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## History of the Sons of Africa / by Neil Kahrim '04. 2004

In 1990 Haverford College was about to experience in new phenomena the likes of which it had never seen before. During the 89'- '90 academic school year Ty Ahmad-Taylor '90, Stephon H. Alexander '93, Ted W. Burnett '90, Eric D. Ferrell '93, Dawayne M. Judd '90, Kiame J. Mahaniah '93, Keino R. Robinson '91, A. Andrew Cohen Samson '91, Devon E. Sanders '91, James E. Vaughn '90, Ernest A. Wright, Jr. '90 and Charles Atkins '90 all decided to experiment with each other and the Haverford community. It was senior year for Charles, Ty, Ted, James, Dawayne and Ernest and it was not until this point in their undergraduate careers at a predominantly white college that these gentlemen actually got to know one another. Men dealing with similar issues in the same environment realized that it was absolutely insane that it took 4 years for them to meet. It was at this point that they decided to do something about the lack of community amongst black men at Haverford.

During the following weeks and months these gentlemen decided to an active approach to promoting community among the black male underclassmen. Led largely by Charles Atkins, they brought these men together and asked them to try something with them that would hopefully help to build a bond and a sense of unity between them. They asked the underclassmen to take an oath of silence for a month. The underclassmen would not speak to anyone except professors, administrators and classmates for academic purposes. Outside of these exceptions the underclassmen would only be allowed to communicate through the upperclassmen. The reaction was unlike anything they had ever seen or expected.

The Haverford Community including black female students and faculty members did not welcome the experiment. Meetings were held on campus to confront the controversy. Ultimately, these men expressed themselves in the form of a step, organized by Atkins, the group's designated spokesperson. This was the beginning of the organization that we now know as the Sons of Africa.

As time went on the organization experienced its shares of hills and valleys in terms of membership and focus however in the mid 90's the organization was firm in it's resolution to provide a social and academic support system for men of African heritage on Haverford's campus. This came from the recognition of a disturbing trend at Haverford. Over the years, men of African heritage generally have had a harder time academically and socially at Haverford. The organization attempts to provide a network that can help these men get comfortable and succeed at Haverford. Social and academic support has been the main focus of SOA however; in the Spring of 1999 the organization began to take on a political agenda as well.

During the '98 - '99 academic school year an interview was done for an article in the Bico Newspaper. The subject of the interview was Ramien Pierre. Ramien was at the time the Dean of Multicultural Affairs. The '98-'99 school year was his last year in the position and he took the opportunity to offer his views about the nature of minority affairs at Haverford as he saw them. Ramien believed the Multicultural Affairs office was inadequately equipped to perform the services that the Haverford community required. It was after reading this article that the Sons of Africa decided to do their best to make a change. The organization sent a letter demanding action that was posted on the comment

board put in the newspaper and delivered to all of the Deans, heads of every department and President. During the following months SOA, and various concerned members of the Haverford community led a march, had various meetings with the President, the Dean of the College, other members of the administration and the Board demanding more faculty of color, more resources for the Office of Multicultural Affairs and attention be paid to diversity at Haverford overall. Though the results were not as they hoped, there were results and the Office of Multicultural Affairs was revamped. Since then SOA has continued to provide academic and social support for men of African descent at Haverford and it plans to continue to do so for many years to come.