

We (The National Membership Committee of the Association for the Study of African American Life and History, Inc. (ASALH)) recently provided a sample installation of officers document that included descriptions of offices held within a branch to ensure the officers are provided an understanding of what is expected of them in advance of accepting a position. We have recently had a couple branches give “Emerita” status to some of our elder members in honor of their outstanding service to the branch that they served for several years.

Because ASALH is engaged in succession planning, this position will be scarcer in the future because many of you are thinking “succession planning” which will mean there will be less people holding offices for extremely long periods of time. This is progress for ASALH and means our intergenerational branches are being inclusive and providing Generation X (born 1965 – 1976), Millennials or Gen Y (born 1977 – 1995) and younger the opportunity to engage in the leadership process along with the GI Generation (born 1900 – 1924), Silent (born 1925 – 1945) and the Baby Boomer generation (Golden Boomers born 1946 – 1964; Late Boomers born 1954 – 1965). This is very important for the future of ASALH and we appreciate all ASALH branches are doing to be inclusive of younger generations in this way. A strong ASALH is an intergenerational ASALH. This methodology was put in place by our founder, Dr. Woodson, through his mentoring model that still exists in ASALH today. Younger people are still being mentored and brought to ASALH annual meetings and the process continues with each generation. (Note: For information new generations identified: Snowflake 2000 – 2020; Gen Z 1996 – 2020; Gen Z/Z New Silent Generation 2011 – 2025. Note: *Dates are sometimes lightly different on generational charts retrieved online.*)

Below is a definition for the position of Emerita or Emeritus that we’d like you to include in your package of items that goes into the notebook that we have asked each branch to have available at every meeting. This definition will ensure every member of the branch understands this position of honor.

ASALH Definition of Emerita (female) or Emeritus (male)

A designation describing a woman or man who no longer holds or is active in the position of President, but is honorably given the title of the position in honor of their extensive and extended service to the organization. (President Emerita (female) or President Emeritus (male) The President has retired honorably from active professional duty, and a majority of the members of the Branch have voted to bestow upon this person the title of Emerita or Emeritus in honor of their longstanding honorable status in the position of President. This person is now provided the opportunity to see the fruits of their labor through the passing of the torch of leadership to the next generation and willingly shares information to ensure there is institutional memory moving forward. In the case of ASALH, this title is only given to a retiring President of a branch. No other office at the branch level in this Association is provided this designation.

EXPLANATION OF GENERATIONAL BLENDING SYMBOLISM
FOR MAY 3, 2013 MARCH ON WASHINGTON FOR MENTORS AND NO-VIOLENCE
Subtheme: To Serve This Present Age—From Nonviolence to No-Violence

Role of Freedom's Song—Copy of Freedom's Song Provided by ASALH
As a gift from NAFJ/NPS and Kiamsha provided to all Marchers

The oldest living generation in the United States today are members of the GI Generation, also known as the Greatest Generation—this generation is defined by the Great Depression, their participation in World War II, and their enormous personal wealth—nearly \$11 trillion—amassed through savings. GI members continue to have influence even today. When you look at the events surrounding each generation, and how the “thinking” of each generation was shaped by these events, it would be wise for the elders still living to fully understand the concept of “*meeting people where they are*” in order to productively interact with esp., Generation X, Y, and the millennials today.

Intergenerational interaction only works when from each generation there is a remnant that connects the older generations to the younger. Let's take a look at Generation X (born 1963 – 1978) and Generation Y (born 1979 – 1999) – Two very distinct generations but in both cases, their parents are from the Baby Boomer Generations (born 1946 – 1954 and 1955 – 1962). Another thing they also have in common, many of the Generation Xers and Yers are angry and they don't know why. Could this have to do with not knowing their ethnic identity, in other words, not knowing their history that tells them who they are—this knowledge would help them connect with things happening in the world around them that they are so intensely involved???? And could it be that their parents failed to pass this information to them????

Generation Y is the first generation to grow up with the internet, the point and click concept of receiving information in a moment's notice. Even before they could type and mouse click their way through the internet, they grew up with modern media choices: television remotes to encourage channel flipping; cable, with a wealth of channels among which to switch; multiple TVs (with video recorders and video games. This reduced the commonality and centralized control of the viewing experience.)

As the Baby Boomers retire and Gen Xers begin to fill the upper management and Gen Y fill lower half of the workforce, we are going to see a notable demographic shift. Memories of historical events for the Gen Yers are few, although they have lived through some notable events.

What connects generations are generations. In other words, intergenerational interaction is the key to keeping the flow of historical information viable and lasting. When you look at Gen Y, although most of them were in programs like D.A.R.E., they are more depressed and world aware than any other generation—gaining a stereotype of the “sad generation.” Although Ritalin was introduced in the 1950s, it was mostly subscribed in the 1990s.

The Silent Generation was caught between the “get-it-done” G.I. Generation (1900 – 1924) and the “world changing” Baby Boomers. Well into their adulthood, the Silent Generation looked to the G.I. generation for role models and pursued what then looked to be a lifetime of refining and humanizing in a G.I. built world. Come the mid 1960s the Silent Generation fell under the trance of their free-spirited next juniors, the Boomers.

As songwriters, graduate students, and young attorneys, the Silent Generation mentored the consciousness revolution, founding several of the organizations of political dissent the Boomers would later radicalize. They received and activated the message from the G.I. generation that education was important, and passed that message very strongly to the Boomers who took the message and ran with it.

The vision for Freedom’s Song is to bridge a gap that separates the generations by using something that captivates the Gen Yers digital/media crave. By taking one significant event of lesser known facts from each decade, beginning in 1905 – 2005, we touch and begin to blend every living generation represented today. Freedom’s Song is a conversation piece – The Gen Yers, when introduced will be enlightened and can then begin to look at the future that they will create with fresh eyes that have been mixed with the wisdom of the ages.

So let’s look at youth development – The understanding of intergenerational interaction has to take place NOW. It must take place at every level. The G.I. generation has stayed involved with the Silent and Boomer generations, still holding board seats, lecturing and teaching at college universities until they are forced to retire, staying involved at every level even at 84 and older. They are extremely important advisors because they have lived what other generations simply talk about. The Boomers must take the lead as the bridge between the old and the new, passing every bit of historical knowledge they have lived and acquired through their lifetime, introducing the Xers and Yers to all the other generations, then leaving the Xers & Yers ready as they make the hand-off while the Boomers are still viable and able. Because Generations X and Y do not readily read, to get them to read we need to be creative in “meeting them where they are” in order to help them learn to match their reading skills with their thinking skills. Their world is fast and furious and they need to be fed information in a way they best process it. Intergenerational viewings of Freedom’s Song will engage them at a level they will engage. And to address the violent society that has been created for them through film, music, etc., an intergenerational viewing of “Proud” the movie is a great conversation piece for discussing what it looks like when cursing and violence are left out of movie scenes—does it still keep the interest of the younger generations? If we begin creating music and making movies that are more cognizant of having positive influences without cursing and violence, can we change the way younger generations will grow up and react in our society? These are questions that deserve discussions intergenerationally. The Boomers are the last generation that remember a time when although Lucy and Ricky Ricardo were married, they slept in separate beds. A time when sexual scenes were only indicated and not shown. When wardrobes were discreet and language was decent, keeping in mind that an innocent child may be watching. Those times have long been gone, but does that mean they are gone forever? Only the next generations can claim a revitalization of such moral standards in how they will develop the future.

Generations are shaped by their childhood experiences, and then defined by their early adulthood actions when each generation can consciously adopt or reject the attitudes or actions of prior generations. The experience of the Great Depression and World War II are a major way of defining the formative years of the so called G.I. Generation also known at times as the “Greatest Generation.” In turn, the experiences of the moon landing, Assassination of John F. Kennedy, and the 1960s social revolution are key events that demarcate the formative years of the Baby Boomer generation. The Boomers excelled academically, socially, economically, and hold the key to blending the generations in a way that will be productive and beneficial to the future of the United States of America and, the world. Although there has been a disconnect, Boomers are the connectors – we must connect now. Boomers have a short window of opportunity to do so, but it can be done. The commemoration of The Birmingham Children’s Crusade on May 3, 2013, will symbolically make that connection.

Boomers are the ones who gathered a great deal of wisdom from living through the crisis periods with the GI and Silent Generations by their side. Boomers have worked to guide the national conversations carefully making sure disasters were avoided. But Boomers are also the ones who disconnected the flow of historical knowledge by forgetting to pass it safely along to Generations X and Y. (There are pockets of people who did not disconnect but the many are disconnected) Many Boomers claimed protecting their children was their reason why—but, did that protection help or hurt????

As important as the understanding of God’s supreme ability to lead and guide us—to protect us not only from our enemy but also from our own selfish thinking—we are now in the third generation of people who do not even know God or believe in God. You cannot accurately tell the history of people of African descent without including their faith as a factor.

If we do not make the adjustment now, new leaders will literally be crippled without the information that mostly lies with the Boomers and their advisors of wisdom and historical knowledge, the GI and Silent generations. By blending the generations, we pass on the history and make a smooth transition to the next generation of learners.

This is why Carter G. Woodson’s legacy of mentoring that exists in this historical organization, the Association for the Study of African Negro Life and History now African American Life and History, is extremely important and serves as a model for other organizations. And now the challenge is to you today. I have prepared a document of activities that if all of us here today engage in these activities, then share them with every single member of our family, all of our friends and colleagues to do the same, I guarantee you we will see a change in our society.

Let’s honor the mentoring legacy of Dr. Carter G. Woodson and the Association as we kick-off the season leading to Centennial of the organization he founded 100 years ago in 2015. ASALH needs its community to keep it alive. So let’s begin to utilize the resources that ASALH has provided—we present to you Freedom’s Song.

Researched and written by Barbara Spencer Dunn, April 2013
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on behalf of Kiamsha for the March on Washington for Mentors and Non-Violence held May 3, 2013