

HETERO DOXY

ARTICLES AND ANIMADVERSIONS ON POLITICAL CORRECTNESS AND OTHER FOLLIES



Underground Frats

The heat had been coming down all week, and things were far too dangerous to try anything close to home. So toward the end of the week, the two men notified others that they'd found a safe locale for the operation. Leaving instructions for everyone coming to the secret meeting to take different routes, they drove cautiously through town, taking care to see that they were not followed, and then proceeded along a deserted highway for about 30 miles. The man on the passenger side unfolded a hand-drawn map antt? watched carefully for the spot where they were to turn off. The road took them into the woods. They drove until they found three cars parked beside a fence. Some of the others had arrived there before them.

After getting out of the car, the pair followed the map to a small cabin in a clearing. A half-dozen other young men greeted them with cryptic signs and handshakes. Satisfied that they were alone and unobserved, the group got down to business, although they still maintained a watchful eye because they knew that even in this secluded site, there was still a possibility that one among them was a traitor who would turn them in to the authorities.

Now for the multiple choice test. Was this a gathering of Maquis resistance fighters in the south of France in 1943? Or perhaps a clandestine conclave of Christians in the USSR during the reign of Nikita Khrushchev? Or a group of Weatherman revolutionaries during the '60s plotting death to fascist Amerika? No, it was a meeting of an underground fraternity in the



political, in effect marrying *Animal House* and the First Amendment

The anti-fraternity jihad centers are, as one might assume, on large state schools and on a network of upper-crust private colleges in the Northeast. The list of colleges that have banned or crippled fraternities includes many of the usual suspects: Williams, Buck-nell, Colgate, Tufts, Lowell, and Wesleyan. Princeton has campaigned against all-male eating clubs, and Yale has pressured its all-male societies to admit women. Pennsylvania's Franklin and Marshall College withdrew official recognition of fraternities and sororities. Administrators at Lafayette and Trinity Colleges have conducted war against the

Greeks by demanding that fraternities become co-ed.

northeastern United States in 1994.

Security measures like the ones described above are carried out with a certain self-dramatization, but they are also well justified. Administrators at a number of American schools, most in the Northeast, are engaged in an all-out campaign against fraternities and are doing everything in their power to stomp them out of existence. From all appearances, they will be satisfied with nothing less than the elimination of the fraternity as a class, a kind of university version of ethnic cleansing.

But what these administrators have done, of course, is not kill fraternities but drive them underground. Banned from campuses, fraternity brothers now meet in secret locations. Their new rituals somewhat resemble the candlelight cave meeting in *Dead Poets Society* combined with, of course, the usual rowdy highjinks that have defined fraternity life. But college administrators have done something that a few years ago would have seemed unthinkable. By their repression, they have made fraternities

As the fraternities have gone underground to survive, schools such as Amherst College have gone an extra step: setting up a network of snitches to inform on the fraternities' secret doings. Students caught engaging in private acts of fraternization between consenting adults—even off campus and on their own time—can expect to be summarily expelled, suspended, or disqualified from scholarships and student jobs. Mere membership in a fraternity, regardless of activity, is enough to earn draconian punishment at some schools, the clearest example of guilt by association on the current political scene.

A glance at history confirms that fraternity brothers are perhaps the least likely candidates for life in the underground. John Belushi and the party raids of the 1950s notwithstanding, fraternities have been a celebrated facet of American life since the founding of the Republic. Fraternities began as groups of students associating together

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for social, religious, or literary purposes. Phi Beta Kappa, now an honor society, began as a fraternity at the College of William and Mary in 1776. As part of a protest against the stuffy social system of the day, Yale students established the Delta Kappa Epsilon fraternity in 1844. DKE members include Presidents Teddy Roosevelt, Gerald Ford, and George Bush; author Nathaniel Hawthorne, composer Cole Porter, politicians Sargeant Shriver and John Chafee; Benno Schmidt, former president of Yale, and ageless rocker Dick Clark.

In 1854, Delta Kappa Epsilon chartered a chapter at Middlebury College in Middlebury, Vermont, where, as at most schools, the fraternity brothers proved to be faithful alumni and generous financial contributors. For many, this fraternity formed a keystone of their college experience and helped them mature. "It was real world experience," says 1964 grad John Buttolph, whose family has attended Middlebury since 1810, and whose great-grandfather purchased the property for the DKE (or "deke") house. During Buttolph's time, DKE spearheaded efforts to racially integrate both their own fraternity and the Middlebury campus.

Until relatively recent times, schools valued and encouraged the fraternity tradition as an integral part of the academic system. During the 1930s, for instance, when Colby College officials moved the school to its present site in Waterville, Maine, they invited fraternities to come and build houses in the center of campus. As at many other schools, the fraternity dwellings form a key part of campus housing to this day. As late as the 1960s, some 90 percent of Middlebury students joined fraternities or sororities with scarcely a peep of protest from the administration.

But that was then, and this is now. On campuses today, unreconstructed veterans of the Sixties have gained positions of power in the faculty and the dean's office. And they never forgot that during their time in school fraternities and sororities not only refused to "get serious" but also impeded antiwar, anti-school, and anti-American protests. "After the Vietnam War, a lot of us didn't just crawl back into our library cubicles," says Jay Parini, radical professor of English at Middlebury. "We stepped into academic positions. Now we have tenure, and the hard work of reshaping the universities has begun in earnest."

The raw material for this reshaping is not only the freshmen who are saturated with PC sensitivity during orientation week and thereafter, but also the fraternities. The campaign against them by the tenured left is based both on historical payback for the way the fraternities were in the '60s and on a pragmatic recognition that the Greek brothers and sisters will always be the last holdouts against today's political re-education. In today's university, the desire simply to party down marks one as a dissident; not to take the PC regime seriously means struggling for survival in an academic gulag.

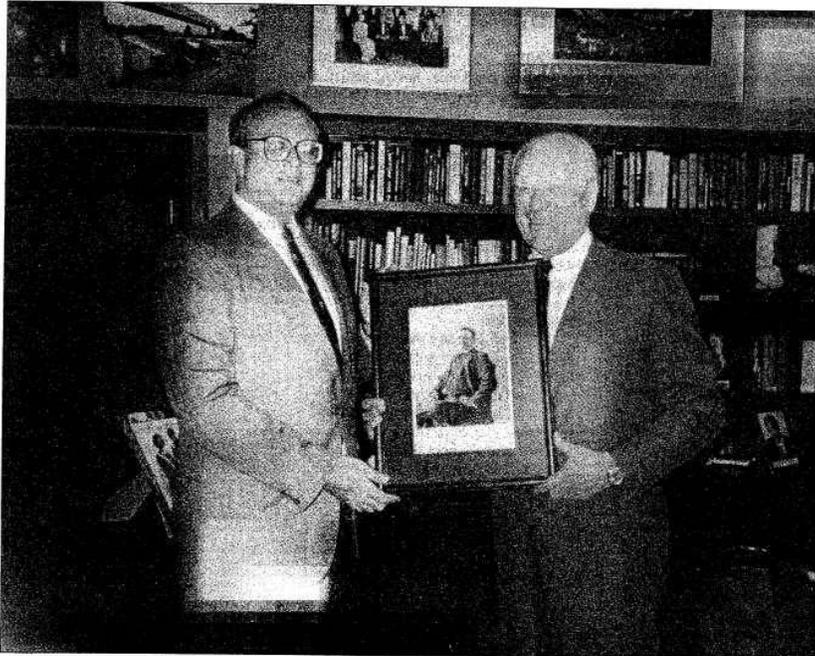
Don Wyatt, Middlebury's vice president for undergraduate affairs, acknowledges that the push against fraternities is part of the PC movement. "This is the 1990s and gender is the real issue, the last stand," he says. Like many administrators, Wyatt is so fond of standards he has several different sets of them for different groups. For example, he argues that all-female schools such as California's Mills College, which do not admit men, are not sexist, but insists that fraternities, which do not admit women, are.

"The mood on campus is so anti-male, even among males," says Christina Hoff Summers, professor of philosophy at Clark College and author of *Who Stole Feminism?* "Any groups where young men are together is outside the control of Big Sister. The gender feminists are nervous about men in groups, so fraternities will have to go.

You can't expect gender feminists to be reasonable."

David Easlick, a New York attorney who has devoted his career to defending fraternities because he sees their struggle as "cutting edge First Amendment stuff," sees fraternity boys as the last free men in the increasingly uniform university setting. "Fraternities engage students' attention and absorb their energies in ways that distract from the inculcation of guilt and anger," Easlick wrote in

To wean students away from fraternity activity, Colby administrators engaged in a sort of pacification program, building a student center where they offered free booze. "There was free beer and tequila, all you could drink," says Chris Mastrangelo, a leader in the fight to keep fraternities at Colby. "Once the fraternity ban was in effect, however, they cracked down on drinking with the zeal of Carry Nation."



Three Dekes: David Easlick, Teddy Roosevelt, and Gerry Ford

a recent article co-authored with Thomas Short. "More important, fraternities provide a social setting, free of

administrative manipulation, in which their members can share their reactions to campus events and discover that they are not alone in doubting the doctrines so insistently promulgated. This provides much needed psychological support for independent thought. Fraternities, in short, have become a sanctuary for campus heterodoxy, and that is why there are those who feel they must be stamped out." But not all fraternities. Not all the practices of the ancient Greeks are currently out of favor on campus. Officials at the University of California at Los Angeles, for example, confirm that the administration encouraged the establishment of Lambda Delta Lambda, the nation's first lesbian sorority. And the University of Nevada at Las Vegas hosts the gay men's Delta Lambda Phi, as well as a lesbian sorority whose name sounds like a skit on *Saturday Night Live*—Lambda Lambda Lambda. One brother in the Northeast whose fraternity has gone underground says that he and his brothers actually toyed with the idea of declaring themselves gay as a way to gain official approval.

Fraternities are the issue at Colby College, occupying a center stage that 25 years ago was occupied by the war in Vietnam. It costs \$25,000 a year to attend Colby, which demands that all of its approximately 1,700 students live on its posh 900-acre campus.

The school's Baptist founders would doubtless have been dismayed by a recent move to chop down the school chapel's cross on the grounds that it was "exclusionary." They would also probably be surprised at the way Colby enforces speech codes, having gone so far as to defund *The Crossfire*, a student publication that took issue with a variety of political correctnesses. Colby officials criticized a "secret Santa" gift-giving campaign because of possible Christian connotations. They changed it to "secret snowman," but that too was unacceptable because of the dreaded m-word. Finally, they changed it to "secret elf and reindeer."

As part of its social uplift campaign, Colby banned fraternities in 1984, even though polls showed that close to 70 percent of the students wanted to retain them. "Not only did they ban the fraternities," says Jed Davis, a Maine attorney who works with the ACLU, "but they seized their

Colby authorities now require students to sign the equivalent of loyalty oaths promising that they will observe the no-fraternity mandate. Like other schools where fraternities have been banned, Colby administrators knew that such a ban would spawn an underground, and they set up a network of informers to help them penetrate it. "They reward the snitches, the misfit students who hang out with deans," says Mastrangelo. And attorney Jed Davis cites a case in which Colby officials entered the room of a student and, while searching through his belongings, found a list of freshman pledges. "The school then called them in, one by one," he recounts, "with faculty members grilling and threatening them."

Davis subsequently notified Colby President William Cotter the student whose belongings had been rifled would bring criminal charges of theft. Cotter

put the issue in the lap of Dean Janice Kassman, who denied that informing or

interrogation takes place. But Davis believes that Kassman and other school officials must have spies in place, because someone told them that a group of 61 students, primarily members of the football team, had engaged in secret fraternity activity on their own time some 30 miles off campus. The college promptly suspended 25 juniors and sophomores for one semester and denied 19 seniors the right to participate in commencement.

Among the suspended juniors were three young men who could not have been present at the rites because they were away studying in England. "The administration didn't know who was there, so they punished all of them," says Jed Davis. "Then the school told them they were free to come forward and prove they weren't there. So much for the presumption of innocence."

Davis and others contrast Colby's heavy-handedness in dealing with fraternities with its reaction to the appearance of the self-styled radical "Anna R. Kissed" on campus. The school caved in to the demand of speaker "Kissed" and her feminist allies in the student body that men be banned from attending her talk, in which she reportedly said, among other things, "If a man was dying on the side of the road, I wouldn't help him." Dean Kassman acknowledges that the school approved the ban against men attending the speech but says the incident sparked positive discussion.

Colby Dean Janice Kassman contends that students are attracted to her school's "fraternity-free" environment and as a result of it are the happiest students in the country. As Kassman describes it, anti-fraternity administrators are simply following the will of the campus masses. The students themselves, she says, were upset that underground fraternities existed at Colby and wanted the off-campus frats to be expelled, not merely suspended.

"It's bullshit," says attorney Jed Davis who has gotten to know many Colby students.

At Bowdoin, another upper-crust college in Maine, there has been the same sort of scorched-earth policy with regards to underground fraternities as at Colby. Over the last several years, Bowdoin has become such a PC stronghold that even faculty liberals feel compelled to protest. In February of 1992, Professor Chris Potholm appeared on WCBB-Channel 10, a Maine PBS affiliate, decrying the school's "thought police" and "ridiculous

rules.' Potholm argued that "diversity" was PC-speak for conformity and, as proof, pointed out that the chairman of Bowdoin's diversity committee had stated that it was wrong for an 18-year-old to be a Republican.

But when Bowdoin fraternities were the object of a PC campaign, they had no campus defenders. The fraternities routinely drew faculty flak for a series of activities, among them, setting up a chapel on campus. And in 1988 Bowdoin gave its fraternities an ultimatum: Go co-ed or disband. The fraternities chose the latter course.

"The crux of the matter was that the faculty wanted to control the students," says 1950 Bowdoin alumnus Phineas Sprague, who remains in close touch with the campus. Sprague makes the obvious point that placing women with the men only increased a sexually charged atmosphere. A firestorm of criticism of the school followed its decision. Students appeared on public television claiming that the fraternities had been "railroaded." Nor were the women particularly pleased with the outcome. Student Leslie Morse complained that in the co-ed houses "women don't have the same standing" and undergrad Iris Rodriguez said simply, "It's time for the college to stopping favors for us."

The PBS station's coverage of the controversy also included some rather startling footage: hundreds of students hoisting placards that denounced Bowdoin's anti-fraternity policies, which they claimed violated not only time-honored traditions but mainstream American rights and values as well. As administrators filed by, the cameras caught students breaking into a spirited rendition of "God Bless America."

Vermont's Middlebury College, which has now banned "freshman" in favor of "first-year student" and approved the term "womyn" for its female campus organizations, is another once fraternity-friendly school that reversed itself and attempted to ban the voluntary organizations as "incompatible with student life." Leading the charge was Middlebury President John McCardell, ironically a faithful Lambda Kai Alpha brother during his student days at Washington and Lee, whose fraternity magazine recently trumpeted his rise to a school presidency. His efforts to prevent students from enjoying a version of his own college experience led him to a carrot-and-stick approach vis a vis fraternities, with the emphasis on stick. "We'd get dragged into the Community Council based on anonymous rumors," says 1991 Middlebury graduate Josh Sarkis, a "Deke" vice president in his student days. "There were about a dozen of these, and each time they would tighten the screws a little further." The council, dominated by faculty, derided the fraternity members for selecting people they liked, urged them to disavow their national organizations, and pressured them to set up a quota system for women, complete with time-tables.

"They tried to take some polls to show that student opinion was behind it," says 1991 Middlebury graduate Morris Tooker. "But it came out that students enjoyed fraternities and didn't want them restricted." Indeed, after Middlebury handed down its anti-fraternity edict, the student publication *Campus* took a poll and found that 62 percent of the students disapproved of the decision.

Trying to give its efforts a veneer of sociology, Middlebury administrators appointed a task force to collect data on fraternities and fraternity life. Hoping for support, the task force "researchers" went to alumni for reactions. One 1980 grad said: "Fraternities do nothing but discriminate against people who would like that type of housing without having to go through some sick humiliating initiation rights [sic], or just drinking till you throw up." Another one added: "They're totally outmoded and provide no positive input to the college as a whole. Get with the

times—fraternities, like the Ku Klux Klan, are vestiges of a time we'd be better off leaving behind." A third member of the class of 1980, doubtless a philosophy major, said: "Although fraternities are not a priori despicable, it is empirically true that fraternities are despicable. That is, it is possible that fraternities are not populated by despicable people engaging in despicable behavior (which, by the way, is the point of a fraternity)."

the underground. Last year during a football game, for instance, a plane flew over Middlebury's stadium trailing a "Deke Lives" banner. The students cheered this happening more enthusiastically than any moment in the game itself.

The PC school officials' quarrel with human nature has pushed them not only into tactical blunders but also into blindness about the possibility of the task they have undertaken. What the fraternity eradication campaign has done, in effect, is to

maximize the contradictions of the PC ethos. If political correctness is the inflexible establishment of the current college campus, then fraternities constitute a key element of the evolving counterculture. On this point, the anti-fraternity forces, ignoring the laws of unintended consequences, are clearly in denial. Middlebury's Don Wyatt, for instance, dismisses underground frats, claiming that they constitute an "army of one." The underground Middlebury Dekes, their phones ringing off the hook with membership inquiries, believe that Wyatt needs some remedial math, along with some sensitivity training in democracy and civil liberties.

What administrators like Wyatt are doing is what orthodox Marxists used to call "maximizing the contradictions." One Middlebury alum who asks not to be named says, "It is absurd to force a student body into one model of social institution that the faculty deems acceptable. Instead, Middlebury should provide opportunities for students to group themselves as they wish. If the resulting groups are single sex, co-ed, or only people who play the

tuba, then that is how it should be in a pluralistic society."

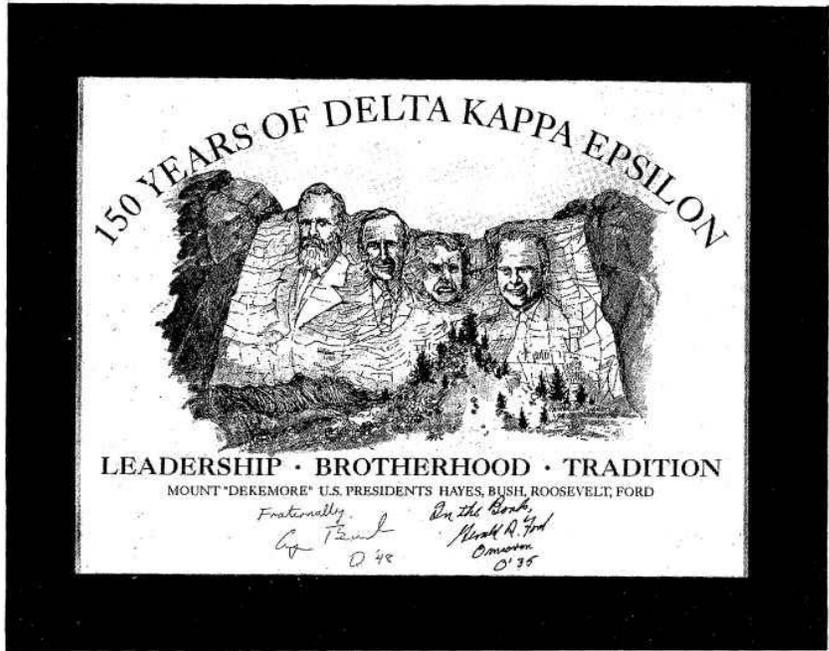
John Buttolph, a 1950 graduate, puts it more pragmatically: "The more you prohibit something, the more students want to do it. If they want to hurt the fraternity impulse, they should legalize them. Students find that this *sub-rosa* stuff is fun." As for the administrators, Buttolph says, "They sense the tide is going the other way and are making a panic effort to stake out an extreme position. They are on the defensive, even though they won the law case."

William Simon, one-time DKE brother and onetime Secretary of the Treasury, says, "Our fraternity system is stronger today than it was in 1952." Pointing to the rapid increase in the number of deke chapters across the country, Simon adds, "Respect for the fraternity system is respect for the freedom of association."

"It's cool to be in a fraternity now," says Chris Mastrangelo, who also works for DKE's national organization. "The anti-fraternity mentality is fueling the fraternity movement. Part of the appeal is hiding from Big Brother." Mastrangelo, who defiantly wore his Deke pin on his graduation gown, says that the banned brothers enjoy meeting off campus or on other campuses, in restaurants, safe houses, or even in foreign countries. "Time teaches you how to do things. You make it clandestine and don't let people know. Fraternities will outlast the PC movement."

In the meantime, David Easlick, Jed Davis, Josh Sarkis, and the others fighting against the ban of fraternities see a need for a federal statute, modeled on California's, which would give those on campus—public or private—the same rights to free association and private property enjoyed by ordinary citizens. Until such a law restores their constitutional rights and returns their confiscated property, says Easlick, "underground frats will have to continue to flourish in secret, exchanging secret cryptic handshakes and symbols perhaps even as radical as Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity."

K.L. Billingsley



But many other Middlebury alums took the opposite view. "Why this asinine witch hunt continues seeking to purge the campus of any heterogeneity continues to mystify me," responded one 1979 alumni to Middlebury's questionnaire. Said another: "I am tired of these snobs using sexism and prejudice as an excuse for their own weaknesses. If the college needs to improve the social and/or intellectual atmosphere for this minority who feels left out, then do it, but don't destroy what has been so positive to so many of us over the years." Another Middlebury grad said: "Fraternities are elitist? In one of the ten toughest schools in the country to get into, what does elitist mean?"

But conflicting opinions did not stop the school from going ahead with its eradication campaign. Last year, President McCardell wrote that the fraternity issue "has been approached with a high degree of intelligent, careful, sensitive and open-minded consideration... All voices that have sought a hearing have been heard."

Activist Josh Sarkis didn't agree, complaining of the administration's "crude Stalinist problem solving." He initiated a lawsuit against Middlebury on the grounds that students' right to free association, as well as their property rights, were being violated. President John McCardell reacted by saying he found no right to free association even in the "deepest penumbras" of the Constitution, an interpretation that is breathtaking coming from a liberal-arts academic.

Last summer, a Vermont court ruled against the Dekes on the grounds that Middlebury was a private institution and could ban fraternities if it so desired. So the DKEs are not only banned at Middlebury but are forbidden to enter the house they own on campus on pain of immediate suspension. Asked what other offenses draw the same penalties as fraternity activity, Middlebury administrator Don Wyatt cited cheating on exams and doing "anything criminal" as carrying comparable penalties. Attorney Jed Davis says that such administrators are "smug and fanatical." Though they fancy themselves trendy liberals, Davis adds, they are really stern-as-death authoritarians who believe that the end, what he calls their "orthodoxy of the moment," justifies the repressive means.

The problem for the administrators is that there is always some spark of rebellion that escapes the net of authoritarianism they set up. Despite administrators' draconian rules at Middlebury—and at Bowdoin, Colby, and many other schools—fraternities continue to thrive in