



An Interview with A Founder of Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, Inc.

Founder Bishop Edgar A. Love

Conducted & Taped By Brother Joshua Mark Hyman

October 3, 1973

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Mark Hyman: What was the single most difficult obstacle that you had to overcome in attempting to establish Omega other than obtaining administration acceptance at Howard?

Founder Edgar A. Love: Of course that was the big obstacle we had to overcome, ran the risk there of being suspended or even expelled from the school for breaking the laws and forming an organization without the consent of the university body committee on student affairs.....you wouldn't believe it but the next, as far as I'm concerned we had no real pressures in Omega until we came to the Charlotte Conclave, when this man.....I don't recall his name had turned.....came with a group of young turks we called them to change the whole program of the Fraternity to retransform the Fraternity into a social action committee or organization when the Fraternity is not meant for that, and I said and so many people since that time, I hope every man in Omega is an activist but the organization is not an activist organization.....I said you can do anything you want to do under three of the four cardinal principles.....in Uplift you can go out and do anything you want to help the poor and the less fortunate than yourself and Perseverance means when you want to start on something hard and difficult you do it outside the Fraternity.....stand by till you see it through.....we had in existence a Constitutional Committee for two years to draft a new constitution with sixteen of the best minds in the Fraternity on that.....we had three or four lawyers on there I know we had three I think four.. and Presidents of schools and men of high intellectual ability on that program on that constitutional revision committee.....and we spent two years and nearly \$30,000 dollars making that new constitution and a new ritual.....because all the men were scattered all over the United States the world way out in California, we had you had to pay their expenses and it cost us a whole lot to have.....

Mark Hyman: Bishop another question, if you had it all to do over again what aspect of the entire Omega founding would you change?

Founder Edgar A. Love: Nothing in the founding would change, nothing, I think we started off with a constitution that wasn't tampered with for maybe forty or fifty years and nobody has ever questioned the preamble except at the Conclave in Charlotte and nobody has ever questioned the four principles of our organization....nobody has ever questioned them so we got off to a good start and we were men of high ideals and we organized on the basis of friendship and that's what a Fraternity ought to be.....I said there was another Fraternity in existence at the time but it was a caste, you had to be fair or you had to have money to get in there.

Mark Hyman: There wasn't too much of the latter around at that time though was there?

Founder Edgar A. Love: Two or three boys know from the south whose parents were sending them 50 dollars a month.....

Mark Hyman: This is 191

Founder Edgar A. Love: 19 and 1Jimmy McPenlin from Jacksonville, I know his father

sent him 50 dollars a month, I got 50 dollars for four years from home and two of us were approached for the organization we never though went to join because.....turned it down flat and when we organized we went to a hearing before the faculty committee on student affairs so we just went on and initiated fourteen other men and put their names on flyers and on placards and tacked them up all up on the trees on the hill around Howard University and all that naming the fact we would be born and when we were born.....that day at chapel President Thirkield a very nervous man anyhow.....I want everyone who's here whose name appears on those placards to get in my office directly after chapel.....so we went into his office after chapel and he stressed Gentlemen do you don't you know that you have made yourself liable to expulsion from the University.....suspension maybe expulsion from the University.....yes sir we know that.....we were willing to run that risk.....to be men to be heard.....you wouldn't hear us.....Why don't you join the Fraternity already on the campus.....we said we don't want to join because its a social club but call it a Fraternity.....and that's what it was.....it was only a social club.....we wanted our Friendship.....I nominated Frank Coleman for president of the Freshman Class the first time we met.....the first time we three met we became friends and through all four years we were on the hill we were inseparable.....Friendship we put it on there and that's why we have Friendship and Fraternity on our shield

Mark Hyman: Which founder gave Omega its name, its motto and its color?

Founder Edgar A. Love: Its difficult to say, its difficult to say, its difficult to say, we all discussed it and Earnest Just, Professor Just he was, gave us a lot of good help, because he knew more about Fraternity's then we did and he helped us really to get our name and motto because he knew greek and he got a book in which there was listed all the known incorporated fraternities in America so we wouldn't take a name which was already incorporated and he was the one who helped us to choose our motto in greek.....Ophelema Philia Psukis.....Friendship is Essential to the Soul and we translate it freely saying Friendship is Essential to Life and it is because we were born as a Fraternity of brothers and friends always love each other and Friendship is the closest affinity that people can have on earth.....closer that blood relationships because brothers will fight, sisters will fight but friends never.....you got to take your relatives whether or not they're wished on you.....but you choose your friends and you usually choose them because they're like minded with yourself and your ideals and your aspirations and that's how the Fraternity was born.....and another thing too.....they demanded that we take out of our constitution a national Fraternity and put in a local Fraternity.....well we compromised on that.....and had written into the constitution, to the Grand Basileus in Atlanta Georgia 1936, Frank Coleman had written it.....but the very next year we set up a chapter in Lincoln Beta chapter and the next year Gamma and we began moving on we haven't heard a word from them since to be a local chapter.....we told some of our friends, we didn't believe that they would expel from Howard University from the School of Liberal Arts, College of Liberal Arts and the Teachers College, fourteen men who all had "B" averages and three of nine, six debaters of the nine came among that group.....we had the president of the German Club.....we had the President of the Se Frances French Club.....we had the Presidents of the Student Organizations on the campus among those men....we didn't believe that they would throw them off.

Mark Hyman: What void did you think Omega would fill when the four of you organized it?

Founder Edgar A. Love: We never expected it.....we never dreamed of it being as large as it has become and really as influential as it has become but we wanted to have a group of young people in every.....in those days.....every black college in the United States.....we had the kind of leadership that men like the founders had been or were and the President of Howard University asked us how would we know that you were going to have an organization patterned after the men who founded it.....I said the only guarantee we could give you is the guarantee that the men that we three have chosen and they'd go on establishing an organization and start off with men pledged to the same high ideals and they'd carry on through on into finitum.

Mark Hyman: Did you consider how it would improve the life of brothers after their graduation from Howard or other colleges?.....Did you have anything in mind about how Omega would improve the lifestyle, the quality of life for its members once they were out of college?

Founder Edgar A. Love: Oh yes, oh yes we thought they would improve the life of their communities in which they might separately go because they had been inspired by the idealism of the Fraternity that they would influence the life of their communities and that they would enjoin to make themselves relevant to the community and not to be an exclusive club and lose contact with people of the community.

Mark Hyman: You already answered part of the next question.....But how does it feel to have spawned an organization that now has 378 chapters and 10,000 active men?

Founder Edgar A. Love: You don't know how happy I feel I got plaques in there on my wall.....150 of them and I'm proud as I can be to think that three humble students in three different fields, one in physics, one in medicine and one in the ministry, would get together and form an organization that would be as large and as influential in the life of America and the communities in which they reside as we find today.

Mark Hyman: What would you consider your prediction for the future of the Fraternity, its done 61 years what about the next 60?

Founder Edgar A. Love: I think you have to make very little change, just as our own American Constitution has stood with very little change, its 150 or more years, I think it will remain with very little change in what it expresses.

Mark Hyman: What do you consider the essential role that any Black Fraternity should play in social structure now in America?

Founder Edgar A. Love: I think they should participate in the Social Action.....We are.....the social end of our life is an important part of our life and one of the areas we need to cultivate

but we must keep our social life on a decent level.

Mark Hyman: Social Action, lets get into that. Is the Fraternity as you see it today growing closer to the ideals of the Fraternity envisioned by you and the other founders at the inception?

Founder Edgar A. Love: No, I can't say that I do see it growing closer to it, yet I find some outstanding men in the Fraternity who are outspoken and who I think are just as strong in sustaining and upholding the honor of the Fraternity through its four cardinal principals as we were envisioning in my day.

Mark Hyman: This may a duplicate situation here but, Do you think Omega Men are living up to your initial inception by way of the four cardinal principles?

Founder Edgar A. Love: Not all of them, not all of them are, I'm sorry to say the master made a mistake he only chose twelve disciples and among them a traitor, you can't expect Omega to have 30,000 in there without making some mistakes, you get men who once in a while who don't belong in there but are in there and stay in there unless he does something to be put out I don't say that so often.....sometimes we made mistakes, we got to be very careful we don't want men just because they're great athletes without any character or because they're outstanding in some phase of school life with no character, we don't want them.....we don't care how popular they may be or how big their name may be, they're not big enough for us.....a man whose mind is not capable of making at least the average that the Fraternity requires.....there's a place for mediocre men but not in Omega.

Mark Hyman: You just mentioned that we have some outstanding men who are not particularly active with the Fraternity but they are outstanding in there fields, How do you suggest we reclaim these men back to Omega for active work?

Founder Edgar A. Love: That's a hard question, how we get them back.....I wrote to Moultrie some years ago to send me the names of all the men of prominence who were not active members.....I never received it, I was going to write them a personal letter and ask them if they would take out a life membership because I know some of them spend as much as a life membership would cost on one night's entertainment.....on one night's entertainment.....and one man I won't call his name we gave him a scholarship to help him to get through school and now he's a millionaire and he's never given back to the Fraternity one penny and I don't believe he's even financial with the Fraternity.

Mark Hyman: Do you think we have a weakness an identifiable weakness today as an organization?

Founder Edgar A. Love: That's kind of hard.

Mark Hyman: Alright.....we don't have to have.....that was just a question that one brother

wrote to us and I can think of the strengths that we've got but that was just a question.

Founder Edgar A. Love: If we have a weakness it is in having some men in there who don't belong in there who carry the name of the Fraternity and like to boast of their Fraternity but at the same time are not living up to the ideals of the Fraternity.....it gives the Fraternity a bad name.....we do have a few of them.

Mark Hyman: You touched on something a while ago, maybe you would elaborate, what do you think Omega has done to shape the present society in which we live, I know we've had some impact on our communities?

Founder Edgar A. Love: Oh we have.....we have so many Omega Men in high places.....we had the first Federal Judge who was an Omega Man and should have been on the Supreme Bench.....if the President had had guts enough at that time to name a man of color to the Supreme Court.....that's a.....Hastie.....Bill Hastie, we have a man Lawrence Oxley in Washington who is the only negro I know of who has had a direct wire to the White House, very few people know that he had a direct wire to the White House, he was the Assistant of Labor and then he came out of the cabinet.....subcabinet.....he was so well thought of and done so much for Washington and for Congress through his influence so that they gave him the privilege of calling direct and I don't know of any other negro who has been so honored.

Mark Hyman: This was during the Roosevelt Administration?

Founder Edgar A. Love: Yeah but, He had it ever since as far as know.

Mark Hyman: Oh. How many of the men did you know in the Black cabinet, I understand that all of them when Ms. Bethune was the top person in Washington, that all the men were Omega Men?

Founder Edgar A. Love: All But one, Evans, I forget his first name.

Mark Hyman: Oh Leonard Evans, Not Leonard.. James Evans from Miami.

Founder Edgar A. Love: He was in there.....he blamed Oxley for that.....you got in there first and you brought all Omega Men in and Oxley said No.....I didn't bring them in.....their training.....their character.....their so forth.....when they wanted a good man and looked around for him they picked him..... he just happened to be an Omega Man

Mark Hyman: Some of those men, do you remember their names, Trent, Weaver, Home.....Frank Horn I think he's the housing man.

Founder Edgar A. Love: You caught me at a bad time, I don't remember so many.

Mark Hyman: That's a no no, that's alright.....we'll just talk ..we're just talking off the top

about some of the things, just go on and just talk about Omega, Bishop my questions have expired here, we had about twenty and some of them were duplications.....but whatever you would like to say about the future of Omega, about the past of Omega, about Omega today anything that you would like to say you go right ahead.

Founder Edgar A. Love: We have got to some how or another put an end to too much politicking at our Grand Conclaves.....its natural in any organization to try to use influence but we've got to be.....we must not carry it too far because after a while you have a little trick here.....a trick there.....one trick younger than the other trick.....to defeat somebody else for some office in the Fraternity.....he wanted to be Grand Chancellor so bad that he was ready to disrupt the Fraternity to get himself elected and he defeated the reporting of the *Constitutional Committee* by calling for a role call vote on every portion put before the house and took forty five minutes for a role call.....well see how much time himself that so we couldn't get anywhere with the constitution and then on saturday when I made my final report I.....someone had been prompted to make a motion.....that we call our next Conclave a Conclave and Conventional Meeting and the first whole day would be given to the handling of the constitution and nothing else and we completed it at that time but he was there with his young turks and the.....championship football game but you see and they wanted to vote us down and voted for a constitutional convention to meet within the year and appropriated 15,000 dollars for this committee that the Conclave national organization would pay the way and expenses of all the undergraduates delegates to this Conclave all the delegates were invited to come but the graduate chapters would have to pay the expenses of their own delegates.....partners of young delegates in there and gave the constitution the way he wanted it....I was ill at the time I couldn't go.....but I sent a two hundred word telegram black letter and I wish I had copy of it to read to you and they say when they read the telegram the house got up and cheered they say that took the house.....they weren't going to change anything.

Mark Hyman: What have been some of your personal triumphs within Omega over the 61 years?

Founder Edgar A. Love: I wouldn't call them triumphs, but highlights

Mark Hyman: Alright highlights, we'll use highlights

Founder Edgar A. Love: Have been the entertainment that have been held for me in the various cities to which I have gone and the lovely entertainment given to me and my wife and the plaques that the men have given me made me feel good some of them so heavy I can hardly lift them