

Here's how a black fraternity could be a bad idea

A friend of mine said, "You're writing about *what*? You'll be crucified!" And perhaps she's right, but here goes anyway.

Two weeks ago in this newspaper, the issue of a black fraternity at Davidson was raised in an interview and an opinion piece written by the Kappa Alpha Psi interest group. Alan Hunter said in the interview, "How could that be a bad idea?"

Here's how.

Simply put, a black fraternity would segregate the campus. A large part of racial tension comes from a lack of communication, as was pointed out at the racism seminar last week. The best way to improve the lines of communication is to encourage fully integrated activities. The best way to inflame racial tensions is to create organizations drawn on racial lines. One of the best ways to make black students feel more comfortable is to get them involved in campus social activities. One of the best ways to alienate black students is to create an organization that would perpetuate the "us vs. them" mindset.

The argument for black fraternities sounds like the rationale for the "separate but equal" doctrine of public accommodations that the Supreme Court outlawed years ago. It is the antithesis of what the Rev. Martin Luther King worked toward. It's hard to believe that it's a black group proposing a black fraternity here; it sounds more like an idea that would ooze from the head of a white bigot: "Well, they're really not comfortable in our fraternity and we're not comfortable having them here, either, so let's toss 'em into one house together."

Shift the terms of the debate for a minute. Would this be a better campus if we had a "Yankee fraternity"? The cultural background of students from the North is quite different from that of students from the South. Yet instead of being an argument for a Yankee fraternity, the preceding sentence is a powerful statement of why we shouldn't have one. My experience here has been greatly enhanced because of my contact with Southern students. I feel I better understand the South, although I'm in no danger of losing my own Yankee roots.

Bringing a "black fraternity" here is offensive because it strongly implies that the fraternities already here are "white fraternities" and that blacks are not welcome within them. That the fraternities existing here already are "white fraternities" is not the case, any more than Davidson is a "white school" in a "white higher-education system" in a "white country."

I deeply resent the implication in the interest group's commentary that only fraternity alumni and graduate brothers who had joined a black fraternity would aid black students. Do the members of Kappa Alpha Psi interest group mean to say that members of other fraternities would not help black members of their group, or in other words, that members of other fraternities are racists? That is a wild, insupportable and false generalization.

Like it or not, Davidson College is fairly representative of the society that Davidson students, white and black, will enter after graduation. Upon leaving here, you will probably not work for a company owned by a black person, and a black person will probably not be

your boss. Your professors in graduate school probably not be black. Here at Davidson, your close friends are probably not black, unless you are black. That's the current situation; the only way to change it is to deal with it, not hide from it. Segregating the campus with a black fraternity is hiding from reality. It cuts off the opportunity for greater racial harmony.

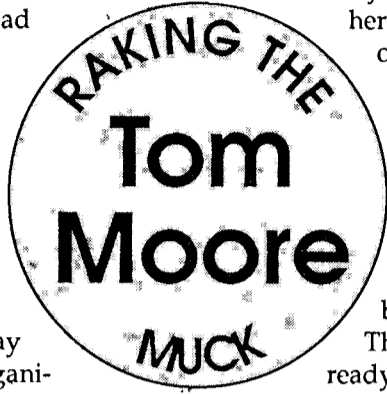
I challenge the assertion that the brothers of a black fraternity would encourage those black students who want to join one of the other fraternities to do so. Some members of the Black Student Coalition already actively discourage black students from joining fraternities; would this get better if a black fraternity arrived?

Black fraternities were founded at black colleges and universities in a segregated era when blacks were not permitted to attend other schools or join other fraternities. Those fraternities did not serve "black interests" per se; they served the needs of the students at those colleges and universities, all of whom were black. The era of segregation in our higher-education system is over, and so should it be for our social groups.

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A note on last week's column:

• While Professor Ratliff was fifth in the top five salaries from the college in fiscal year 1987, he's paid on a nine-month schedule (as are all professors), while the others on the list work twelve months a year. If the nine-months' salary (\$59,600) were stretched to 12 months, it would come to \$79,466. Figure in that all professors are entitled to one-year sabbaticals every seven years and the salary to compare with the others would be \$90,819 per year. Zounds.



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- All submissions must be signed. Writers must present the editors with compelling reasons if they do not wish their names printed with their work.
- The staff will not edit commentaries for content or for style, but for the rules of English grammar only.
- Letters should be under 300 words in length. The editors reserve the right to edit and/or condense any letter.
- The editors reserve the right not to print submissions which contain factual errors, advertisements, or objectionable material, or which represent a viewpoint very similar to other letters printed dealing with the same topic.
- All submissions should include the author's address and phone number. Submissions to the "Commentaries" section should include the following information: the author's home city and state, graduating class, and major field of study (or profession).

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