanta Civic Center to their feet. Tau Chapter originally places second at the Sprite Step Off finals in Atlanta, GA, but controversy spread once the winner was announced.

Ludacris, the Sprite Step Off host, shook his head walking onto stage and made the announcement reluctantly, telling the crowd that they “had to understand”, that their first place prize was awarded to the ladies of Zeta Tau Alpha. The building shook with disgruntled boos from the stands. Disgusted comments flooded every social media outlet as the civic center emptied.
Justin McCain embraces his father, John E. McCain after being introduced to the Mizzou community as the newest member of Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Inc. on December 12, 2009. John welcomed his son with a huge hug, embracing their new relationship as “brothers”. While never guaranteed, it is not uncommon to have “legacy” membership in BGLOs. John was initiated into Kappa Alpha Psi on March 4, 1980, and thirty years later, two of his sons would be members of the same brotherhood.

The relationship of “legacy” membership can be likened to the relationship of men or women who attend Ivy League institutions such as Harvard or Yale. These academic relationships are assumed to be traditional and the parent promotes the expectation of the children enrolling in the parent’s alma mater. These academic relationships are assumed to be traditional and the parent promotes the expectation of the children enrolling in the parent’s alma mater.