

Charles Kelly

BSA President Interviewed

In accordance with the continued observance of “Black Week,” April 1 thru 14, an interview was held with the Black Student Alliance’s President Charles Kelly by Kenneth Rollins, a member of “The Black Rap” staff on April 6.

President Kelly, a junior in Emory College, talked candidly about the BSA: its goals, its gains and its problems. He also voiced the need for a significant increase in the recruitment of black high school students to attend Emory. The text of the interview follows.

Question: In plain and simple terms, what is the purpose of the BSA?

President Kelly: Our purpose is to serve as an outlet of pressures that black students would come under in a white university. I would imagine that all students get these pressures, but Emory is such a “white university” and does not have the facilities to relieve the pressures of black students. We also serve to give black students a form of culture not found in a white university—in the area of entertainment, art exhibits, etc. In general, our purpose is to serve black students.

Q. When was the organization established?

A. I suppose there was some sort of an alliance of black students just as long as there was more than one black student on campus. But it came into full-swing in 1969 due to a formidable rebellion. So it began in 1969.

Q. You called it a rebellion?

A. Yes, a rebellion in that the people didn’t go through normal channels to bring changes: that’s a rebellion. It had to happen because there was nothing here to appease black folk—no place to party, no black literature, no black teachers and counselors. The rebellion came close to a riot. People were arrested for mass assembly, such as what happened in front of Cox.

Q. Can you chart the progress of the BSA?

A. From the ‘69, the Black House was attained. It is a sign of progress, but it is not the best in the area. The Black House is an old place; it’s about one-and-a-half or two miles from campus. Most of the students live on campus and must walk there. And when it gets cold and you’re tired, it gets pretty rough. Also, the BSA was allotted a certain amount of money from the

SGA. Ever since that time, there has been a steady drop in our funding. Right now, we are functioning under something like \$1000 which must serve 120 students. There have been significant gains though. There has been the establishment of a Black Studies Department which is headed by a black person, Dr. Aldridge, and the Afro-American Reading Room in Candler Library. The wages and treatment of workers, which were complained about in 1969, have been significantly upgraded. Recruitment of black students is at a minimum though. Much can be done about that. I think a scholarship can be offered to help with Emory's high tuition, and that funds must be given to the BSA to allow black students to achieve our goals. Without those funds, our hands are virtually tied.

Q. What external problems does the organization face?

A. One of our main problems is proper funding. With it not only would we be able to satisfy blacks on campus, but we would be able to show others that Emory is not the "white stronghold" as it appears to be. You mentioned external problems. Without the proper funds, internal problems develop. Our members become dissatisfied when activities are hampered due to the lack of funds. We cannot function properly without the adequate funds.

Q. Can you give a reason for the lack of proper funds?

A. Now we're getting heavy. We have been looked upon as being a special interest group—in some cases we are—such as, "We will give the black students this and they will be cool." No white student sees what the BSA "can be." The BSA offers things dealing in Blackness, such as "Black Week." Black students are presenting two plays: we're also having a theater group from New York. These things are open to the white community at Emory; it would be to their advantage if they did attend. This, to me, is a form of racism. If the people here are as smart and competitive as the Administration and student body claim, I cannot see beyond racial overtones why they cannot see that it is to their best advantage to have a BSA that functions properly. As I mentioned before, this does take money.

Q. Does the BSA participate with other black organizations on a city, state and national level?

A. Yes, we have a strong communication with other black organizations and schools. This is necessary in that we don't get everything we need from Emory. We have things we want to share with our black brothers and sisters, and we want to take full advantage of this.

Q. Next week will be the final half of "Black Week." Has it been a success so far?

A. As far as "Black Week" is concerned, it has been a tremendous success in that one of its reasons was to contribute to the Martin Luther King Scholarship Fund. And it was also designed to bring black students together. We want to do things that all black students would enjoy. The play by black students is a prime example of showing that black students can and want to work together, and the proper medium can bring that about.

Q. Finally, what goals would you like to see the BSA attain during the remainder of this year?

That's a deep question. I would like to see a completion of all the activities of "Black Week" and, also, a modification of the Black House. The Black House is somewhat run-down: and contrary to popular opinion, it was run-down when we got it. Most of all I would like to see black students as a whole recognize each other and in the independent schools of the University. I would like to see more black high school students accepted and given the necessary funds to attend Emory. Finally, the BSA has not been recognized since the incident by the University. It would be to their best advantage to "check us out."