

# The Hegemonic Struggle and Domination in Black Greek-letter Fraternities

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## Introduction

Hazing in black Greek-letter fraternities (BGFs) on the campuses of colleges and universities has been attacked by BGF national offices as well as college and university administrators.<sup>1</sup> Despite these efforts, the practice persists and shows few signs of subsiding.<sup>2</sup> Problems in studying hazing continue partly because scopes of inquiry are often limited to such a degree that the real practices which keep hazing alive are never engaged. One problem is that too little attention is paid to the historical roots of the organizations' initiation rituals (Jones, 1997). While a reconstructed view of the historical and contemporary importance of ritual is necessary, it is not the pull of ritual alone that mobilizes black men to endure and covet the punishment of hazing. A powerful and almost always overlooked companion to ritual, which serves to keep hazing alive, is narrative. Narrative is a coercive tool not only used in BGFs, but found in many other arenas. Commenting on narrative in his study of conflict in Northern Ireland, Allen Feldman (1991) asserts:

No discursive object exists outside of, or prior to, a discursive formation. The self is always the artifact of prior

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<sup>1</sup> It should be noted at the outset that the practice of hazing does not occur exclusively in undergraduate chapters of BGFs, nor does it only occur in black fraternal organizations. The practice crosses lines of race and age. This study centers on black fraternities, but in no way should be read as indicating that hazing does not exist in other organizations with different racial compositions.

<sup>2</sup> For an extensive record of reported hazing incidents refer to Nuwer (1990) *Broken Pledges*.

received and newly constructed narratives. It is engendered through narration and fulfills a syntactical function in the life history. The rules of narration may perform a stabilizing role in the cultural construction of truth, but then self and truth are subordinate to the trans-individual closures of narrative (spoken or written) In a political culture the self that narrates speaks from a position of having been narrated and edited by others — by political institutions, by concepts of historical causality, and possibly violence (p.13).

BGF members function within such a political culture. Like all narrative, BGF narrative is coercive in that it is highly influential in shaping the psychologies of the groups' members and potential members alike. The political dimension of the narrative used within the BGF community should not be underestimated, though its impact has never been thoroughly examined. A particularly political, popular discourse is used within the organizations, because it inevitably determines modes of interaction between members. BGFs do not, in my opinion, autonomously create violent individuals (Jones, 1997). They do, however, provide a medium for violence to be imposed upon others. This imposition is sometimes so intense that some argue it borders sociopathic (Applebone, 1994; Harris, 1994). Certainly, a significant percentage of BGF members deny that they or the pledge process, as they have conceptualized it, are aimlessly violent or even negative. For example, one 1991 initiate states:

People act as if no one can get positivity out of pledging. I can say that there were some serious positive aspects to my four-week pledge period. I feel that pledging engrossed in me such skills as conflict resolution, time management and creativity. I continue to use those skills in my life today — at work, in grad school, in community organizations, etc. Personally, I do not agree with Intake.<sup>3</sup> From talking with some fellow Greeks, their organizations are making changes to the membership intake process, because it just doesn't work. A lot of people want to make

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<sup>3</sup> "Intake" is a new initiation process adopted by BGFs to curtail hazing. This process will be discussed in depth later.

the process seem very primitive, barbaric, and . . . senseless. Well, I disagree and even if pledging presented problems, Intake certainly isn't the right answer to those problems. Intake as an answer in 1990 was not the right answer and it's not the right answer now. Isn't that evident?

### **Power, Hegemony and Domination**

Agreement on whether or not the BGF pledge process is generative or not will probably not be engendered by this study nor is such a consensus its purpose. It is essential, though, that we utilize clear definitions of politics and power. Following Laswell, we will approach politics as the process which determines who gets what, when and how in a group or societal structure. Following a close variant of this definition, Maulana Karenga (1993) notes that the political process is ultimately concerned with "gaining, maintaining, and using power" (p. 311). Power, simply put, is the ability of some agent X to force some agent Y to do something agent Y would otherwise not do. These agents are not necessarily individuals. That is, agents X and Y may be social and/or political groups as well as individuals. In either instance, the central concern of politics is power and, conversely, any quest for power is (in one way or another) political. No matter if the researcher examines this process in system-oriented terms (Apter, 1977) or studies revolutionary structures and processes (Gross, 1974; McAdam, 1982), the works are examinations of power.

Harold Cruse (1967) correctly asserts that even though America is philosophically based on the notion of individual rights and privileges, real power can only be located in group structures. This stance mandates a de-emphasis of the individual and a re-situation of group and societal influence when studying politics and power in their many manifestations. There has existed the tendency to classify any group dynamics that lay outside the realm of electoral politics as non-political if not exclusively sociological (Gosnell, 1967; Ladd, 1969; Wilson, 1960). Hanes Walton (1985) is correct in criticizing this practice as myopic, because power and the struggle for it are the essence of the political and extend well beyond electoral activity. Interaction in many areas of everyday life is deeply political and is driven by overriding group dynamics which have been embedded in American society. Everyday life is, in fact, a reification produced by

(as well as a producer of) power. There is no innocent moment or inaccessible sanctuary in which everyday life can escape the continuous struggle for power. Try as they may, it is difficult (if not impossible) for individuals or groups to escape this reality.

While there is a very real difference in power potential between collectives and derivative groups, there also exists a political choice for both. The choice is whether to act and become agents or succumb to victimage and continue to be acted upon. It is here that we locate struggles which Gramsci (1971) refers to as hegemonic. Cultural and political studies have often invoked Gramsci's concept of hegemony to describe moments of national socio-political struggle, but the term remains ambiguous to many. Probably the most common perception of hegemony sees it as an almost universal process through which domination of one group by another is achieved through the construction of an ideological consensus (Gitlin, 1980; Williams, 1977). This formulation of Gramsci is not altogether correct. This is so because while hegemonic struggle always involves coercion and consent, it does not necessarily involve the negativity of domination. While power is necessary for domination to occur, domination and power are not the same. Power is not always negative. Domination, on the other hand, is marginalization marked by an exercise of supremacy over and oppression of another. This state is always negative. Hegemony, according to Gramsci himself, does not necessarily seek or equate to domination. Gramsci speaks of hegemony as having two faces. He remarks, "Permanent hegemony is always bad; temporary hegemony of one group or region may be beneficial to all. Hegemony of north over south in Italy has been bad but need not have been so" (1971, p. 130).

Domination occurs in multiple arenas and is necessarily preceded by the acquisition of political power. Only through the garnering and abuse of such power can one group marginalize and subordinate another. While these struggles can be societal (national or international), they also occur within social sub-groups. BGFs are one example of a terrain where such conflicts are played out. After we address the hegemonic struggle within BGFs, we shall look at a case which is clearly political in the traditional sense and utilize the argument to study black fraternities. In an unlikely comparison, it will become clear that the tactics employed by the American political

right to revive conservatism are very similar to the ones used to maintain a pledge process in contemporary BGFs that seems unable to rid itself of violence.

### **Educated Gangs? — To Pledge or Not to Pledge**

If everyday life is political, then the narrativity of everyday life is also political and possibly hegemonic. This is so because narrative as a contributor to identity serves as a powerful force in constructing an individual's reality to an extent that often is not realized. Certainly, it is not physical force, but the exploitation of the desire to be BGF members (largely engendered by narratives of members of the organizations) which drives pledges' submission to acts which are condemned by organizational policy. Hazing's continuation is firmly locked in BGF narrative and, as we shall see, this is the reason for the failure of the groups' Membership Intake Programs (MIP), which were tailored to replace pledging. In BGFs, the language of domination revolves around the concept of pledging and it constructs criteria for acceptance. The greatest rift in BGFs to date may be the ongoing debate over whether the groups should reenact the traditional pledge process or continue to utilize MIPs for the purpose of initiating members. The differences between traditional pledging and MIP are striking.

The old process, which differed slightly from group to group, had five stages. The potential initiate: (1) attended interest meetings or "smokers"; (2) submitted his application and, if it was deemed satisfactory, would be interviewed; (3) "made line" (was accepted as a member of the incoming pledge class); (4) pledged; and (5) was initiated. Different chapters routinely embedded particular criteria for "making line." For example, some chapters required potential pledges to "come around" before the official smoker. Quite often, this process could lead to men who "came around" participating in what was colloquially known as "pre-pledging" — taking part in pledge activities that were not officially condoned by the national organization. Chapters such as these would usually decide who was to make line even before the official smoker took place, and the smoker became nothing more than a facade for senior fraternity and school officials. Some argue that this trend afforded active members a better opportunity to test and become acquainted with the men who were to join their fold. Contrarily, others contend that this



practice led to the exclusion of quality candidates who refused to submit to non-fraternity-sanctioned activities and the extorting of money and servitude from those who would.

The MIP process, which also differs slightly across organizational lines, is different from the pledge process in that the steps consist of (1) attending an "Interest Meeting"; (2) submission of application and interview; (3) acceptance; (4) initiation; and (5) participation in educational sessions. Noticeable is the absence of "pledging" (the educational sessions are used as substitutes). Beyond this, and maybe more important, the candidate is carried through the initiation ritual *before* he goes through the pledging substitute, and the educational sessions of the MIP eradicate a number of traditional interactions. The candidates are no longer considered members of a "line" so they are not required to dress alike, walk in line, or learn fraternity history and lore in a confrontational manner. This process was constructed in an attempt to bring hazing to a halt, and its supporters contend that the eradication of pledging is the only way to eliminate hazing. This is so, in their view, because hazing has become such an integral part of the pledge process that the two cannot be divorced from one another. The core assumption involved in MIP is that men who are initiated first will not submit to hazing because they have obtained the object of their desire — membership.

The MIP was initiated by BGFs after the Spring of 1990 in most chapters, but it has failed in achieving its goal of discontinuing pledging and the violent hazing that is usually associated with it. A member of Kappa Alpha Psi addressed MIP:

I am not the one who has made past tradition; those who came before us did. Knee jerk responses to complicated issues is not advancement! I'm sure you would not deny that in many ways we were better off years ago. Sometimes when you advance too much you lose something important. In many ways we have lost our identity. Intake was in effect in 1991, however my chapter pledged us the old way. If I had to do Membership Intake and not be able to pledge — hell no, you could keep it. Whoever said you need a fraternity to achieve or help mankind? My advice to young men seeking such a thing would be to join an honor society, or NAACP or church action com-

mittee. But if you're looking for brotherhood, find a fraternity chapter that has a pledge process. I would tell a young man not to fool himself; don't waste that few hundred dollars that he will spend on membership. Send that money to a charity. You can't buy brotherhood. Frederick Douglass said, "If there is no struggle, there is no progress."

Soon after MIP was initiated, John Anthony Williams, Sr. (1992) completed a dissertation entitled "Perceptions of the No-Pledge Policy for New Members of Predominantly Black Fraternities and Sororities." While Williams' study focused on undergraduates, I believe the results to also be true of many graduate chapter members. Williams used a 26-item original survey to assess three scales: (1) the Policy Awareness Scale, (2) the Hazing Tolerance Scale, and (3) the Policy Endorsement Scale. He came to a number of conclusions concerning BGF members. Members felt that (1) the policy (MIP) was enacted too quickly with little input from members at large, (2) hazing definitions were too broad, (3) insufficient time was allowed by MIP to teach the history of the organizations, (4) bonding is lost, (5) lifelong commitment is jeopardized, (6) the policy promotes disunity in chapter ranks, and (7) new members feel they get no respect and acceptance from older members.

Williams' findings indicated that MIP is shunned by many BGF members. Subsequently, pledging and hazing persist. The refusal to embrace MIP is largely because there has been, and continues to be, a great emphasis on storytelling among members of BGFs. These narratives usually revolve around activities common to men in general (i.e. athletics and sexual conquests). Unique to fraternities, though, is the "pledge story." A great factor which determines many members' sense of belonging or "bonding" is their ability to engage in the telling of these pledge/war stories. To be able to say that one has engaged in the very same or similar rites of passage as the brothers in his company is somewhat comforting and, in theory, builds brotherhood and allegiance to the organization (Jones, 1997).

The regarding of violence during this process as legitimating is pervasive among BGF members. In fact, the pressure to prove one's triumph over violent hazing and to engage in the "I pledged, too" discourse is so great in some circles that many members base a good deal of their fraternal worth on the abuse they received during the

pledge period. This is so because many members are only slightly concerned with an individual's post-pledge work and commitment to the organization. In one sense, this indicates that hazing — and the unique fraternity narrative it brings — is an attempt by BGF members to construct and maintain a collective memory and history distinct from that held by any other group. As Polkinghorne (1988) states, "The stories we encounter carry the values of our culture by providing positive models to emulate and negative models to avoid" (p. 14). A brother who has gone through the archaic pledge process, which includes brutal hazing, is looked on as a true or "real" member and accepted into the inner sanctum of a particular chapter even if he makes no further substantive contribution to the organization scholastically, intellectually, and communally. Acceptance is extended to such a member much more readily than to one who does make these contributions, but cannot attest to being abused during his initiation into the fraternity.<sup>4</sup> This leads active members and candidates alike to desire strongly the right to say, "I pledged!" One BGF member comments:

The ritualization of hazing baffles me. The means are what's important now. The means have superseded the ends of developing a good brother. It's almost like the question is "can you withstand this?" "You can be a pathological, deviant fool, but if you can withstand what we're going to put on you, have proven your worthiness," which is really warped, but that kind of confusion pervades Greek life. There are some exceptions, but unfortunately it seems that the exceptions ultimately become alienated. They aren't "down." It's a shame, but stuff has become so topsy turvy that abnormality has become the norm.

In this progression, even the word pledge has become nebulous since the formation of BGFs in the early years of this century. Confusion of pledging and hazing is problematic and helps prevent the discontinuance of violence in the groups. In a focus group at a

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<sup>4</sup> This reality produces an all too often encountered quandary in BGFs concerning men who have never been initiated into the fraternities, but were pledged. The perennial question is, "Should we regard this man as a brother?" even if duly initiated members who followed the guidelines are marginalized. Quite often the answer is in the affirmative, which supports the view that it is not legitimate membership by the guidelines of the national offices, but pledging itself which gains acceptance.



Kentucky university, four undergraduate members of Kappa Alpha Psi were asked what they thought the differences between pledging and hazing were. To a man they all insisted that the two were the same. One member strongly stated:

I've been in the frat for three years and I've never been to a set (pledge session) where there was no wood (paddling) or something like it. That includes when I was coming in. Bros (brothers) were constantly housing (beating) us — night in and night out. There's no other way to instill discipline, respect, and love of the frat in a "G" (pledge).

Another added:

I don't think anyone is going to appreciate something that they don't have to work for. Pledging makes you work for the frat and that includes some physical stuff. So yeah, I don't see how you can have pledging without hazing. Why don't you tell me the difference, because I don't think there is one.

The same sentiment was articulated by a mix of undergraduate and graduate members at the 1995 National Pan-Hellenic Conference (NPHC) Collegiate Leadership Summit in Richmond, Virginia. In a focus group conducted by Dr. Jason DeSousa, former Assistant Executive Director of NPHC and Kappa Alpha Psi. BGF members along with their sorority counterparts submitted that pledging and hazing were synonymous — inextricably tied. Others, however, contend that pledging is not synonymous with hazing. In reality they are diametrically opposed. Their stance is based on the belief that a pledge is simply a vow to uphold the ideals of the organization. In this sense, anyone who knowingly violates these principles breaks his pledge or vow. Following this line of reasoning, the pledge process is merely an extension of the original pledge. What the process seeks to do is prepare the potential initiate for a life guided by the organization's principles. It, in effect, helps him to hold true to the pledge.

One member of Phi Beta Sigma asserted that pledging and hazing conflict with one another, even though many BGF members do not recognize this dynamic. This member saw pledging as "a rite of passage, which should developmentally enhance the individual intellectually, physically, and spiritually. This should be exclusive of

abuse. But, the pledge process should somehow measure a person's commitment." Interestingly, BGF members who support hazing also use "commitment" rhetoric. This apparent similarity between the pro- and anti-pledge process brings about commitment, but what does it bring commitment to? A Kappa Alpha Psi Chapter Development Specialist commented:

Sometimes pledging the old way can almost make a brother less dedicated to working for the frat. I can't tell you how many brothers I meet who feel that the frat owes them something because they "pledged hard." They feel like they paid their dues during the pledge process and then rest on that. On the other hand, brothers who go through MIP usually don't have that mentality. They still feel that they have to prove themselves, but they do it in a different way — by working for the frat after they are initiated.

An Alpha Phi Alpha member continued to differentiate pledging and hazing:

Hazing is a terrible distortion of pledging. The terms are often wrongfully used interchangeably, but hazing (unlike pledging) does not foster any real sense of binding between individuals. It only leaves bitterness in its wake on many levels. From personal experience, I really didn't want anything to do with guys who recklessly abused me, just because they were in positions of power for that period. The men that I really had lasting relationships with were the ones that tried to save me from the abuse, even if on the "QT" (Quiet Tip — doing so without others knowing). These guys sat us down and tried to give the whole thing meaning, you know? That's where I established my bonds, not with the crazies.

This member felt that discontinuing pledging, which he saw as a fruitful practice in order to stop hazing, was somewhat akin to "throwing the baby out with the bath water, but what else could be done?" Notably, he saw societal violence as the root of hazing. "You know, I think it's just part of the culture. This society has historically been permeated with violence and no portion of it is immune to the effects of it." He also noted that there was a serious question of black

machismo that came into play. There was and is a "distorted sort of pride which comes from being able to survive the abuse of hazing." As another Alpha said in the *Wall Street Journal*, "It's a manhood thing" (Delisser, 1994).

Some members believe that hazing has always been a part of the organizations. Others believe it was an activity created to mimic white groups. Others contend that it is a result of fraternity men going to World Wars I and II and bringing the hazing techniques of boot camp back to the fraternities. While opinions vary on exactly when hazing rose to its present place in BGFs, the stance that it has grown, if not in brutality, in randomness is supported by many members. A member of Alpha Phi Alpha posits that even the threat of death has not stopped this progression:

The real question is, are we capable of coming up with a viable pledge process where there is no physical contact or mental denigration? Unfortunately, the very real answer is no! Brothers in my frat, as well as others, have been doing these things long after they knew they were wrong. Death has not become an effective deterrent, neither has suspension or expulsion from the organizations. What we've reaped are vastly intertwined codes of silence which hamper all efforts to reach the truth. Why? Because the desire to belong is stronger than the will of the truth in our groups. Even good men sometimes succumb to the ways of their compatriots. It's sad, but this is what peer pressure can do.

Another member of Alpha Phi Alpha addresses this situation:

At one time when I would hear my cousins tell stories about pledging at places like Tennessee State and Fisk...I mean it was bad in terms of why they would relate and they romanticized about it in terms of it being a macho thing, but somehow...I have to be careful saying this, it seemed to have some purpose to it. Yeah, they were paddled, but I never heard them talk about being seriously hurt or even feeling like their lives were in jeopardy or that they were being victimized by sadists. I don't want to in any way rationalize what happened there, but it seemed different from the stories I hear now where

you've got horror story after horror story of young men being brutalized, subjected to all kinds of degradation, traumatized, humiliated — in some cases murdered. Somehow I got the sense that there used to be constraints on how far you could go. Somebody was going to check you if you got out of hand, but now there don't seem to be any constraints. I mean it's like Rodney King on a college campus, but we've changed roles and suddenly fraternity brothers have become the cops.

The societal implication brought to the fore by this member is insightful. As Deborah Prothrow-Stith (1993) notes, fraternities and sororities serve a purpose that organizations rarely associated with them also serve. The obvious links between religious cults, secular secret societies and Greek-letter organizations are often drawn (Brunson, 1991; Carnes, 1989; Jones, 1997). These comparisons disturb very few Greeks in that these organizations are historically regarded as noble and positive in their own right. To mention black Greeks and gangs in the same breath, however, usually occasions uneasiness. Prothrow-Stith makes this venture, not in an effort to equate Greeks with gangs but to position Greeks as models to which gangs should aspire. Ironically, her attempt to elucidate the deviancy of gangs by contrasting them with fraternities and sororities inadvertently brings to light an important similarity which could all but destroy her argument that Greeks are "pro-social." Prothrow-Stith begins her discussion by pointing out that both Greeks and gangs speak to members' personal needs:

Gangs satisfy a whole range of normal adolescent needs. The most significant of these is the adolescent hunger for peer approval and acceptance. But violent gangs are not normal. When young people feel that their lives are knit into the fabric of the society at large and when they face the future knowing that a fair share awaits them, they do not form or join gangs, although they do form social clubs, fraternities, sororities, and other age-mate groups. Violent gangs arise when young people face a future of limited opportunity and despair, when for military, political, social, or economic reasons the life that awaits a young person has been stripped of meaning and

validity (pp. 96-97).

It is ironic that Prothrow-Stith does not also attribute disfranchisement as an impetus for the formation of fraternities when, in actuality, it was an important factor leading to their founding. The point, though, is not where our attention will be focused, for she does realize that, practically and ritualistically, fraternities and gangs are not diametrically opposed.

From a developmental perspective, however, antisocial groups, such as youth gangs and pro-social groups such as fraternities have a great deal in common. Both kinds of associations exist to provide members with an interim emotional base, one that gives substance to the ambiguity the adolescent feels when he is between the dependency of childhood and the independence of adulthood. Pro-social and antisocial, they provide young people with goals and objectives, a world view, and a place where they are valued. Group membership gives some purpose to life. The more adrift a young person feels, the more powerful the attraction of the peer group, but even well-adjusted young people need what groups offer.

Rituals are one way anti- and pro-social groups satisfy the developmental needs of adolescents. Interestingly, these rituals tend to be similar, whether adopted by adolescents operating inside or outside the law. The secrecy typical of youth gangs and of many sororities and fraternities suits teenagers trying to carve out areas in which they can be separate and distinct from their parents and siblings. The idea of wearing special clothing, "colors" that identify members, provides young adults an outlet for their narcissism . . . . Initiation rituals, common to adolescent groups the world over, speak directly to the adolescent need to prove oneself. Usually prospective group members, be they sorority "pledges" or youth gang "wannabees," must undergo some sort of trial to prove their loyalty to the group. That's what pledge week, initiation rites, and hazing are all about. Once they pass, new members are allowed into the inner sanctum, where the affection and the loyalty of other insiders is guaran-



teed (p. 27).

It is difficult to contest Prothrow-Stith's stance that fraternities and gangs have similarities. But, those who contemplate the link between black gangs and black Greeks often pose the question, "Outside of educational differentiation, murder, and drug trafficking, what makes fraternities different from gangs?" Prothrow-Stith answers that the use of violence is the difference. But, as we have seen Greeks are violent. Violence's manifestations are certainly not to the same illegal degree in BGFs as they are in gangs, but initiatory violence is the same. To be sure, there is very little difference in the gang practice of new members being "beaten in" and the physical hazing that BGFs employ. Narratives from many members indicate that it is this hazing and this hazing alone that guarantees "the affection and the loyalty of other insiders" to the neophyte. A Kappa Alpha Psi member addressed the non-hazing pledge process:

I was on line underground as an undergrad and was never initiated — you know how frat politics go, it just didn't work out. I later joined as a graduate member and the process at my chapter was totally different. As an initiate who has endured both the new and old processes, I must say that I did not gain a sense of closeness or bonding in the intake process the way I did during the pledge process. Not to say that my pledge process was perfect or even good, but it taught me many things, not the least among them being altruism and brotherly love. This whole idea of initiating somebody before they pledge is crazy. That's if they pledge at all. They can't appreciate it.

Another member of Kappa Alpha Psi commented:

There's just something different about people who don't pledge. I mean, they're still in the fraternity, but they're different. It's like having an adopted brother or sister. You still love them, but they aren't blood —so it's different.

This is another comment that supports the stance that it is the violence itself, the hazing of the pledge process, which legitimates new members in the eyes of many of the already initiated. Some BGF members do not hesitate to admit this reality. For example, a member of Phi Beta Sigma remarks:

I'm pro-pledging and I don't mind saying that. I wholeheartedly disagree with the position that pledging is bad or purposeless. Yeah, bad things can happen to people who pledge and they often do, but the vehicle itself is not flawed or faulty — people are. Pledging and hazing aren't the same, but they help to reinforce one another. I mean, I'm not saying that anybody should be killed or anything, but I think the struggle in pledging has to stay in place for our organization to remain viable as far as producing members who really love them.

From this perspective, pledging and hazing (at least in the contemporary sense) are inseparable as they relate to BGFs<sup>5</sup>, and the melding of pledging and hazing is largely done with discourse. This discourse is important, because the meaning that narrative conveys about human experience requires the use of discourse. To try to separate pledging and hazing is akin to attempting to get rid of a pesky problem by simply calling it something else. In BGFs, pledging and hazing are interlocked and it is the discourse used within BGFs, not physical force, that convinces pledges to not only submit to, but desire participation in, the violence of the BGF pledge process.

Discourse and narrative are powerful in BGFs because they are used to differentiate and establish cleavages that separate members proper from perceived contagion. For example, one tool used to differentiate through discourse is the challenge or charge. The charge is a verbal tool used to identify a fraternity brother. One member asked a question, which on its face may seem very common, and the other member properly responds. Supposedly, members who have not gone through a pledge process will not be able to effectively respond to charges, because of inadequate exposure to the histories of the organizations and a good deal of unwritten traditional information. Ironically, even members who have been pledged often cannot respond to charges of members from different chapters and regions, because (like gang "sets") there exists a lack of cohesiveness in the fra-

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<sup>5</sup> For clarity's sake, with the realization that there is no clear distinction (in practice) between pledging and hazing for many BGF members, the reader should regard any mention of pledging from this point forward as including hazing. This is not to say that I feel hazing and pledging are synonymous. It is to say that, for all intents and purposes when BGF members speak of pledging, they are usually speaking of the incorporation of hazing.

ternities' intake processes (even pre-MIP) and localized or regionalized traditions. Quite often, a member's allegiance to his particular chapter will greatly supersede his allegiance to the fraternity as a whole. Some members are quite often at a loss when they are faced with regional, chapter, or personally constructed charges. This inability of members to respond to charges that are not sanctioned by the fraternity has led to intra-fraternity violence in a number of instances, because one brother may feel that the other, from a chapter with which he is not familiar, is not "real."

The term "real" has very little to do with whether or not a member adheres to the ideals of, or actively participates in, his organization. In reality, it speaks to whether or not he was hazed. A member who does not go through the abuse of hazing is said to be "paper," in that he simply signed his name on paper and was allowed entrance into the organization without struggle. An Omega Psi Phi member addresses the respect that comes from hazing:

You take wood (beatings) to show your love for the frat. How else can you prove to brothers and yourself that you really want it? It's showing love, you know? If a brother doesn't want you in his frat, he won't even give you the wood — he just won't \* \* \* \* with you at all. On the for real tip, if you don't prove yourself nobody is going to respect you. You're going to be "cat"<sup>6</sup> for the rest of your life. Tell me, would you rather get your \* \* \* kicked for six weeks or get it kicked for the rest of your life, because bros don't respect you?

This is the tag that most young black men interested in fraternities seek to avoid at all costs. The self-consciousness of pledges concerning how they will be viewed (and subsequently granted or denied acceptance) by their potential fraternity brothers and continued adherence to what are regarded as traditional ideas and practices by active members fuel the pledge/haze process. Some members assert that BGF men do not haze because they really believe that abuse will make better members, but do so because the practice is one of self-gratification and personal domination. One member

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<sup>6</sup>"Cat" is another term of disrespect used among some black Greeks in some regions (at the writing of this piece, members of Omega Psi Phi) to denote a person who did not pledge properly.

stated, "Hey man, this process allows these people to have slaves and they refuse to let them go. These people do not even remain true to their own pledges to uphold the ideals and rules of the fraternities they claim to love so dearly, because they randomly break them by hazing." Other members sympathize and the passages below relay only a sample of the panorama of arguments levied against pledging as it is traditionally carried out in BGFs:

- When I was on-line, the phrase was "bump for your brother," which meant if he was to get a stroke, I asked for it instead. If he was getting beat down by visiting brothers, I was compelled to step up and take some heat. Looking back, would I do that again? Would I bump for my brother? Hell no! No sir. I would not step in and take a paddle in the face, or let them put "Icy Hot" on my [genitalia], or swallow an egg after it had been in three previous mouths — all for the sake of my line brother, no sir. It's nice to reminisce about the good old times and how we "grew" together, knew each other, loved each other, needed each other. But that line of BS is so played out it hurts even to say it. The truth is, we all wanted to be accepted by our fraternity so badly that we would have done just about anything they told us to do. We keep trying to make this a romantic experience, but we have forgotten that our big brothers would have hit us anyway; made us eat that rotten apple, drink that wine, skip class — regardless of whether we bumped for our brother or not.
- No matter what the fad is — gangsta rap, hip hop, etc. — we should consider the type of individual we are attracting to our organizations. As one brother said, "Trash in, trash out; trash out, trash in." People are even saying now that we seem to be portraying a "gang-like" image, which upsets some folks in our organizations, but what are we doing to make people say this,

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<sup>7</sup> Alpha Phi Alpha, Omega Psi Phi, Phi Beta Sigma and Kappa Alpha Psi fraternities and Alpha Kappa Alpha, Zeta Phi Beta, Delta Sigma Theta, and Sigma Gamma Rho sororities.

you know? It was pointed out to me that there was a time when being a part of the Elite Eight<sup>7</sup> was something that was desired by many students, but only a few were accepted. These few tended to be those who were scholarly and upstanding members of the campus community — with exceptions as in any case. However, this perpetuated the image of organizations being about scholarship and community service because these were emphasized during the pledge process and after. Now, the focus is solely on “how did you pledge” As a result you get a bunch of people who can take a beat-down, but can’t put together a community service project. Thus, the campus community and the black community as a whole begin to question the purpose of our existence beyond pledging, hazing and “kickin’ it” at parties.

- In academic terms, I guess the move from pledging to MIP0 could be considered a paradigm shift. However, in this case, as is the case with most drastic change, it has been rejected, and done so without being given full consideration. It is very popular today to look at pledging through rose-colored glasses. We all have an opinion of what pledging should be, and if it were a perfect world, we wouldn’t be having this interview right now. But it’s not a perfect world and the very ugly reality of any pledge process has been and, it seems, will continue to be ignored. We’ve got brothers who advocate slapping and punching as positive motivation to remember inane facts. We have brothers who think the receipt of those occasional slaps or paddling instilled a sense of pride, camaraderie and esprit de corps, the level of which cannot be matched by any post-pledge experience. I sincerely do not agree with this reasoning.

To be fair, for every argument against pledging there exists a counter. And these members are just as spirited as their brothers who argue against the continuation of the practice.

- Pledging, as it was intended to be was never dangerous or bad. When pledging is conducted as a “rite of pas-



sage," wherein the big brothers or sisters act as mentors, trying to bring the neophyte pledgee into consciousness, the process indeed is positive.

- This intake thing is so personal. I was one of eight and even though it has only been three years, we are in different parts of the country, we still keep in touch and even came back this past December for our anniversary — all eight of us. Would we all have been there if we didn't pledge? I doubt it. The funny thing is that I did not know a single one of them before my process into this organization. Pledging may not be the thing that causes bonding, but if it doesn't, it sure does begin the process. In my case, who knows if I ever would have even met my seven sands. We have cultivated a wonderful relationship that has grown since December 6, 1992, and are still cultivating it. Can brothers who do not pledge have the same kind of relationships — I don't think they can even comprehend it!
- Rituals are real valuable, particularly to us as Africans. We've always used rituals to reinforce our beliefs and our values and when done properly, that can be achieved. Every society has these types of rituals. Why? As a biologist, I know that nothing useless is conserved in nature — so why are these rituals? Perhaps they are needed and perhaps desired by the youth as part of their process of growing up. So what happens if the rituals that have been developed and refined over years and years are suddenly taken away and replaced with nothing? I suggest that if it is indeed a necessary activity for fraternal and social development, the youth will start creating their own to fill the vacuum. If it is not needed, nothing will happen. As a test of my hypothesis, which do you see? What is this thing called "underground pledging?" Hmmm.

### Conservatism and Domination

Pledging and hazing continue because they are the "popular" things to do within the structures of BGFs in order to gain accep-

tance. This unquestioned adherence to the popular is not unique to BGFs. Some believe there has been a progression in America that has led to a preoccupation with the popular and rising apathy, or even nihilism, where the realm of transformative political processes is concerned (Allen, 1994). The American populace has grown less and less concerned with being aware of why they do what they do in everyday and political life. This is a necessary condition for hegemony. It is here, in the popular sphere that hegemony must "take account of and even allow itself to be modified by its engagement with the fragmentary and contradictory terrain of common sense and popular culture" (Grossberg, 1992, p. 246). Through these modifications, hegemony seeks to constantly reinvent the relations of state, economy, and culture. Grossberg, with the help of Stuart Hall, summarizes the relationship of the popular with hegemonic struggles:

This [the sphere of popular culture] is where the social imaginary is defined and changes; where people construct personal identifications, priorities and possibilities; where people form and formulate moral and political agendas for themselves and their societies . . . . Hall, following Gramsci, describes this as the need for any hegemonic struggle to ground itself in or pass through "the popular." The popular here is not a fixed set of texts or practices, nor a coherent ideology, nor some necessarily celebratory and subversive structure. It is the complex and contradictory terrain, the multidimensional context, within which people live out their daily lives (Grossberg, pp. 246-247).

There is much support for what is perceived by some as an end of history as far as rational-critical discourse is concerned (Alway, 1995; Cook, 1994). Divisions along monolithic racial, gender, or class lines by themselves do not provide us with a substantive understanding of what is at work, though all of these factors help us to understand the marginalization of particular subaltern groups. While these cleavages can never be discarded, the question as to which one serves to marginalize most extremely or most often is debatable and the answer changes from case to case. Close examination reveals that large anonymous factors are also at work to engineer social divisiveness and anxiety (Bhabha, 1994; Brecher & Costello, 1994; Dionne,

1995).

One of the most cogent examples of this anxiety and its political response is the United States congressional elections of 1994 in which the Republican Party seized the political reins of America by a startling percentage of the vote. A common opinion articulated by many was that Americans were weary of Democratic rule and this wave of popular discontent rose up to sweep the Democrats out of office (Peters, 1993). Certainly, discontent existed and remains to this day, but was it some type of a priori condition which manifested itself with no need of outside impetus or were there other factors at work? According to Grossberg (1992), this state of discontent is not one which spontaneously rises up from the masses. It is affectively and effectively engineered by what he calls popular conservatism.<sup>8</sup> Grossberg contends that the popular issues leading to public discontent are not the real factors driving the political machine of American society — they are only facades and the masses fail to recognize the true culprits.

What is really at work is a combination of factors which serve to bring about axial shifts in popular sentiment and subsequently provide a friendly environment for the growth of the popular conservative political machine (Grossberg, 1992; Porteous, 1992). To say that politics drives culture or that culture drives politics would be too simple (remember, many BGF members who support the pledge process defend it as a “cultural” phenomenon). The reality is that both are inextricably tied and Grossberg seeks to show how. Popular conservatism is not a political rebellion, but a rebellion against politics. It is a rebellion that breeds adherents to cynicism for cynicism is a necessary condition for popular conservatism to exist (Goldfarb, 1991). Popular conservatism is a rebellion against politics because it continuously diverts attention from the political and towards the social or cultural as reasons why discontent is present and therefore offers social or cultural solutions to alleviate suffering (Maffesoli, 1996; West, 1993).

Grossberg's engagement of the relationship between the political and the popular is rooted in Gramsci's (1971) hegemony. Grossberg concedes that hegemony is based on both coercion and

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<sup>8</sup> Grossberg's term “popular conservatism” does not necessarily refer to the American Republican Party, though the Republicans utilize popular conservative tactics.



consent, but feels Gramsci's core/periphery model may not be dynamic enough to explain the modern American landscape. In an attempt to move away from a static engagement of American hegemony, Grossberg partially rejects Gramsci's idea of the non-flexible core and replaced it with what he calls the ruling bloc.<sup>9</sup> Grossberg comments:

In a hegemonic struggle . . . the social field cannot be easily divided into two competing groups. The diversity of "the people" confounds any such simple divisions; for while the masses appear to be undifferentiated, social differences actually proliferate. The difference between the subordinate and the dominant cannot be understood on a single dimension. Power has to be organized along many different, analytically equal axes: class, gender, ethnicity, race, age, etc., each of which produces disturbances in the others. At the same time, those seeking to hold the dominant position do not constitute a single coherent group or class. Instead, a specific alliance of class fractions, a "bloc" which must already have significant economic power, attempts to win a position of leadership by rearticulating the social and cultural landscape and their position within it. This re-articulation is never a single battle. It is a continuous "war of positions" dispersed across the entire terrain of social and cultural life. At each site, in each battle, the "ruling bloc" must re-articulate the possibilities and recreate a new alliance of support which places it in the leading position. It must win, not consensus, but consent (p. 245).

The ruling bloc, then, is not static and realizes that it must constantly appeal to the popular by articulating and rearticulating as much as is needed that it is making a dynamic shift to some stable set of ideals — which are invariably past-oriented. Along these lines, Stuart Hall (1988a, 1988b) examines the advent of Thatcherism in Britain as reflective of this appeal to the popular where ideals, stabil-

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<sup>9</sup> Grossberg's assessment of Gramsci's idea of the "core" as non-flexible may be somewhat inaccurate. It stands to reason, in fact, that Gramsci's idea of a *historical bloc* goes toward Grossberg's *ruling bloc*, though Gramsci can be said to run aground on the issue of class essentialism. This too is debatable, for Gramsci's overall arguments move well beyond issues of class.

ity, and threat are concerned. The driving force of Thatcherism was to identify an "enemy within" which threatened the very existence of good "Englishness" (Grossberg, p. 249). Of course, in order to make this appeal to the society and cause lines of division that perpetuated Thatcher's political power in English society, she had to present to the public what she felt this ideal "Englishness" was or had been. What happened in reality was that Thatcher created an emotive or affective myth which appealed to the masses. This adherence to a false history of what engendered English greatness, stability, and morality carried paranoid side effects such as racism and classism along with it, because there must be reasons for the loss of the mythic state. This was the same strategy used by Fascists in Germany, but with much more extreme results — the Holocaust.

This is also the case with American conservatism. The reasons for the loss of mythic America are largely temporal. They shift from external (the Russian threat, Khadafi, Hussein, Middle Eastern terrorists) to internal (affirmative action, welfare policy, the deviancy of homosexuals) depending upon the national crisis at hand. The progression of the popular conservative strategy, however, does not change. The conservatives move forward around the notion of a post-modern frontier. This is, they must put into place parameters which define when "America was what it should be" and when "America became what it is." This involves the historical designation of a period which marks the "fall of America" (Grossberg, p. 267). Like Thatcherism and Fascism, the popular conservatives must construct a glorious past which did not have post-modern problems. The problems that did exist supposedly could be handled in a quick, effective manner that was agreeable to the majority of mythic America's populace. The dividing line of this frontier is usually placed somewhere around the Vietnam years — the late sixties or early to mid-seventies. It sees the America of the fifties and sixties as what the country should be and the post-sixties period as the time of the "fall" into degeneration.

Certainly, the America of the fifties and sixties was quite different from the one we know today. Some of these differences however, especially the cultural ones, are not the reasons that America's "place" has changed on the global terrain. Popular conservatism, however, engenders the belief that these are the precise changes that have led



to the continued demise of America. This is the realm that not only allows the existence of racism, classism, ethnic conflict, sexism and other myopic divisions, but helps to create and cultivate them. Whether or not the popular conservatives believe their rhetoric is really not the point. The point is that past-oriented discourse is an essential tool of domination, because it serves to actuate the next stage in the process — what Grossberg calls affective epidemics.

These epidemics usually function in a diversionary manner. For example, one of the very real problems which drive the condition of American and the world is the growth in power of the disembodied multinational corporations which mandate the existence of Arendt's (1958) animal laborens (Barnet, 1994; Bhabha, 1994). No longer is the oppressed/oppressor dichotomy limited to the space of individual states. The economic pursuits of the multinationals are quickly turning the world into one which houses invisible economic giants and subaltern laborers. The focus of popular conservatism does not allow for the engagement of politics on this level. Popular conservatives push the reification of a totally different set of concerns. While the problems of race, ethnicity, class, and gender are quite real, the new global economy may be more relevant today in that it mixes all of these ingredients into a particularly explosive, fetishized, paranoid brew in post-modern America. Xenophobic cleavages, more than anything, present issues (largely mythic) that popular conservatives can seize and create misleading affective epidemics (Slakey, 1993). It must not be forgotten that cynicism is necessary for this "dumbing" of the masses. There must exist a general disinterest in alternate perspectives on the epidemics and a willingness to be lied to (Carey, 1995; Goldfarb, 1991).

The apparent success of such manipulation cannot be explained by falling back on images of the masses as intrinsically manipulatable, as cultural and ideological dopes. In fact, vast numbers know or assume that they are being lied to, or else they seem not to care . . . this is precisely the paradox at the heart of contemporary U.S. politics and of the new conservatism's success. A large proportion of the population is outraged by at least some of what is going on, yet they remain inactive and uncommitted. There is a feeling of helplessness: what can anyone do? (Grossberg, p. 258)

It follows that some thinkers believe, without a doubt, that America has become a "cynical society" (Ewen, 1988).

Ewen asserts that Americans are far less concerned with substantive political matters that dominate everyday life and are more consumed with the notion that their existence is defined by what image (be it false or not) they are able to present to their fellows. Because of a preoccupation with the anti-intellectual and non-political, popular conservative discourse becomes a tool which is capable of defining reality for a good percentage of the American populace. The preoccupation with image is intimately tied to Freire's (1990) evaluation of the oppressor's psychology, which carries over to the oppressed. In the Marxist tradition, Freire realizes the oppressed can easily buy into a system which he [the oppressed] cannot define himself independent of the oppressor. Both suffer from false consciousness in that the oppressor feels that "to have is to be" and the oppressed feels that "to be is to be like the oppressor."<sup>10</sup>

Ultimately, the construction of the post-modern frontier and the use of affective epidemics leads to the phenomenon of disciplines mobilization. The non-agents who arise from the popular conservative progressions are eventually caught in a cycle of conceptual movement which Grossberg said is the psychological equivalent of "spaces without places" (p. 296). These consumers of popular conservatism are constantly led along by the ruling block, blind, with no sense of direction or critical engagement of the very issues that are used to dominate them..

### **BGF Ruling Blocs and the Membership Intake Epidemic**

An examination of the internal BGF debate over the pledge process makes it clear that a paradigm shift from pledging to MIP has not occurred. It is much easier to find members of the groups initiated after the implementation of the various MIPs who did pledge than it is to find ones who did not. Only two of the seventy-seven men interviewed for this study admitted to having gone through MIP

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<sup>10</sup> In the black case, as with any study of marginalization, the temptation is to quickly accept the notion of false consciousness to explain the dilemma. While false consciousness is somewhat accurate, it brings with it the Marxist tendency to reduce the argument to material concerns. Material concerns are not to be discarded, but they do not provide a full picture in and of themselves. Considering this, an engagement of Du Bois' (1903) double consciousness would also be in order here (and possibly more accurate in the African-American case).

properly, even though a good number of them were initiated after pledging was outlawed. When we compare the identity narrative of pro-pledge BGF members (who seem to be winning the battle thus far when the groups' practices are studied) to that of popular conservatives we come full circle and see striking similarities in the tools used to maintain adherence to their agendas.

Hegemony, and in this case domination, always involves a struggle to define and re-articulate the popular or even the essential (Grossberg, 1992). As we have seen, simple membership does not necessarily lead to reification of the programs or practices espoused by organizational leadership. To the contrary, members' approaches are often defined by the very contexts and practices of which the national organizations disapprove. This is so because speaking the language of the popular is more important to many than remaining true to regulations of an organization whose purpose has already been altered by the constant progression of time. It is ironic that one member commented, "Who ever said you need a fraternity to achieve or help mankind?" He goes on to advise any young man seeking these goals to join an "honor society, NAACP, or church action committee." This is ironic, because BGFs were founded for these very reasons — achieving and helping mankind in their own particular way. The search for some elusive brotherhood notwithstanding, what other real purpose can the organizations serve?

Historically, these groups have raged against labels which brand them as "social." They fancy themselves as community service organizations whose mission is to better the life chances of the entire African-American community. It is obvious, however, that there exists a contingent of members to which this purpose is secondary, if not forgotten. If the perceived purposes of the organizations have indeed shifted in the minds of the members, then stated fraternity policy is for all intents and purposes inconsequential. With the progressive loss of memory concerning the macro-political roots of BGFs as socio-political movements, attention can be shifted easily from the political to the popular. This is so because the concept of pledging has moved from its place as sacrificial ritual with clear purposes in the Girardian (1989) sense to one of popular ideology. When positioned as such an ideology, it becomes unclear as to whether many members know why they continue to hold on to the process when it



does not accomplish the task it is invoked to accomplish. How this can be empirically proved or disproved, though, is not important to BGF members. What is important is the fact that, beyond anything else, pledging is a celebration of the pleasures of social differentiation. The rejection of MIP is an attempt to maintain the dividing line by maintaining the practice.

Just as hegemony in the popular conservative sense is organized around an explicitly defined national project of structuring social and political formations to define and mobilize the struggles of everyday life, the project of pledging speaks to the same mission within BGFs. In the BGF case, brothers who have been hazed (be it before or after 1990) form a powerful ruling bloc. This bloc of "real brothers" engages in a struggle with the anti-pledge movements for the hearts, minds, and bodies of entering members. Like the popular conservatives, they are winning. They win because this is not a struggle that speaks to logic or critical thinking, and maybe not even to achievement, scholarship, or altruism of any recognizable sort. It is one that speaks to actives' and potentials' moods, passions, desires, and volitions (Grodin & Lindlof, 1996).

To aid in its struggle against anti-pledge movements, the BGF ruling bloc must (like popular conservatives) establish the frontier which marks a decline in BGF strength of membership and purpose. This decline in fraternity viability, for these men, is marked by the adoption of MIP. Consequently, the MIP frontier is the enemy, for it is defined as the moment when "unhealthy" individuals began to be allowed into the fraternity and infected its body. All pro-pledge rhetoric invokes this belief in one way or another, and BGF affective epidemics are numerous. They claim that MIP members do not know history; have no or questionable love for the organization; did not work to join; are uncomfortable with "real" brothers; cannot handle challenges; have no respect for tradition; will not actively participate beyond the trivial aspects of the groups, etc. The list goes on and whether the assertions are true is not the issue. The fact of the matter is BGFs now have a population of "illegitimate sons" who are targeted as reasons to maintain the violent pledge process. The MIP frontier, as with all post-modern frontiers and the affective epidemics which accompany them, "distributed people and practices (and the investments that connect them) in a specific way" (Grossberg, p.

260). Participation in pledging divides BGF populations by identifications and processes rather than identities and contributions.

If the products of the MIP process are not considered enemies, they certainly exist on the other side of the frontier and are excluded from certain relations for they are plagued with "otherness." Little fraternal space is set aside for these men located outside of the popular conception of what entrance should entail. They are subsequently relegated to a nether world in which they are members of the organizations and not members simultaneously. The struggle in BGFs then is one which is very much concerned with defining what "matters." This is more than a philosophical question, because it involves a very real struggle to define the nature of authority in BGFs. The fact that national policies change, but chapter practices remain constant brings Hobbes to mind, "He is the ruler who rules." Clearly, the national organizations are not the sovereign: they do not rule — the violently initiated ruling bloc does. It is here that we find those that construct various crises in the organizations and use them to determine why, where, and when fraternal benefits are bestowed upon other members. This political process is one which does not work in one direction. Not only does the ruling bloc define parameters of acceptance, but parameters of acceptance also define members of the ruling bloc, for they are mobilized in a very disciplined manner which eventually seizes control of many of their identities (Digeser, 1995; Taylor, 1989; Trupp, 1987).

The assertion that pledging is a "cultural" construct that cannot be understood by outsiders may or may not be true, but there also exists the possibility that it is not understood by insiders. Either way, insiders continue to be moved by the project because of its emotive and social appeal. Undoubtedly, pledging does produce a common experience on some levels. Whether the experience is necessary, positive, or negative is debatable. But, it is clear that once someone enters this field of experience they quite often "find themselves almost uncontrollably situated on or at least pulled toward 'the right' regardless of their ideological relations (or lack of relations) with the Right" (Grossberg, p. 283). It should be clear that those who wish to maintain pledging must be considered the Right, for they espouse the conservative ideal of never letting go of the past, because to let go opens the door to destructive consequences. These conservatives,



like all conservatives, strive to establish substance and meaning where individuals are concerned based on an idyllic (or even mythic) past resting on a perception of "when fraternities were what they ought to be." The invocation of affective epidemics have far reaching ramifications as Grossberg indicates:

Affective epidemics define empty sites which, as they travel, can be contextually re-articulated. These mobile sites are constantly fetishized, invested with values disproportionate to their actual worth. Their most important function is to proliferate wildly so that, like a moral panic, once an affective epidemic is put into place, it is seen everywhere, displacing every other possible investment. But unlike moral panics, such epidemics are not always negatively charged and they have no specific focal point of identity, working instead through structures of identification and belonging. Mattering places are transformed into vectors so that the concerns and investment of real social history become the ruins of a displaced, perhaps even misplaced, paranoia. In response to a condition that has been often characterized as "cultural weightlessness," the new conservatism establishes a daily economy of saturated panics. This leaves only two possibilities: either fanaticism or sentimentality, both struggling to make a difference within a condition of affective excess (Grossberg, p. 284).

Finally, whether pledging is driven by fanaticism or sentimentality is not certain. It is more than likely driven by both. What Grossberg is speaking to is the important invention and reinvention of fetishization and misplaced paranoia. Is it really possible that MIP, in and of itself, has or even could destroy the very fabric of black fraternities as some members believe? Conversely, is pledging the tool which can really deliver fraternities to and beyond old heights of success? Whether it can or cannot accomplish such a task, a number of pledging's features offer perplexing quandaries. The most obvious issues is the contradiction between the fraternities' stated rejection of pledging and members' actions which continue to perpetuate it. The reality is, regardless of whether the process is coveted or condemned by national officers or philosophers, its appeal con-

tinues to mobilize men. It not only mobilizes them, but mobilizes them with such force that it has all but closed off the possibility of a sustained, organized movement to dethrone it. In most circles, it has all but erased those fractions of the fraternities' populations that have not received its stamp of authenticity. These "paper" or "cat" individuals are not embraced, because they carry the contagion which is perceived as having the potential of unraveling the fabric of the fraternal orders. These MIP initiates are viewed as infectious, because their initiation experiences cannot compare to those of duly pledged members.

Engaging BGFs as having ruling blocs, a pledge frontier and epidemics established through narratives which mobilize potential initiates is telling. It is telling because these are the very factors which ultimately substitute a mechanical discursive tradition that locates blame for BGF shortcomings elsewhere, instead of attempting to find viable oppositional practices which would help eradicate the deficiencies. That many members do not remember the original purposes or adhere to the founding ideals of their organizations is clear. This lack of memory does not matter to them though, because the acceptance that comes with submission to violence is defined by powerful affective lines and practices, not logical reasoning. If this political memory were left intact or reconstructed, then it is here that we should locate a key to resistance to modern ritualization of random violence in BGFs. This is not to say that there is any single or simple conspiracy in BGFs to maintain pledging. It may be that members are involved in a complex conspiracy, but conspire without knowing they conspire. This unconscious conspiracy can be located in narrative, which is one of the most powerful tools of domination used to maintain any conservative structure. Such structures often effectively cause the realm of the Self to collapse into everyday fraternal life. As a result, the world of the individual is increasingly politicized upon the fraternities' contested terrain and loses sight of societies'. Subsequently, these men become more and more vulnerable. They are vulnerable because individuals desire to be accepted by the fraternal body, but can easily be rejected if the correct avenues of acceptance are not followed. This rejection (or perhaps more

important the threat of it) continuously subjects potential and active members to the surveillance of the accepted other. Individuals on this ruling bloc's mobile terrain make every effort to compensate for perceived shortcomings so as not to be denied acceptance to or to be expelled from the space reserved for "real" members.

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