

Volunteer Traditions: Neoclassical Architecture and Its Racial Impact on Fraternity and
Sorority Houses at the University of Tennessee

by

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DEDICATION

I am dedicating this thesis to Langston Dante Latavious Carter. A very close friend of mine, Langston passed away in April 2020. When I began this research, there were many times where I discussed with him the path I wanted to take with this topic. He read my proposal and believed this would be a great contribution to public history.

Langston, I hope I have made you proud. Through this entire writing process, you have always been my source of motivation. So many tears have been wept, so many instances of frustration I have felt. However, it has been worth it because I have finally kept the promise I made to myself after your death. Thank you, from the depths of my heart, for your presence on Earth and in spirit. I miss you, and I love you.

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ABSTRACT

Architecture is used often to iterate to the public specific ideas, usually tied to perceived societal norms of a particular culture, group of people, or to represent an idea that is meant to convey ideas that tie to specific ideologies. In the twentieth century, the adoption of Neoclassical architecture on the American landscape correlated with ideas of whiteness and elitism, and those ideas further materialized in collegiate spaces with the same adoption of this architectural style. Neoclassical architecture, along with acts of racial and ethnic discrimination, created and continues to nourish these ideas on college campuses. This thesis explores the symbolism and meaning of twentieth-century fraternity/sorority house architecture on southern college campuses using the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, as a case study. Fraternity and sorority houses' use of Neoclassical architecture perpetuates ideas of the lost cause south and white supremacy, creating a hostile physical statement to students of color. Neoclassical architecture plays an important role in one's perception of slavery and how one understands their ancestral ties to its horrific place in history.

CHAPTER I: THE LEGACY OF CLASSICAL HISTORY AND THE ADOPTION OF NEOCLASSICAL ARCHITECTURE IN THE UNITED STATES

The Classical style began to take root as the American colonies began to consider independence in the mid-1700s. Before that, Europe influenced much of the colonies' early architecture. Several of the architectural styles included the Dutch, Georgian, and Tudor styles. Christine Kreyling emphasizes that significant colonial buildings “reflected national origins in Europe, with the House of Burgesses and other structures in Williamsburg, Virginia, representing the most architecturally significant effort by the English to project a presence in their North American empire.”¹



Figure 1: Dutch colonial style home in Somerset, Maryland²

¹ Christine Kreyling, Wesley Paine, Charles W. Watterfield, Jr., and Susan Ford Wiltshire, *Classical Nashville* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1996), 33.

² Historic American Buildings Survey, creator, and Nathan Loughborough, Albert S. Burns, photographers, *Milton, River Road, Somerset, Montgomery County, MD*, Maryland Montgomery County Somerset, 1933, documentation compiled after, photograph, <https://www.loc.gov/item/md0195/>.

The eastern seaboard especially incorporated these styles into domestic and government structures as the colonies' political leadership resided mainly in that area. Typical European architectural styles found in the United States in the eighteenth century consisted of "a two-story [five] or seven bay rectangular block on a raised foundation."³ Known as the Georgian style, symmetry dominated the façade with a central entrance flanked by a balanced number of windows, and two chimneys built on the gable ends of the house.



Figure 2: Wythe House, Williamsburg, Virginia. The Wythe House is an example of the Georgian style.⁴

³ Gerald L. Foster, *American Houses: A Field Guide to the Architecture of the Home* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2004), 114.

⁴ Frances Benjamin Johnston, photographer, *Wythe House, Williamsburg, James City County, Virginia*, James City County United States Williamsburg, Virginia, ca. 1930, photograph. <https://www.loc.gov/item/2017891584/>.

During the early years of colonization, architectural styles originated from various places in Europe. For northern colonies, such as New York and New Jersey, some architectural inspiration hailed from Holland due to a large influx of Dutch people settling along the Hudson River Valley.⁵ But the dominant trend was the Georgian style from England and Scotland. The New England colonies (consisting of New Hampshire, Massachusetts Bay Colony, Rhode Island, and Connecticut) first constructed buildings from readily available sources of wood, a common architectural practice that originated from Essex and East Anglia.⁶ But like in other northern colonies residents were constructing dwellings, churches, and public buildings in the Georgian style by the eighteenth century.

Many of the colonial Georgian-style buildings reflected designs found in European-published architecture books, again, especially those from England by such authors as Robert Morris. The colonies lacked trained architects at the time, and it was not until well after the Revolution when America had its own professional architects.⁷

The end of the Revolutionary War in 1783 marked a turning point in American history and culture. War often is the period where a time ends, and another begins. War brings with it the conclusion and beginning of social patterns and influences that affect either side's landscape. The eighteenth century marked that period for a country that experienced a break within its political structure. The American Revolution marked the

⁵ David P. Handlin, *American Architecture* (New York: Thames and Hudson, Inc., 1985), 18.

⁶ Handlin, *American Architecture*, 18.

⁷ *Ibid.*

ending of Britain's dominance over its colonies in the New World, and the beginning of a new country who desired a new national identity. The United States created a new governmental system, abandoning many of the political policies of Europe and fashioning itself into a national brand. With the eagerness to establish a new identity, the governing bodies of the United States looked to the past for guidance in creating its political and architectural forms. Public architecture in the new United States shifted toward the Neoclassical style.⁸

The U.S. government heavily desired a country to call their own that rested on these principles: unity, order, and stability.⁹ Classical Greece and Rome spoke heavily to these ideals. The United States based its core founding belief of democracy on what they perceived as ancient Greek principles, seeing those as associated with a formerly strong, well-built empire and reflecting values that it wanted to imitate. The architecture of Greece and Rome spoke directly to what the United States desired: the symmetry of the ancient temples represented the unity the country desired; the perceived whiteness (the idea of Classical buildings as all white reflects their preserved state in the eighteenth century and not their original state) represented the purity the country longed for.¹⁰

By the early nineteenth century, the United States possessed a considerable number of architects—both gentlemen self-taught architects and ones more formally trained—compared to the Colonial period. Charles Bulfinch, Benjamin Latrobe, Robert

⁸ A classic statement of this transition in American architecture is W. Barksdale Maynard, *Architecture in the United States, 1800-1850* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 1-50.

⁹ Kreyling, Paine, and Warterfield, *Classical Nashville*, 34.

¹⁰ Maynard, *Architecture in the United States*, 221.

Mills, William Strickland, and Thomas Jefferson were all devotees of the Neoclassical style, especially for public buildings.

Of the gentleman architects, Bulfinch and Jefferson were the most important. Charles Bulfinch (1763-1844) was born in the United States, but European architecture heavily influenced his stylistic vision due to his extensive travel to England, France, and Italy. His work, primarily in New England, reflected various degrees of Classical inspiration. His designs for the Washington Arch, the Beacon Hill Memorial Column, and the Massachusetts State House are impressive early Neoclassical statements.



Figure 3: Charles Bulfinch's Washington Arch¹¹

¹¹ Detroit Publishing Co., copyright claimant, and publisher Detroit Publishing Co., *Washington Memorial Arch*, United States New York, New York State, none, [between 1900 and 1920], photograph. <https://www.loc.gov/item/2016796942/>.



Figure 4: Charles Bulfinch's Massachusetts State House¹²

Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826), like Bulfinch, was a self-taught architect influenced more by French interpretations of Classical buildings due to his years in Paris as an American ambassador in the 1780s. He translated the Roman temple, La Maison Carée, at Nîmes, France, into the first state capitol building for Virginia. He incorporated English and French Classical interpretations at his homes, Monticello and Poplar Forest.¹³

¹²Historic American Buildings Survey, creator, *Massachusetts State House, Gates & Steps, Beacon Street, Boston, Suffolk County, MA*, Suffolk County Boston Massachusetts, 1933, documentation compiled after, photograph, <https://www.loc.gov/item/ma0911/>.

¹³ Handlin has useful summaries of all of these architects in his *American Architecture*.



Figure 5: Thomas Jefferson's Monticello¹⁴

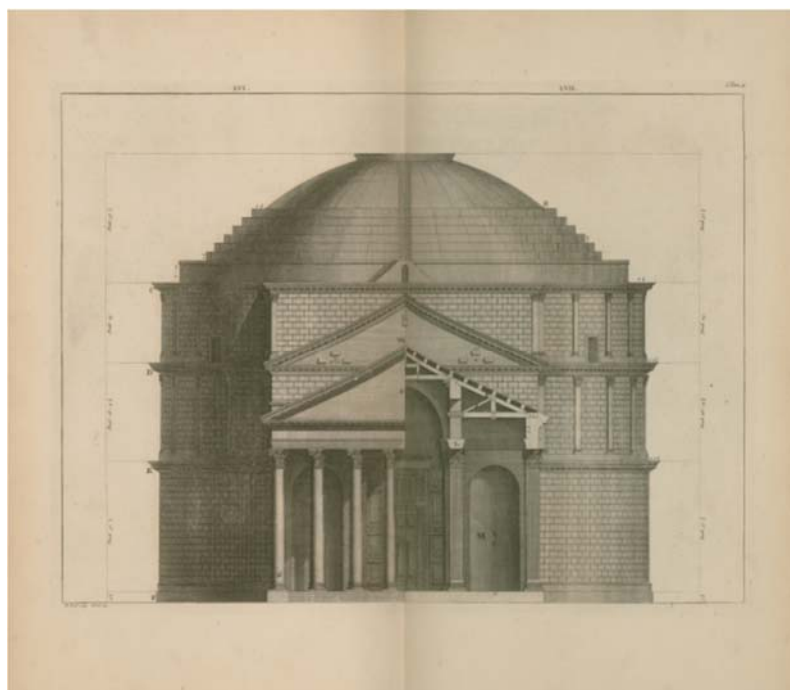


Figure 6: Palladio's sketch of the Roman Pantheon¹⁵

¹⁴ Theodor Horydczak, photographer, *Monticello, Virginia. Front of Monticello from center*, Albemarle County Virginia, none, ca. 1920-ca. 1950, photograph, <https://www.loc.gov/item/2019683072/>.

¹⁵ Andrea Palladio, *Pantheon*. Plate LVII, half of the front under the Portico, <https://www.loc.gov/exhibits/thomas-jeffersons-library/interactives/palladio-architecture/10.html>.

A major influence on Jefferson was the work and publications of Andrea Palladio (b. 1508 – d. 1580), an Italian Renaissance architect whose classic study, the *Four Books of Architecture* was incredibly influential in Europe in the 17th century, as well as on the development of Neoclassical architecture in America in the 18th century. Jefferson had a copy of this book in his library and referred to it as his “architectural bible.”¹⁶

The establishment of the District of Columbia, and the first major federal buildings, gave two avowed classicists, George Washington and Thomas Jefferson, the opportunity to put a lasting imprint on the design of the nation’s capital in their collaboration with the French architect Pierre L’Enfant. Washington and Jefferson both possessed this desire of adopting Classical architecture on the American landscape. Washington desired this new look of Classicism and Thomas Jefferson, who was more experienced in the building arts, supported the president’s goals. They wanted a public landscape that reflected governmental authority, stability, and unity because they believed the country needed such traits to experience longevity.¹⁷ Therefore, “Jefferson, thus, became the first American leader to envision a plan for housing a new government in the forms of architecture.”¹⁸ L’Enfant’s street plan had little influence on future American cities, but the idea that public buildings or important buildings of any sort must be Classical would have a lasting effect on the American landscape, and would grow in popularity across the United States, especially in the South.

¹⁶ “Thomas Jefferson’s Library: The Architecture of A. Palladio” Exhibitions, Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/exhibits/thomas-jeffersons-library/interactives/palladio-architecture/>.

¹⁷ Michael Curtis, *Classical Architecture and Monuments of Washington, D.C.* (Charleston, SC: The History Press, 2008), 19-24.

¹⁸ Kreyling, Paine, and Warterfield, *Classical Nashville*, 34.

Classical architecture allowed public buildings to stand out, and make a statement of dominance and authority. Kreyling analyzes why the early United States desired this look:

Throughout the formative years of the architecture of government, the founders and their architects associated the logical purity and form of Greek architecture with democracy in Greek city-states, whereas they connected the Roman style with a powerful centralized authority in an expanding empire. These key characteristics of ancient systems of government were thought to be compatible with the new American republic, and, as a result, the early shapers of the nation adopted a classical architecture symbolizing Greek democratic ideals and Roman strengths.¹⁹

The high columns emphasized height, with the large spaces in between them and in between the stairs and actual entrance exhibited a large space, which also emphasized expanse. The eighteenth-century perception of ancient Greece as the originator of western democracy and ancient Rome as a republican bastion made early Americans use them as examples for what a powerful country should look like. The fact that Greece and Roman societies also incorporated slavery (which was based on social status rather than ethnicity) was also appealing to the nation's founders. Not only did Classical architecture emphasize power, but it was able to be emphasized in multiple buildings. According to Foster, "Thomas Jefferson saw Rome's architecture, as well as its republican form of government as model for the United States, for it offered a wide range of buildings types compared to other styles."²⁰

¹⁹ Ibid, 35.

²⁰ Foster, *American Houses*, 230.

The use of Classical architecture in the South quickly gained popularity. Foster asserts:

the Greek Revival took different forms and persisted longer than in other regions. Screens of two-story columns were wrapped around shaded Creole plantation house galleries, creating the familiar brooding character of antebellum mansions in Alabama, Louisiana, and Mississippi, with less attention paid to “correct” Classical proportions than in the North.²¹



Figure 7: Parlange Plantation, New Roads, Louisiana²²

Inland southern cities by the antebellum era had shifted from the Georgian/Federal style to a Classical look. In Nashville, for example, early Classical

²¹ Ibid, 234.

²² Carol M. Highsmith, photographer, *Parlange Plantation, New Roads, Louisiana*, United States New Roads, Louisiana, none, between 1980 and 2006, photograph, <https://www.loc.gov/item/2011631225/>.

buildings included the Hermitage (c. 1831, 1834-1836) and St. Mary's Cathedral (1844-1847). Then William Strickland's Tennessee State Capitol (1845-1859) turned Nashville into what city boosters once called the Athens of the West.²³ Strickland's design not only shaped Nashville into the new Greco-Roman style; it also became a powerful statement building for Tennessee.²⁴ The Classical style would dominate the state's public buildings for the next 100 years.



Figure 8: William Strickland's Tennessee State Capitol²⁵

²³ Carroll Van West, *Nashville Architecture: A Guide to the City* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2015), 22, 25, 232.

²⁴ Kreyling, *Classical Nashville*, 35.

²⁵ Historic American Buildings Survey, creator, and William Strickland, *State Capitol, State Capitol Boulevard & Cedar Street, Nashville, Davidson County, TN*, Tennessee Davidson County Nashville, 1933, documentation compiled after, photograph, <https://www.loc.gov/item/tn00034/>.

The Revolution and the adoption of Neoclassical architecture helped the United States to be recognized internationally by giving it a national identity. The architectural attributes associated of Neoclassicism caused the former image of the United States (as a conglomerate of dependent colonies of Great Britain) to dissolve and to be reborn into a nation of its own measures. Neoclassical architecture existed as a reaction to Europe's overbearing, "motherly" demeanor, and showcased the new nation's resolve to formulate and dictate its own laws. Using Neoclassical architecture for government buildings to emphasize its newfound power existed as the primary way to show its rising stature among other already developed countries.

CHAPTER II: NEOCLASSICAL ARCHITECTURE IN THE DOMESTIC SPHERE IN THE ANTEBELLUM SOUTH

At the turn of the eighteenth century, builders and architects of homes found many middle-class and elite patrons demanding Classical embellishments to their homes. The first one hundred years of settlement in North America relied on what scholars call impermanent architecture, buildings often deemed “rudimentary,” even by seventeenth-century standards, and what we might describe as vernacular in style.²⁶ As these dwellings slowly faded—and low construction remained popular well into the nineteenth century—framed houses and houses of masonry became popular living spaces.²⁷ However, early on in its appearance, difficulties arose. It was often troublesome to successfully obtain lime for the mortar used to construct masonry dwellings, as limestone was practically non-existent in colonies such as Connecticut and Virginia. Colonists, therefore, were forced to use substitutes such as clay. There was also the idea that floated among the colonies that masonry was an unsafe architectural method due to the increase in dampness forming in the material.²⁸

Those unfounded concerns disappeared in the eighteenth century as elite homeowners not only wished for more architecturally sophisticated buildings with “more abstract compositions of space, mass, and surface,” they also wanted classically inspired

²⁶ Fiske Kimball, *Domestic Architecture of the American Colonies and of the Early Republic, 1888-1955* (New York, Dover Publications, 1966), 4. Also see, Dell Upton, *Architecture in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 17-56.

²⁷ Upton, *Architecture in the United States*, chapter one.

²⁸ Kimball, *Domestic Architecture*, 35-6.

statement houses.²⁹ The use of brick became a staple in building, and the academic style, derived from Classical architectural elements, began to dominate the cities of the east coast.³⁰ At the beginning of the nineteenth century, Americans begin to step back and truly examine their domestic spaces to emphasize power.³¹

Religion and Domestic Architecture

Americans of the Early Republic often considered their own domestic architecture through the lens of Christianity. The Great Revivals of the first years of the nineteenth century led to the creation of new denominations, such as the Cumberland Presbyterians in Tennessee, and an expansion of Methodist and Baptist churches across the nation. At the same time religious leaders, in a society that had separated church and state and when no “established church” existed, worried that citizens lacked a sacred environment. Thus, ministers often emphasized the idea of “home religion.”³² This idea of associating the home with Christianity flourished as people began linking the home with nature and domestic tranquility. Nature, associated with beauty frequently because of its idyllic landscape, was often “seen as a reflection of God [and] [s]ince beauty was connected to God, anything that was beautiful would manifest what was good.”³³ Thus, the home

²⁹ Ibid, 53.

³⁰ Ibid, 54.

³¹ David P. Handlin, *The American Home: Architecture and Society, 1815-1915* (Canada: Little, Brown & Company 1979), 4.

³² Handlin, *The American Home*, 5.

³³ Kimball, *Domestic Architecture*, 16.

residing in nature or the countryside existed as the proper space to rear a family as God existed at the core of its development.

The home became the primary domain outside the church where Christianity could thrive. It existed as a place that, in theory, produced pious and productive individuals that could be useful to society. Thus, the home had to exist as a place of proper cultivation, with the mother in charge of education and religious readings at the home. Colleen McDannell, in her study *The Christian Home in Victorian America, 1840-1900*, emphasized that the idea of a Christian home yielded a preference for Gothic style among many middle-class northern Americans. In the South, however, Classical homes were the choice of middle-class and elite property owners, especially on the wealthy plantations that depended on the labor of enslaved workers.³⁴ The Classical-columned home of antebellum lore may have been Christian on the inside, with rituals within the family. But both inside and outside the “Big House,” in the work spaces, and in the quarters, all that mattered was work, and the enslaved toiled from dawn to dusk, and even beyond if their assignment was to get fires lit and empty chamber pots in the night.

The idea of home as a nurturing Christian environment took a different form when it came to slavery. Enslavers and white Americans, in general, saw slavery as a paternalistic institution that provided solutions to what was deemed the natural plight of Blacks. On the plantation, the idea of nurturing took a twisted turn where only the Whites could prosper. Emphasis was placed on upbringing, and the involvement of the parents. The duty of the parents was to encourage the growth and development of their children

³⁴ Colleen McDannell, *The Christian Home in Victorian America, 1840-1900* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002).

and to project a righteous lifestyle onto them. Enslavers had little concern about nurturing their enslaved property due to white perceptions of black capability. Whites' ideas of blackness gave rise to racial stereotypes of Blacks, beginning with the foundational assumption that Blacks were inferior. Included in this thinking was that Blacks constantly disrupted society due to their incompetency, dishonesty, thievery, and sensuality. Surveillance of black life became fundamental and extended to religious life. Whites allowed Blacks to attend church in segregated spaces; they did not like the idea of the enslaved holding their own religious services, whether in the quarters or in the woods of the plantation.

In antebellum cities, Whites' distaste and stereotypes about the enslaved perhaps becomes most telling in the rising popularity of minstrel acts. First beginning in the 1820s and exploding in popularity in the 1830s, minstrel acts consisted of Whites imitating what they deemed were the actions and personalities of Blacks.³⁵ Many minstrel acts consisted of overly done facial features, such as the nose and lips, and numerous theatrical movements. Also included in these acts was the emphasis placed on broken and/or unintelligible English.³⁶

³⁵ Robert C. Toll, "From Folktype to Stereotype: Images of Slaves in Antebellum Minstrelsy," *Journal of the Folklore Institute* 8, no.1 (June 1971): 39.

³⁶ Matthew Mihalka, "Minstrel Shows," *Encyclopedia of Arkansas*, online edition. Accessed March 15, 2021.



Figure 9: minstrel poster³⁷

According to historian John Blassingame, minstrel acts reflected the white perception of three types of the male enslaved: Sambo, Jack and Nat. Sambo was the faithful slave who possessed much love and affection for his enslaver and his family. Jack was the slave who was faithful until he experienced mistreatment from his enslaver. Nat was the rebel who always sought to be free and purposefully disobeyed his enslaver.³⁸ Nat was the character which white society dreaded the most. He put fear into Whites as he was the one who could destroy the pillars that upheld the racially uneven institution.

³⁷ Strobridge & Co. Lith., *William H. West's Big Minstrel Jubilee*, 1899. [Cincinnati; New York: Strobridge Litho. Co], photograph, <https://www.loc.gov/item/2014637067/>.

³⁸ John W. Blassingame, *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 224-225.

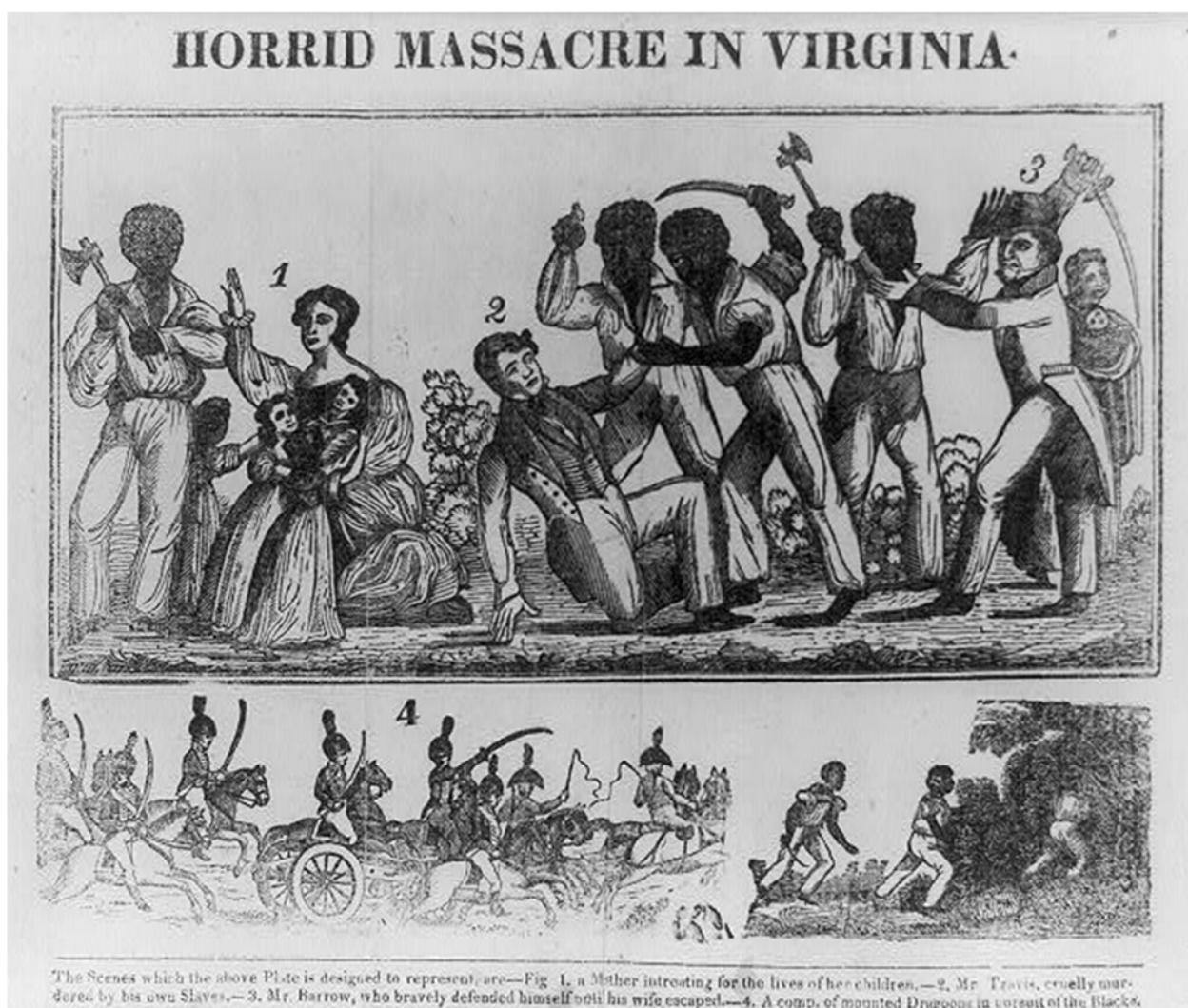


Figure 10: Nat Turner composite of rebellion³⁹

Whites also perceived that religious controls on the enslaved were needed due to their transference of sexual violence to black men. White owners considered enslaved women to be property with whom they could do as they wished. But the culture pointed the finger unjustly at black men as sexual predators and at black women for their inability to control sexual desire. Whites deemed black women as hypersexual creatures. The term

³⁹ *Horrid massacre in Virginia*, Southampton County Virginia, 1831, photograph. <https://www.loc.gov/item/98510363/>.

“Jezebel” was often used to describe black women as those who always entertained the idea of sex and detested the idea of piety. These thoughts originated at the beginning of the African slave trade when Europeans, not used to seeing nudity in their home countries, found African women to be carnal beings because they generally did not wear clothing in their native settings.⁴⁰ These portrayals of Blacks show that Whites felt that Blacks were uncontrollable if they had too much freedom. Thus, not only did the institution of slavery keep them in line, but the architecture of plantations helped to emphasize the meaning of slavery and oppression.

The Plantation House

Beginning in the late eighteenth century, but expanding across the South in the nineteenth century, was a private landscape that challenged the dominance of the courthouse and town square—the plantation landscape of a “Big House,” surrounded by work buildings and a bit farther afield the quarters of the enslaved. The vast majority of southern plantation homes embraced the Neoclassical style, particularly commanding two-story columns that defined the entrance into the enslaver’s home. These buildings ever since have been celebrated for expressing a new cultural identity for the United States; much less acknowledged is that the Greek Revival mansion also is a statement building that represents white superiority and dominance over Blacks.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Deborah Gray White, *Ar'n't I a Woman?: Female Slaves in the Plantation South* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1985), 29.

⁴¹ John M. Vlach, *Back of the Big House: The Architecture of Plantation Slavery* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993).

The design of the plantation landscape emphasized separate spheres for the inferior and the superior, and reflected the Whites' dominance over black slaves. Although there were laws already in place in the United States that emphasized this racial pyramid, the plantation home was a consistent reminder of these racial hierarchies. According to Dell Upton, "the great planter intended that his landscape would be hierarchical, leading to himself at the center."⁴² On the outskirts of the plantation or sometimes behind it would lie dwellings for the enslaved, scattered about the landscape consisting of often one-room or shared two-room houses. In addition to the power that emphasized the importance of the planter through race, the house itself represented its individual power. The planter's "house was raised above the other buildings and was often set from the surrounding country side by a series of barriers or boundaries – fences and terraces."⁴³ The crisp layout of the main parts of the plantation emphasized the power of white supremacy over the enslaved. The white mansion towered over the one-story, one-room houses and the well-constructed columns supported a Classical portico which emphasized dominance. Upton notes that "the white landscape, or more precisely the great planter's landscape, was both articulated and processional."⁴⁴ The planter at the center of everything shows a dominance that is all-seeing. By placing the main house at the center, the planter could see everything that he owned—the land and those who worked it. The main house played as a nineteenth-century "Big Brother."

⁴² Dell Upton, "White and Black Landscape in Eighteenth-Century Virginia," in *Cabin, Quarter, Plantation: Architecture and Landscapes of North American Slavery*, eds. Clifton Ellis and Rebecca Ginsburg (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 128.

⁴³ *Ibid*, 121.

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, 129.

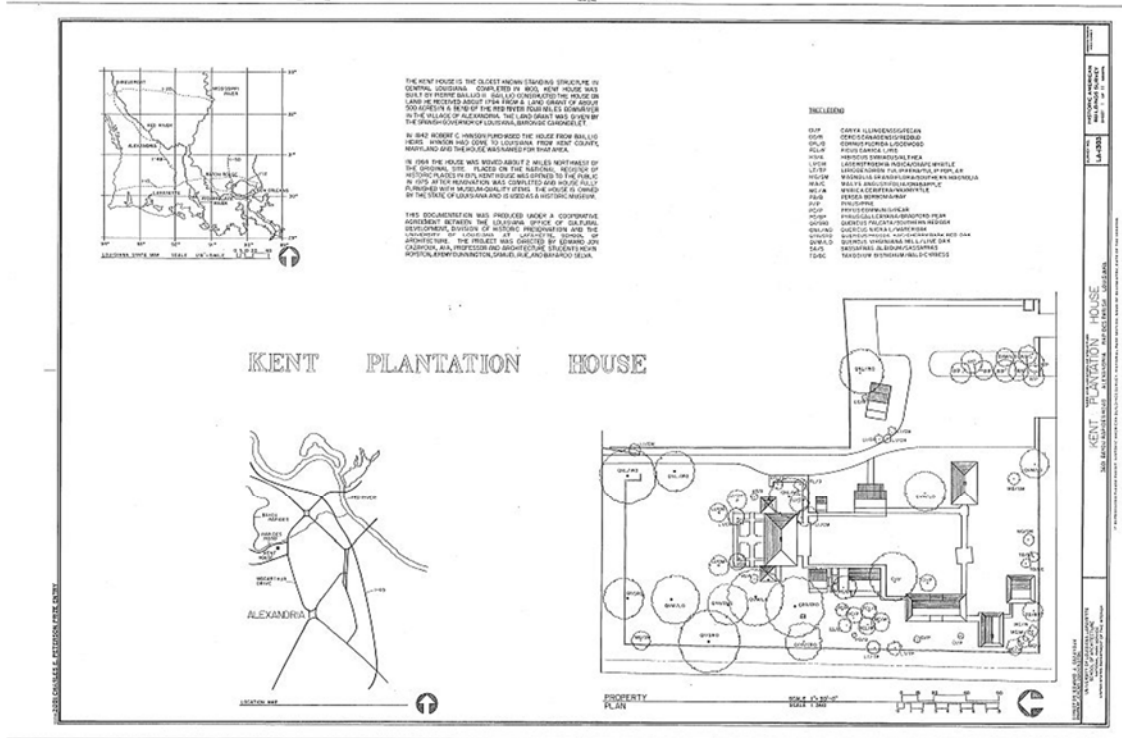


Figure 11: Kent Plantation House map. Toward the bottom left corner is a drawing of the plantation's physical landscape. The plantation house is in the center, with other structures in front on either side of it.⁴⁵

Though it was the planter that was mainly watching, anyone under the planter's control could be as well -- his wife, overseers, even visitors. The main house served as a dominating architectural force that prompted fear, caution, and self-awareness.

The mixture of the columns and the manicured landscape provided a scenery of power and dominance in that the main house dominated the smaller living quarters of the enslaved. The house represented why everything around them was in existence; economic and sometimes political prosperity oozed through the houses and that is what gave power

⁴⁵ Historic American Buildings Survey, creator, Pierre Baillio, Robert C Hynson, State Of Louisiana, Samuel Rue, Edward J Cazayoux, School Of Architecture University Of Louisiana At Lafayette, et al, Kent Plantation House, Bayou Rapides Road, Alexandria, Rapides Parish, LA. Alexandria Louisiana Rapides Parish, 1933, documentation compiled after, photograph, <https://www.loc.gov/item/la0428/>.

to their owners and justified, visually, their control of the landscape and the lives of the enslaved.

The following images show a Greek Revival-style house from Vicksburg and the grandiose Classicism of the Gainswood House, located deep within the Alabama Black Belt. Both properties are as large and classically expressive as any Classical-styled public building of their time in the south. Both connect the power of the plantation class—and their wealth from slavery—to the power of democracy itself. The link between Classicism, power, and white supremacy marked the southern landscape for the next one hundred years.



Figure 12: An antebellum Greek Revival house in Vicksburg, Mississippi⁴⁶

⁴⁶ Walker Evans, photographer, *Antebellum plantation, Vicksburg, Mississippi*, United States Vicksburg, Vicksburg, Warren County, Mississippi, 1936, Mar., photograph, <https://www.loc.gov/item/2017762231/>.



Figure 13: The Palladian-inspired Gainswood Plantation in Demopolis, Alabama⁴⁷

⁴⁷Carol M. Highsmith, photographer, *Gaineswood, a plantation house in Demopolis, Alabama*, United States Alabama Demopolis. Demopolis, 2010, photograph, <https://www.loc.gov/item/2010641109/>.

CHAPTER III:
EXCLUSIVITY IN HISTORICALLY WHITE GREEK-LETTER ORGANIZATIONS
AND NEOCLASSICAL ARCHITECTURE OF FRATERNITY AND SORORITY
HOUSES AT THE UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE

American Greek fraternal organizations are exclusionary. Even when numerous organizations stress the importance of diversity, there is nevertheless an unspoken barrier between those who are members of these organizations and the rest of the collegiate population. Once the recruitment process concludes, the opportunity to identify with organizations ceases to exist and it becomes inaccessible to others. If one desires to join an organization, they must wait until it is time for another pledge or intake class, which could range from a semester to two years or more (depending on the organization's active status) at the undergraduate level. Until then, organizations will promote themselves in the form of hosting social events, participating in philanthropy projects, and other functions that not only supposedly boost sisterhood or brotherhood, but will also serve as an advertisement to later attract new members.⁴⁸

An attempt to join an organization reveals how segregated these organizations are from non-members. The goals of the organization and the ways they present themselves to non-members reveal how that specific organization implements exclusionary practices. Phi Beta Kappa, which is considered the first Greek fraternity established in the United States, centered its ideals around scholarship and academic success. Although its criteria

⁴⁸ Allan DeSantis, *Inside Greek U: Fraternities, Sororities, and the Pursuit of Pleasure, Power, and Prestige* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2007); Nicholas L. Syrett, *The Company He Keeps: A History of White College Fraternities* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009).

differ greatly from current Greek organizations, the idea of framing qualifications around one's academic merit is in itself a type of exclusion. One is denied access to the organization if they do not meet the qualifications set in place by members. Something that may have been innocent at first thought (determining who was academically qualified to join) spurred a system that affects how organizations operate today.

A similar story is found with women's sororities. Kappa Alpha Theta is considered the first American Greek sorority for women. However, at the time of its founding, it was not the only women's organization. The Aldelphian Society (currently known as Alpha Delta Pi Sorority) was founded in 1851 in Macon, Georgia, at Wesleyan College. The Aldelphian Society adopted many of the same practices, rituals, and traditions as male fraternities did at the time, a pattern also followed by Kappa Alpha Theta.

Because of class and racial prohibitions being promoted and implemented by Greek fraternal organizations since their beginning in the United States, one can see the implications that such exclusions have had on the overall racial, ethnic and socioeconomic hierarchies that have plagued the United States and continue to do so in current day.⁴⁹

The architecture of the homes for many Greek organizations in the south reflects the Classical style, whether in a straightforward Neoclassical portico or a more restrained interpretation associated with Greek Revival style. Combine that with the inherent racial

⁴⁹ Syrett, *The Company He Keeps*, 121-285; DeSantis, *Inside Greek U*, 1-18, 217-234.

biases, and the emphasis placed on Classical education in the nineteenth century, you have buildings that add to racial and ethnic tensions on college campuses.

American fraternal Greek organizations have influenced campus life at higher education institutions since the early eighteenth century. Although Phi Beta Kappa Society was officially founded in 1776, before its beginnings there were other clubs involved at universities. However, these clubs or societies did not last, primarily because of the difficulty in retaining members. This situation was especially the case when Phi Beta Kappa rose to prominence. For example, an organization that only went by the initials F. H. C. (which most likely stood for *Fraternitas Hilaritas Cognitioque*) was created by 1750, and Thomas Jefferson himself was a member.⁵⁰

There are over a hundred Greek social organizations that operate in the United States. Their beginnings date mere months after the Declaration of Independence. Founded December 5, 1776, the Phi Beta Kappa Society was organized at the College of William and Mary in Williamsburg, Virginia. John Heath, an American lawyer and politician of Virginia, was the organization's first president. Established upon the principles of friendship, morality, and learning, and known for its selectivity and excellence in the liberal arts, Phi Beta Kappa influenced the formation of later Greek fraternal organizations in the United States. According to historian Richard Current, "Phi Beta Kappa introduced the essential characteristics of others that followed it: an oath of

⁵⁰ Richard Nelson Current. *Phi Beta Kappa in American Life: The First Two Hundred Years* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 4, translation: "Brotherhood, Cheerfulness, and Knowledge.

secrecy, a badge, mottoes in Greek and Latin, a code of laws, an elaborate form of initiation, a seal, and a special handshake.”⁵¹

In 1824, students at Princeton University organized the second-oldest fraternity founded in the United States, and the first American Greek fraternal social organization, Chi Phi Fraternity. Twenty-seven years later, in 1851, the Aldelphian Society organized at Wesleyan College. By 1900, over fifty Greek fraternal social organizations had been founded in the United States. All these organizations possessed similar characteristics and practices that distinguished them from those outside of the organizations.

The promise of kinship and camaraderie between members served as the primary method to motivate individuals to join. The level of secrecy regarding any ritualistic practices such as handshakes, meanings behind symbols used by the organization, and laws set up by the organization that remained confidential to non-members also played a role in people’s curiosity to join. The selectivity in obtaining membership as only a limited number of members were accepted on an annual or bi-annual basis depending on social status, ability to pay initial and annual fees, and the ability to maintain a one’s grades, too, led to the idea of exclusivity. These principles and other unspoken characteristics (in the South most strictly limited membership to White Protestants) shaped how these organizations viewed themselves, and those outside of the organization. These organizations formed their own groups so they could distinguish themselves from other students at their schools. The organizations already defined their distinction from other students, a separateness that later affected minority groups and

⁵¹ “The History of Phi Beta Kappa,” History, Phi Beta Kappa, accessed November 2, 2019, <https://www.pbk.org/History>.

those of a lesser economic status to the point where they created their own fraternal organizations.⁵²



Figure 14: Chi Phi fraternity members⁵³

⁵² Kathleen E. Gillon, Cameron C. Beatty, and Cristobal Salinas, Jr., “Race and Racism in Fraternity and Sorority Life: A Historical Overview,” *New Directions for Student Services*, no. 165 (Spring 2019): 9-16.

⁵³ “History of Chi Phi, About Chi Phi, Chi Phi, accessed February 18, 2021, <http://chiphio.org/about-chi-phi/>.



Figure 15: Members of the Adelphean Society, c. 1895⁵⁴

Ancient Influences

The rituals practiced within American fraternal organizations did not originate within the organizations themselves. The idea of implementing ceremonial practices such as a demanding initiation process and the performance of other sacred acts derived from ancient Greek religious practices. Several ancient Greek rituals influenced the American Greek fraternal system and how they set about inducting initiates, establishing bylaws, and creating fraternal traditions and ceremonies. These rituals occurred in what are called *mystery cults*. Characteristics included a payment needed in order to be inducted, meetings that took place at night, and an initiation ritual that consisted of libations, purifications, etc. However, it is important to understand the terms “religion” and “cult” when discussing ancient Greek religion. These terms do not relate at all to American

⁵⁴“Alpha Delta Pi, 1895 Adelphean Society c1895, c. 1895 Digital Archives of Alpha Delpa Pi, accessed February 18, 2021, <https://www.alphadeltapi.org/page/digitalarchives/#archives%2FAdelphean%20Society%2FAdelphean%20Society%20Photos>.

fraternal organizations, and when discussing these organizations, one should not think that the same rituals performed by ancient Greeks meant the same under the American fraternal context. The Greek Pantheon sits at the top of this dominant system and involves the twelve major Olympian gods and goddesses. The worship of these deities ruled most of the Greek religious system and was essential to Greek civic identity. Within this religious system were ritualistic practices performed by those in high religious offices. Mystery cults lay outside of the official public religion and were not recognized as such.

Although mystery cults resided outside of the state religion in Greek city-states, it is still important to understand that religion in general in ancient Greece meant something different than just religious practices; it was a way of life. Unlike American fraternal organizations, Greek religion practiced rituals to worship higher powers as a way of ordering and protecting state society. American fraternal organizations adopted these practices but altered them to fit whatever needs they had regarding their specific organization. These organizations did not worship religious deities, and nor did these organizations touch every aspect of members' lives. Although an important aspect, these organizations were not embedded in everyday life as religion was in ancient Greece (although there are numerous religion-based organizations, they are not discussed in this research). It is these practices that make these organizations known within American society.

The Eleusinian mysteries, a well-known ancient cult popular throughout the Greek world, is an example of this type of religious sect. Open to men and women and those who were free and unfree, regardless of age, the Eleusinian mysteries still had

several qualifications to join. First, there was a fee. Although there were thousands who would join at one time, “initiation [...] was not a simple act; potential initiates must have been in a position to spend time and money, as they also had to pay a fee to the officiants.”⁵⁵ The idea of social status was also important for inclusion into the Mysteries not only because of fees, but also for ensuring that time was spent within the organization. The organization was not open to everyone. According to Bremmer, “not every Athenian was initiated.”⁵⁶ Also important was if one would be able to finish the initiation process. As with American fraternal organizations, the idea of selectivity plays an important part in defining members and non-members.

Racial and Ethnic Implications Caused by Exclusion

The United States possesses a history that is intricately tied with racial supremacy and division. Since the introduction of Africans on the shores of the North American colonies in 1619, the color of one’s skin has played a huge role in their treatment and lack of inclusion in what would become the United States. African Americans and other minority groups resided on the outskirts of American society and have been ignored when it comes to any type of advancement in the United States. Thus, it is no surprise that when the first Greek fraternal organizations appear in the United States, black Americans were not members.

⁵⁵Jan N. Bremmer, *Initiation into the Mysteries of the Ancient World* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter GmbH, 2014), 4.

⁵⁶ Turk, 4.

Kappa Alpha Theta sorority was founded in 1870 at DePauw University, formally known as Indiana Asbury College. In its formative years, Kappa Alpha Theta, along with other female organizations such as Kappa Kappa Gamma and Sigma Kappa, “focused on academic achievement.”⁵⁷ Often, sisters would “[spend] much of their time together practicing their literary pieces in front of one another.”⁵⁸ Alpha Phi, too, also participated in the same activities. According to historian Diana Turk, “in all of the histories of the first women’s [sororities], concern with intellectual performance [...] h[e]ld primary place.”⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Ibid, 23.

⁵⁸ Ibid, 24.

⁵⁹ Ibid.



Figure 16: Sigma Kappa Founders⁶⁰

However, toward the end of the nineteenth century going into the twentieth century, that changed. According to Turk:

In the early 1900s, the issue of “race suicide” became a prominent one in American society, fed by social commentators such as G. Stanley Hall and Charles Eliot. White Anglo-Saxons in America were committing “race suicide” they argued, none were more to blame than the highly educated, white, middle- and upper-middle-class college-educated women who were marrying later and less often than their peers of other classes and races and who were bearing fewer children than their nonwhite, non-Protestant, and foreign-born peers.⁶¹

⁶⁰ “History of Sigma Kappa,” About Us, Sigma Kappa, accessed September 18, 2020, <https://sigmakappa.org/about-us/history/>.

⁶¹ Turk, 58.

With these societal issues taking place, Kappa Alpha Theta and other women's fraternities made decisions regarding who exactly could join. Due to not only racial issues occurring in the United States, but also the growth of the organizations brought up questions of selectivity. At several occasions, Kappa Alpha Theta revoked the charters of some of its chapters due to "[falling] below Theta standard."⁶² One chapter collectively decided to "return their charter to the fraternity rather than suffer the humiliation of having it revoked."⁶³

During the 1910s, it was clear that ethnicity would continue to play a huge role in women's fraternities' membership. With the increase of Jews and Catholics immigrating to the United States, organizations discussed amongst themselves what to do. In the end, "the sisters of Kappa Alpha Theta, Kappa Kappa Gamma, Pi Beta Phi, Alpha Phi, Chi Omega, and other organizations largely barred women of these faiths from entry."⁶⁴ Even later in the century, banning Jewish girls was still a goal as five officers at the George Washington University chapter resigned in 1964 after claims of anti-Semitism. The president, vice-president, and three other officials of the undergraduate chapter resigned when the alumnae chapter rejecting the girl's application. A spokesperson from the sorority's national office made claims that it was because the girl "did not have proper recommendations."⁶⁵

⁶² Ibid, 90.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid, 104.

⁶⁵"Sorority Officers Resign On Rejection of Jewish Girl," New York Times, February 13, 1964, <https://www.nytimes.com/1964/02/13/archives/sorority-officers-resign-on-rejection-of-jewish-girl.html>.

The national trend of racial and religious exclusion discussed by historian Diana Turk was most pronounced in the South as two patterns converged: the rise of higher education institutions in the South in the post-Reconstruction era and the imposition of Jim Crow segregation, established through legal and extra-legal, violent means, in all facets of Southern life. The “Lost Cause” narrative of an unbowed, defiant South took control of fraternal organizations’ identities.⁶⁶ The organizations were diehard supporters of segregation and promoted white supremacy in their rules, rituals, and control of campus life. The University of Tennessee at Knoxville is a representative case study of this region-wide pattern.

University of Tennessee as a Case Study

A clearly incorrect belief among many Americans is that Appalachia was almost always a White-dominated world, with only a handful of people of color in residence. For example, the previous historiography of East Tennessee and Knoxville’s slavery history almost unanimously declared that the slave population was extremely low due to the lack of large plantation homes in the area and that several abolitionists resided there.⁶⁷

However, the idea that Knoxville strayed away from slavery is historically false.

Knoxville took extensive measures to ensure that Blacks were recognized as inferior.

⁶⁶ The literature on the “Lost Cause” is vast. For a recent survey see, Adam H. Dombay, *The False Cause: Fraud, Fabrication and White Supremacy in Confederate Memory* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2020).

⁶⁷ Charles H. Faulkner, “Slavery in Knoxville, Tennessee: In, but Not Entirely of, the South,” in *Slavery in the City: Architecture and Landscapes of Urban Slavery in North America*, eds. Clifton Ellis and Rebecca Ginsburg (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2017), 125.

Slave codes existed in the city and determined where and how Blacks maneuvered across the landscape. Ordinances determining when blacks could assemble and if they could live in the city were just a couple of the strict methods the Knoxville government implemented to show its aggression toward Blacks. Punishment for defying any of the ordinances was whipping.⁶⁸

Despite Knoxville's small population, the comparison of the number of enslaved to slaveowners is telling. Slightly over 30 percent of the population were enslaved Blacks, a percentage that is similar to other bigger cities in the state like Nashville and Memphis.⁶⁹ Knoxville clearly had a substantial amount of enslaved at the time of the Civil War.

After the Civil War, Knoxville quickly became a segregated town, with the largest black neighborhoods located north of downtown, and city officials enforced Jim Crow codes. These laws demanding that African Americans be treated as second class citizens were concrete evidence of white Knoxville's view of its black residents.⁷⁰

The state's land grant university, the University of Tennessee, reflected the Jim Crow philosophy of the city and region. The university dates itself to Blount College, which existed before Tennessee became the sixteenth state of the Union.⁷¹ The college's first building was nothing spectacular: a two-story frame house dedicated to William

⁶⁸ Ibid, 126.

⁶⁹ Ibid, 127.

⁷⁰ Bruce Wheeler, *Knoxville, Tennessee: A Mountain City in the New South, 3rd Edition* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2020).

⁷¹ Neal O'Steen, "The University of Tennessee: Evolution of A Campus," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 39, no. 3 (Fall 1980): 258.

Blount, the territorial governor and a former North Carolina speculator who signed the U.S. Constitution. Thomas Jefferson later gave college administrators the advice to create an “academic village” similar to European universities, schools in the North, and Jefferson’s own University of Virginia. The college struggled through different phases until Reconstruction, when, in 1869, state officials named it the state land-grant college and renamed East Tennessee University as the University of Tennessee.

Still the university struggled until the second decade of the twentieth century. Then in the late 1910s and 1920s, the modern university located on “The Hill” overlooking the downtown took physical form. Its campus design was a restrained version of Collegiate Gothic, best expressed in two early buildings, Ayers Hall and Hoskins Library, that flanked each other on Cumberland Avenue. The faculty and administrators of “modern” UT, however, were die-hard segregationists. There were few exceptions among Whites in the region. One way of understanding the solidarity of the ruling class at the university is to consider how southerners, and Americans in general, embraced the 1915 film *The Birth of Nation*. The popular movie inaccurately portrayed almost every aspect of post-Civil War Southern life. The creation of the Ku Klux Klan, for example, was necessary and defensive. The movie consists of numerous parodies of Blacks, particularly in the scene where black men participated in Reconstruction politics. It inaccurately portrays them as feral animals and links them with stereotypes such as consuming chicken and walking barefoot. These portrayals emphasize Whites’ beliefs that Blacks were incapable of performing professionally in any sphere, specifically in government affairs. This scene also includes the passage of a law allowing intermarriage between Blacks and Whites. Further in the scene, the black politicians stare upwards to

the young white women standing on the balcony. Frightened, the women quickly leave.⁷² Black men were portrayed as the most dangerous threat to the destruction of white society by their desire to despoil white women. White women are prey to them, and white men felt they must protect white women at all costs. Thus in 1919, when Knoxville Whites falsely claimed that a black man raped a white woman, a white riot ensued, destroying downtown Black businesses and residences. Two years later, Ayers Hall opened on the UT campus.⁷³

The University of Tennessee Fraternity and Sorority Architecture

The University of Tennessee is home to twenty-one historically white fraternities that are a part of the Interfraternity Council, and thirteen historically white sororities that are a part of the National Panhellenic Conference. Fourteen fraternities were nationally founded before 1900, with six having a chapter established at UT before 1900. Of the sororities, twelve were nationally founded before 1900, with none having a chapter before 1900. However, seven of the fourteen had chapters at UT by 1930. The six fraternities that founded chapters at UT before 1900 are as follows: Alpha Tau Omega (1872), Kappa Alpha Order (1883), Kappa Sigma (1880), Phi Gamma Delta (1890), Phi Kappa Alpha (1874), and Sigma Alpha Epsilon (1879).

Historically, several of these fraternities are linked to a history that consists of racism and support for white supremacy. Sigma Alpha Epsilon was founded in 1856 at

⁷² D. W. Griffith, *The Birth of a Nation*, directed by D.W. Griffith (Riverside, California: David W. Griffith Corp., 1915).

⁷³ W. Bruce Wheeler, "Knoxville Riot of 1919," Carroll Van West, et al, eds., *Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture* (Nashville: Tennessee Historical Society, 1998), 513.

the University of Alabama and is the only fraternity to be founded below the Mason Dixon line. Founded during a time when a potential civil war was brewing, all of its chapters were established in the south. After the Civil War, the efforts of Harry Bunting and William Collin “Billy” Levere revived the fortunes of the fraternity. By 1930, SAE had over 120 chapters.⁷⁴

Sigma Alpha Epsilon is not unaware of its antebellum past. Numerous individuals who supported segregation were members of SAE, including Lucius Quintus Cincinnatus Lamar II, who eventually became a senator and associate justice of the U.S. Supreme Court. Lamar heavily advocated for the continuance of segregation.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ “About,” sae, accessed October 13, 2020, <https://www.sae.net/about/>.

⁷⁵ Edward Mayes, *Lucius Q. C. Lamar: His Life, Times, and Speeches, 1825-1893* (Nashville, Tennessee: Publishing House of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1896), 629.

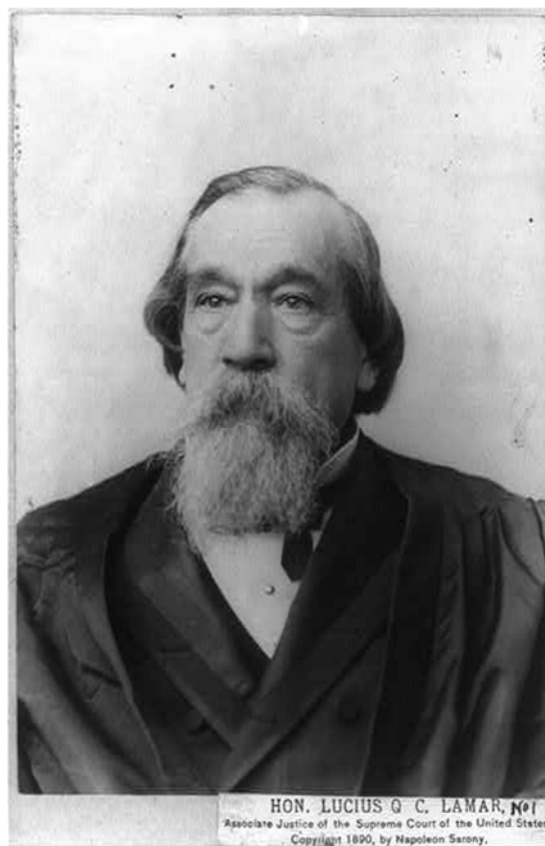


Figure 17: Lucius Quintus Cincinnatus Lamar II⁷⁶

During the Civil War, six of its seven founders donned the Confederate uniform. In the 1888 issue of its journal, *The Record*, Sigma Alpha Epsilon disapproved of another fraternity, Kappa Alpha, on speaking about race issues. SAE admitted that entry into the organization required one to be white and male, and discouraged Kappa Alpha from speaking in the future on race issues.⁷⁷

The earliest images of the UT's fraternity and sorority houses from the Volunteer Yearbooks are from 1922. The houses were of the Victorian style, which consists of asymmetrical shapes and decorative trim, as seen in the photographs below of Sigma

⁷⁶ Lucius Quintus Cincinnatus Lamar, 1893, ca. 1890, photograph. <https://www.loc.gov/item/2004681874/>.

⁷⁷ Sigma Alpha Epsilon, "The Record of Sigma Alpha Epsilon," *Sigma Alpha Epsilon* 8-9 (1888): 36.

Alpha Epsilon and Kappa Sigma. The Sigma Chi house, however, has a prominent Classical Revival-style one-story porch.



Figure 18: Sigma Alpha Epsilon fraternity house, 1922⁷⁸



Figure 19: Kappa Sigma fraternity house, 1922⁷⁹

⁷⁸ University of Tennessee, *The Volunteer*, University of Tennessee, Knoxville, 1922. University of Tennessee Knoxville Digital Collections, 217.

⁷⁹ *Ibid*, 209.



Figure 20: Sigma Chi Fraternity House, 1922⁸⁰

These early frat houses were exactly that—older houses that fraternities rented or bought for use as headquarters. By the 1960s, after the pivotal *Brown v. Board of Education* decision by the U.S. Supreme Court in 1954, fraternity houses at the university took on new shapes and styles, embracing Classical architecture. The Kappa Alpha Order fraternity house in 1922 is a stark contrast to the 1960 yearbook photo of the house. Instead of a stately frame Victorian, the fraternity made its home in a symmetrical three-bay Georgian Revival house, complete with a classically inspired front entrance covered by a one-story Classical portico.

⁸⁰ Ibid, 221.



Figure 21: Kappa Alpha Order fraternity house, 1960⁸¹

Indeed, the section on “Greeks” in the 1960 yearbook began with a photograph of the reproduction Parthenon located in Nashville, Tennessee. Originally constructed in 1897 and rebuilt in the permanent materials in the 1920s, the gleaming columns and portico reflected the classical style that the Greek organizations were increasingly embracing. Alpha Gamma Rho’s older house now had four tall slender classical posts supporting its two-story portico. The Delta Tau Delta’s house had a grand two-story Classical Revival entrance, with its fluted columns topped by Corinthian capitals, perhaps the most stylistically embellished house at the university.

⁸¹ University of Tennessee, *The Volunteer*, University of Tennessee, Knoxville, 1960. University of Tennessee Knoxville Digital Collections, 140.



Figure 22: Delta Tau Delta fraternity house, 1960⁸²

Phi Sigma Kappa's house also was Classical Revival in style, but its two-story columns came with Ionic capitals, similar to those at the Tennessee State Capitol.

Sigma Alpha Epsilon, Sigma Chi, and Sigma Phi Epsilon expressed the colonial version of a southern plantation house in their Colonial Revival-style homes.



Figure 23: Sigma Alpha Epsilon fraternity house⁸³

⁸² Ibid, 139.

⁸³ University of Tennessee, *The Volunteer*, University of Tennessee, Knoxville, 1955. University of Tennessee Knoxville Digital Collections, 209.



Figure 24: Sigma Chi fraternity house, 1945⁸⁴



Figure 25: Sigma Phi Epsilon fraternity house, 1948⁸⁵

Up until the middle of the twentieth century, students and faculty were majority white. The university fostered an environment that would have been hostile to African American students even after desegregation. In 1966, the university broke ground on a

⁸⁴ University of Tennessee, *The Volunteer*, University of Tennessee, Knoxville, 1945. University of Tennessee Knoxville Digital Collections, 218.

⁸⁵ University of Tennessee, *The Volunteer*, University of Tennessee, Knoxville, 1948. University of Tennessee Knoxville Digital Collections, 267.

new on-campus Fraternity Row, moving most fraternities from the Classical Revival older homes to new brick buildings that were much more modern in style, and lacked the Classical embellishments found on the earlier frat houses. Still today, over 50 years later, Fraternity Row reflects modern, contemporary design.

But *The Volunteer Yearbooks* tell us that while the exterior might have given way to a new attitude, racial rituals still happened inside the frat houses. In 1960, Alpha Tau Omega had participated in a fraternity event that shows them dressed as dark-skinned Egyptians carrying a white woman on a chaise. In 1967, Sigma Alpha Epsilon participated in a minstrel show with fraternity members in blackface, demeaning African Americans.



Figure 26: Alpha Tau Omega fraternity members appropriating Egyptian culture in a skit performed in 1960⁸⁶

⁸⁶ University of Tennessee, *The Volunteer*, University of Tennessee, Knoxville, 1966. University of Tennessee Knoxville Digital Collections, 135.



Figure 27: Sigma Chi fraternity hosting a minstrel show, 1967⁸⁷

⁸⁷ University of Tennessee, *The Volunteer*, University of Tennessee, Knoxville, 1967. University of Tennessee Knoxville Digital Collections, 326.



Figure 28: Sigma Chi fraternity hosting a minstrel show, 1967⁸⁸

Images of Greek life and classicism are not only found in the 1960s. Images of sorority houses do not appear in UT yearbooks until the latter half of the twentieth century. The sorority houses built in recent years bear no resemblance to the modernist Fraternity Row of the late 1960s. Most homes in the Sorority Village are prime examples of plantation-style homes. Gresham Smith Partners were the primary architects for the new village. Construction for these houses began in 2011 and they were all completed in 2014. In the photograph below, mammoth Neoclassical porticos dominate most of the houses.

⁸⁸University of Tennessee, *The Volunteer*, University of Tennessee, Knoxville, 1967. University of Tennessee Knoxville Digital Collections, 329.



Figure 29: Sorority Village at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville⁸⁹

⁸⁹ “Abundant Green Space for a College Community: The University of Tennessee – Sorority Housing Site Development,” Gresham Smith, accessed April 2, 2021, <https://www.greshamsmith.com/project/the-university-of-tennessee-sorority-housing-site-development/>.

CHAPTER IV: THE EFFECTS OF HISTORICALLY WHITE ORGANIZATIONS ON MINORITY STUDENTS

Due to the racial and ethnic discrimination from Greek organizations, minority groups created their own Greek fraternal spaces. In 1906, Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity and Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority became the first Greek organizations for African Americans in the United States. Even today, the councils and conferences that Greek organizations fall under are segregated due to historical discrimination. The National Pan-Hellenic Conference houses the historically white sororities while the National Pan-Hellenic Council houses nine African American fraternities and sororities (also called the Divine Nine). There are other councils that host Asian and Latino-based organizations as well.

As described above, Greek fraternal organizations have a long history of being exclusive. Stemming from ancient Greek cults, Greek organizations adopted similar practices that led to the introduction of exclusionary practices that discriminated against minorities. Even today, Greek organizations on numerous occasions experience issues of race, especially when African Americans attempt to join a predominately white organization and vice versa. Such was the case with Melody Twilley, an African American student at the University of Alabama who, in 2001, desired to join Alpha Delta Pi sorority and was denied. She was the only African American to apply for membership.⁹⁰ The University of Alabama, like so many other universities, have these

⁹⁰ Jeffery Gettleman, "Jeffrey Gettleman Talks About the Efforts to Break the Color Barrier in the Greek System at the University of Alabama," interview by Noah Adams, All Things Considered, September 10, 2001, Literature Resource Center.

racial struggles.⁹¹ Despite major progress within the last one hundred years, these exclusionary practices have had lasting effects and will continue to play a role within the structure of Greek fraternal organizations.

African American fraternal organizations existed before building their own spaces on the collegiate landscape. The first known Greek fraternity for African Americans is Sigma Pi Phi, founded in 1904. It is a non-collegiate fraternal organization. Founded as a professional organization, Sigma Pi Phi existed as a space for black professionals as they were denied entry into predominately white professional organizations. Sigma Pi Phi does not identify as a collegiate organization; however, the organization has close ties to the Divine Nine. Many of its members are members of these organizations, including the founder Henry McKee Minton, who was a member of Alpha Phi Alpha.⁹²

The founding of the Divine Nine signaled a change for African Americans. These organizations provided a space to acknowledge and promote educational and personal success. These organizations offered successful members the ability to surround themselves with like-minded individuals and served as a foundation of strength in black communities. The twentieth century marked how BGLOs (black Greek-letter organizations) have been vessels for uplift through social action programs and initiatives.⁹³

⁹¹ "A University's Ugly History -- University of Alabama Must End Practice of Discrimination by Greeks." Anniston Star, Anniston, Alabama, September 17, 2013, accessed April 16, 2021, https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A343092435/STND?u=tel_middleten&sid=STND&xid=c73bfd36.

⁹² Matthew Hughey, "I Did It for Brotherhood: Non-Black Members in Black-Greek Letter Organizations, in *Black Greek-letter Organizations in the Twenty-First Century* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2008), 313.

⁹³ Tamara L. Brown, Gregory S. Parks and Clarendia M. Phillips, eds., *African American Fraternities and Sororities: The Legacy and the Vision, 2nd edition* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2012).

BGLOs saw themselves as those who would uplift the black race. To them, they were the leaders of the black community. Black individuals in the middle class were usually the ones who were able to join these organizations. Since slavery, black people constantly fought the negative stereotypes associated with their skin color. Starting in the 1870s, the concept of Social Darwinism played a significant role in this as it was embedded in the idea of white superiority. This idea of racial inferiority regarding Blacks led to Blacks being identified as “other.”⁹⁴

African Americans consistently fought against these stereotypes and were able to successfully create long-lasting foundations of the black cultural elite.⁹⁵ Thus, those who were able to be considered elite felt it was their duty to assign themselves as the leaders and protectors of the rest of the community.⁹⁶ W.E.B. DuBois had these same sentiments, and believed “the negro race, like all races, is going to be saved by its exceptional men.”⁹⁷ His view heavily influenced this discourse at the turn of the twentieth century.

This idea of racial uplift was one of the major factors in the creation of BGLOs. The founders of these organizations had access to higher education, something that even for Whites at the time was held as the epitome of success. Thus, by having this advantage, higher-level educated Blacks positioned themselves to lead and influence other black individuals into obtaining this status. Therefore, black elites created social

⁹⁴ Jessica Harris and Vernon C. Mitchell, Jr., “8: A Narrative Critique of Black Greek-Letter Organizations and Social Action,” in *Black Greek-letter Organizations in the Twenty-First Century: Our Fight Has Just Begun* edited by Gregory S. Parks (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, year), 144.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

action initiatives that manifested themselves into eight historically black Greek-letter organizations whose founding principles drew heavily from these early twentieth century ideas.

Each of these organizations have their own principles, practices, and rituals that they believe separate them from the others. However, when one takes a close look at them and analyze their backgrounds and the reasons behind their foundings, one can see that they have many similarities.

Alpha Phi Alpha (1904) was the first collegiate organization for black males. Even at its beginning, Alpha Phi Alpha emphasized its commitment to being “a catalyst for change.”⁹⁸ Even though the fraternity experienced disagreement among its members whether to leave social action to other organizations such as the NAACP, with the election of Rayford W. Logan as the fraternity’s education director in 1933, the ideal of social change became heavily embedded within its principles.⁹⁹ The first campaign during his tenure was the creation of citizenship schools that would be placed around the nation. The campaign was so successful that even the NAACP adopted it as one of its own initiatives. The campaign later transformed into the organization’s national program titled “A Hopeless People is a Voiceless People” in 1936.¹⁰⁰ Alpha Phi Alpha’s involvement in social action did not stop there. They were heavily involved in the abolishment of segregation even before the Civil Rights Movement began.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 146.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 147.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

Alpha Kappa Alpha (1908) is the first African American sorority. Keeping in tune with its motto, “Service to All Mankind,” the organization involved itself in various service projects. During the 1920s and 1930s, the sorority created its Vocational Guidance Program that “helped students qualify for entrance into the job market.”¹⁰¹ The organization created the Mississippi Health Project that aimed to providing health services to the residents of Lexington, Mississippi, and “improve the conditions at the Saint’s Industrial School” there.¹⁰²

Despite these projects, the sorority felt as though it was not doing enough. Members desired to be involved in public policy, an area that would initiate positive change more quickly for African Americans. Thus, the organization involved itself in the Joint Committee for National Recovery (JCNR), which existed as an extension of President Roosevelt’s New Deal initiatives.¹⁰³ It existed as a “coalition of professional associations and national organizations committed to ensuring that African Americans had fair access to newly created government jobs.”¹⁰⁴ The organization also established the Non-Partisan Council on Public Affairs, which was an organization that was a full-time lobby. Goals for the lobby included fighting for minimum wage for female laundry workers, voter registration, and the fight against police brutality. The lobby also collaborated with the NAACP and the National Urban League, organizations that they

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 149.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

felt had similar goals as their own. This activism, along with their other social justice projects, identified them as effective advocates for African Americans.¹⁰⁵

Kappa Alpha Psi and Omega Psi Phi (1911) also both played a huge role in social activism for African Americans. Kappa Alpha Psi created the Guide Right Movement, with the goal of aiding African American youth in obtaining successful jobs. The fraternity also made aware to its readers of its journal, *Kappa Alpha Psi Journal*, the existence of antilynching bills so that way they could be educated on the topic. The organizations also were active in the NAACP. Members of Omega Psi Phi purchased life membership in the NAACP. They similarly supported the National Urban League.¹⁰⁶

Delta Sigma Theta (1913) was involved in social activism, and participated in the women's march for suffrage that was held in Washington D.C. in 1913, just two months after its founding. The organization created the National Vigilance Committee, which was created to "address the political issues relevant to African Americans, endorse the appointment of African Americans to policy-making positions, and lobby the federal government on a number of issues of international and domestic concerns."¹⁰⁷ During World War II, the sorority created its Job Analysis and Opportunities Project, which helped African American women have access to better job opportunities. The organization was also a member of the American Council on Human Rights.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 151.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 155.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

Phi Beta Sigma (1914) was also involved in social action. Some members were a part of the Central Committee of Negro College Men, an organization that was led by T. Montgomery Gregory, one of the founders of Phi Beta Sigma. Other members of the committee also included members from other BGLOs.

Zeta Phi Beta (1920) during World War II created the National Housing Project, which allowed the sorority to be “directly involved with the U.S. government and its efforts to find housing for employees in the defense industry.”¹⁰⁹ The project directly dealt with poverty and better housing opportunities. The organization also was involved in the ACHR and the National Juvenile Delinquency Project.¹¹⁰

Sigma Gamma Rho (1922) created the National Vocational Guidance Program, “through which members provided counseling services to skilled and semiskilled workers in myriad fields.”¹¹¹ Like Zeta Phi Beta, Sigma Gamma Rho was involved in curbing juvenile delinquency and was heavily involved with the NAACP. The sorority also “obtained a full life membership in the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History.”¹¹² Like the other organizations, Sigma Gamma Rho was involved with the Civil Rights Movement and implemented several anti-poverty initiatives.¹¹³ Iota Phi Theta

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 158.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 160.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Ibid, 160.

(1963) was involved in the NAACP, the United Negro College Fund, Southern Christian Leadership Conference, and the National Sickle Cell Foundation.¹¹⁴

The African American presence on predominately white university campuses has always not been completely welcomed. Desegregation of these schools, particularly those in South, met with strong and often violent resistance. Most of the Divine Nine organizations that are currently on UT's campus, were chartered at the school during the latter half of the 20th century. Those organizations are: Alpha Kappa Alpha (1970), Delta Sigma Theta (1975), Kappa Alpha Psi (1986), Phi Beta Sigma (1979), Sigma Gamma Rho (1991), Omega Psi Phi (1970), and Zeta Phi Beta (1974). Iota Phi Theta's chapter was not chartered until 2012.

Despite having a history of providing consistent aid to minority communities, these organizations have always experienced setbacks. First, unlike their white counterparts, BGLOs do not possess the same support system as the white organizations. White organizations receive much more money from their alumni members than black organizations do. This occurs because of the low number of members in BGLOs compared to white organizations as well as the amount of years in existence compared between the two. This is also due to underlying racial privilege. Another instance is that the BGLOs on UT's campus do not have houses like the white organizations. In actuality, many BGLOs at predominately white universities do not have their own houses. At UT, none of the minority organizations have their own houses.

¹¹⁴ Ibid, 161.

In addition to this lack of a physical presence on campus, black organizations have felt extreme pushback against their mere presence as an active organization on campus. On October 22, 2012, at the University of Tennessee, Kappa Sigma Fraternity was involved in a racial incident where “six Kappa Sig[ma] members allegedly painted their faces black at a university-affiliated mixer.”¹¹⁵ In the aftermath of the incident, leaders within the fraternity and other black organizations had a closed meeting to discuss the implication of the actions and how they affected student life on campus. University officials later suspended Kappa Sigma, but the students were never punished by the school and the chapter was later reinstated by the organization’s national office.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁵ John Tester and Cherish Matthews, “Kappa Sigma Slapped with Suspension,” *UT Daily Beacon*, October 31, 2012, https://www.utdailybeacon.com/news/kappa-sigma-slapped-with-suspension/article_c27e8fb9-8d24-5b7a-bdbc-6ce1a584a4f4.html.

¹¹⁶ New York Times, “University of Tennessee Won’t Punish Students Who Appeared in Blackface,” November 27, 2012, <https://www.nytimes.com/2012/11/27/education/university-of-tennessee-wont-punish-students-who-appeared-in.html>.

CONCLUSION: STEPS TOWARD RECONCILIATION

Considering the United States' long history with its appreciation of Neoclassical architecture and the racism tied to that specific style, the road to reconciliation is a long one, but possible. What UT can offer is more support through its Office of Diversity, as well as mutual respect between students, staff, and faculty of color, and their white counterparts.

The steps that UT can take are many. First, the administration needs to acknowledge the racism that has been embedded within historically white Greek organizations. The idea that these organizations practiced (and in some cases continue to practice) racist actions is not unknown. The incidents that have happened across southern university campuses and happen on UT's campus have been prevalent, and the environment in which they breed has been condoned to some extent. Take the case at the University of Oklahoma, where white members Sigma Alpha Epsilon were caught on camera on a bus singing racist chants. One of the members informed the media that the song was taught at a leadership event.¹¹⁷ The retreats that these organizations have may or may not be a source of racist idea, but these ideas still embed themselves in the practices of the organizations and continue to thrive on the collegiate landscape.

Another step that UT can take is providing spaces for BGLOs and multicultural organizations to meet. Every historically white Greek organization on UT's campus has a house, a place to hold meetings and social gatherings. It serves as the centralized space

¹¹⁷ Susan Svrluga, "OU: Frat members learned racist chant at national SAE leadership event" *Washington Post*, March 27, 2015, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/grade-point/wp/2015/03/27/ou-investigation-sae-members-learned-racist-chant-at-national-leadership-event/>.

for the operations of the organization. Not only do these places serve as meeting spaces, but they also serve as residential spaces. Minority organizations on campus do not have this luxury, and are often forced to use community spaces on campus for organizational meetings, revealing new members, social gatherings with the student body, etc. Below are images of social events that minority organizations have thrown on the university's campus. Note that in both images, the events were to occur in rooms that are in community spaces, rather than in a space that is specifically operated by the organizations.



Figure 30: Flyer for “Meet the Greeks,” a social event that is often thrown once a semester by minority organizations that encourage the student body to interact with Greek members.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁸ “2019 Meet the Greeks: National Pan-Hellenic Council and Multicultural Greek Council,” <https://www.memberplanet.com/events/utknphc/utkmtg19>.

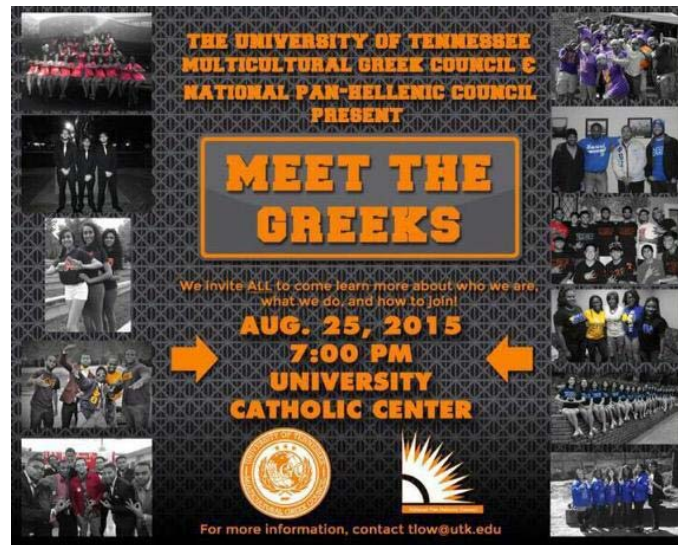


Figure 31: “Meet the Greeks” flyer¹¹⁹

Another step toward reconciliation is to hold organizations more accountable when it comes to diversity. UT’s Office of Fraternity and Sorority life documents the requirements that each organization must meet for the academic year. The office, however, only *recommends* that organizations “coordinate or attend one program which focuses on diversity.”¹²⁰ Thus, by giving organizations that option to choose to do an event associated with diversity, it gives the organizations an option to ignore it as an issue.

Another step UT can follow is to understand and acknowledge the privilege that the historically white organizations have over minority ones. African Americans did not have this type of space until the early part of the twentieth century at Howard University. Historically, white organizations have had political, cultural, and financial advantages

¹¹⁹ MGC of UTK, August 25, 2015, <https://twitter.com/UTKMGC/status/636210418717999104/photo/1>.

¹²⁰ “Sororities and Fraternities,” Office of Sorority and Fraternity Life, University of Tennessee, Knoxville, <https://gogreek.utk.edu/about-us/councils-organizations/>.

over historically black organizations due to racism that has affected their ability to gain resources and influence and to be seen in a positive light.

The University of Tennessee has a long way to go to create an equal environment for its minority Greek-letter organizations. Taking the steps listed above can help to create a better environment for current and future students of all races.

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