

Delt's first Black brother inspires change By Megan Fee

Members of Delta Tau Delta rode through the 1990 Round-Up parade at the University of Texas in a car painted with racist slurs. Almost 30 years later, the chapter called its first Black, Ade Adesanoye, a brother.

Adesanoye, a junior biology major, grew up in Southlake, Texas, but is originally from Nigeria. Following decades of racial discrimination within the Greek system, chapters in the Interfraternity Council, such as Delta Tau Delta, are making strides to improve diversity.

"Representation on campus isn't that great, and representation in Greek life is even smaller," Adesanoye said, emphasizing that African Americans make up only 4% of UT's student body.

Lack of representation, however, is not the only issue haunting UT's past. Blatant instances of racism in Greek life have permanently tainted the community. In April of 1990, Phi Gamma Delta posted signs on its lawn reading "No Blacks Allowed." For more than 10 years, border-control-themed parties have popped up on campus.

"Delt, along with a lot of other fraternities at UT, has had a really racist past," Adesanoye said. "It's just nice to see how much they're trying to make Delt more of an accurate representation of the student body."

Cole Kofnovec, a junior who serves as the council's vice president of member development, said the IFC worked hard this year to promote recruitment events at freshman orientations to provide a wider range of students the opportunity to get involved in the recruitment process.

"Texas IFC fully supports individual chapter efforts and hopes diversity remains a priority for many years to come," according to an IFC board statement he provided.

Adesanoye did not intend to rush a fraternity before he got to UT, but after befriending both new members and active members of Delt at the start of his freshman year, he decided to give rush a try. He pledged Delta Tau Delta in the spring of 2018.

"I wanted to join a fraternity with older guys that I would look up to and want to be like, not just guys who know how to party," Adesanoye said.

He has found the brotherhood to be the most rewarding aspect of his experience in Delt, and said he has met all of his best friends through the fraternity.

"I've gotten so many opportunities that I wouldn't have gotten otherwise -- job wise, internship wise, career wise... It's a great community. I love it," Adesanoye said.

And while he has made history himself, Adesanoye has also paved the way for other minority students in the Greek system.

Colby Buckhanan and Sam Yeboah, friends of Adesanoye from freshman year, followed in his footsteps as Black members of Delt, pledging in the fall of 2018.

"I don't even think I would have considered being in a frat if I didn't already see that he was a part of it," said Buckhanan, a junior biochemistry major who is now Adesanoye's 'little brother' within Delt.

Buckhanan admitted he was not the biggest fan of fraternities during his freshman year, and came into UT without much knowledge of the Greek system.

"They weren't really diverse, so there was no point for me to get into it," said Buckhanan, who participated in other organizations his freshman year, but always felt like something was missing -- until he met Adesanoye.

"I thought, 'No way, is he in a frat?'," Buckhanan said, referencing his first impression of Adesanoye when they shared a lab freshman year. The pair became friends, and within several months, Buckhanan decided to pursue rush. He signed his Delt bid after a summer rush event, where he said he felt more welcome and had more fun than he could've ever expected.

But the newly paved road has not always been smooth for Buckhanan as one of the few Black brothers.

"Going to alumni events, and tailgates, catching looks here and there...it's something that most people don't know about or understand because they're not in that position," he said. He said he believes Delt's recent inclusion of Black members has "opened up a lot of eyes."

"We know this isn't normal. This isn't something that most African Americans get the opportunity to be a part of," said Buckhanan. "We recognize that, and are able to connect on a different level because of it."

Buckhanan also admitted he has not seen much of a change in Greek life outside of his pledge class. He attributed much of the community's lack of diversity to fraternity culture itself, not to active racial discrimination.

"I don't think it's anything about race... I think it's more about culture," he said, explaining that racial minorities have a harder time connecting with Greek life because of its lack of diversity.

Though there is no immediate fix for this entrenched issue, Adesanoye has a few ideas of his own for making Greek life more inclusive.

For one, he suggested that UT could hold a formal rush. He said the informal rush process that IFC fraternities conduct doesn't draw in many African Americans, and that it is difficult to rush without having personal connections with a fraternity. He said many Black men and women are scared of rush because they may see Greek life as an "elitist white system," which he said, is "completely false."

Moreover, Adesanoye said finding a way to lower fraternity dues would make Greek life more accessible for people of all backgrounds.

But even with its barriers, he said he believes everyone deserves to have the opportunity to participate in Greek life.

"Don't judge a book by its cover," Adesanoye said. "You don't know unless you've actually experienced it."