

### 3 greek groups with similar foundations

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Maybe you have seen these men on and off campus, dressed in army fatigues and marching or running single file. Perhaps you have heard stories about certain rituals they practice. And possibly you have questioned the purpose or validity behind these public and private displays.

In case you are wondering who "they" are — they are not the Army ROTC members; they are members of black fraternities at Penn State.

While the three black fraternities at the University — Alpha Phi Alpha, Kappa Alpha Psi, and Omega Psi Phi — are diverse in their ways, their foundations are similar. James Horsey, former president of Kappa Alpha Psi fraternity, said all three chapters were formed on this campus for essentially the same purpose: identity.

"We (Kappa Alpha Psi) were established at Penn State more or less to try to get the blacks united — to have everyone pull for the same thing in the same direction," Horsey said.

"You have a tendency to stick to the people who are like you when you leave home," he said. "When you come up here from, say, Philadelphia, where the majority of your friends are black, you're going to tend to stick with your own kind."

Omega Psi Phi fraternity, the first black fraternity to form on campus, unified the black population at the University at the time, said Lawrence Ball, social chairman of Omega Psi Phi.

"Our fraternity was founded in 1921," he said. "It was comprised of the total black student body (eight members) at the time, and came into being because there weren't many blacks here, and they needed to form an organization — to have something to belong to."

But the men interviewed said their reasons for joining black fraternities vary.

Paul Pollock, president of Alpha Phi Alpha fraternity, said the idea of having a "family," to which one can turn was an important reason he pledged a black fraternity.

"It's the idea of having a family-type thing," he said. "I had to have that closeness — (fraternity members) were there when I needed some help."

"I went to a high school that was 50 to 70 percent black, and to come up here was a real shock. Often in that situation, you need somebody to turn to."

"You join the organization that best fits you — especially if you come from a black neighborhood. You want that family feeling."

Sharing a common interest with the fraternity members was what appealed to Horsey.

"What I was looking for was a group of people that had my common interest — who didn't really brag around," he said.

While these men said they saw no fault in blacks joining white fraternities, and vice versa, they each personally opted against this alternative for various reasons.

"I really couldn't see me pledging a white fraternity," Horsey said.

"In white fraternities, when you have 50 or 60 members, there's no way to really get to know all the brothers and have a brotherhood," he said. "Here (because there are only about 25 members), I can really get to know each one personally — you get to fall in love with each brother."

"I've been to white fraternities where not everyone even knew each other. That's not fraternity life to me."

For the duration of the pledge period, which usually lasts from six to eight weeks, pledges in black fraternities must dress in a uniform fashion — an act that symbolizes unity among the pledges, Horsey said.

"In our pledge program, we stress three things: unity, achievement and brotherhood," he said. "When you see our pledges and they're all dressed alike, that's the unity."

To emphasize this unity, the pledges must march or stand in line when they are together; Horsey said any attempt, for example, by pedestrians to intersect any line of pledges is avoided by the pledges.

"Our motto is 'the chain is as strong as the weakest link.' We don't let anyone walk between the (pledge) lines, because the bond is too strong to be broken," he said. "Everyone has a

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*— James Horsey, former president, Kappa Alpha Psi fraternity*

And there are other reasons.

"I feel as though I wouldn't really be myself (in a white fraternity)," Horsey said. "I'd be fooling myself as far as being happy in a white fraternity."

"They're not programmed like I am," he said. "There are blacks in white organizations who couldn't be in Kappa Alpha Psi, because they're not into what we are all about."

"I think it's what you were into before you got here."

Ball said the difference in lifestyle is an important reason in choosing a black fraternity over a white one.

"I found I could associate with (Omega Psi Phi) better than with white fraternities," he said. "We have different styles of parties and we like different things."

They also have different modes of recruitment, membership education and post-initiation practices, Ball said.

He said the group does not have a rush program the way white fraternities do. Instead, potential pledges are interviewed by the brothers, and if they are approved, are offered a chance to pledge at the fraternity. Ball said. If the pledge satisfactorily completes the pledge program, he then becomes a full-fledged member, he said.

The pledge period is where the greatest visible difference between black and white fraternities exists.

weakness — be it physical, mental, or academic — whatever. Therefore we try to make everyone equal and try to strengthen them.

"When you pledge Kappa Alpha Psi, we want you to be able to say you love one of your fraternity brothers and still be a man. There aren't enough people, especially among the black population, who know (people) care — it's a pride thing."

"We want the brother to have some direction," he said. "And we want him to learn — we want him to know how to run a house, for example. All the brothers are learning from each other."

Pollock said his fraternity also stresses the importance of solidarity.

"It's psychological; when you do things as one, you think as one. You have to come together, because when you start out, you're so far apart."

"It may seem strange at first for people to see (the uniform pledge lines), but once it's explained, it's easy to understand. Once the brothers explained (the pledge lines) to me, I never questioned it."

The fraternities allow the pledges one day a week to dress as they please, Ball said.

Pollock said that in addition to mandatory uniformity, sometimes the pledges are subjected to social silence.

"They are not supposed to speak to anyone, outside of talking to teachers, relatives and fraternity members," he said. "It's a discipline type of thing. Regardless of the rule, usually they talk anyhow."

Horsey said another way his fraternity and white fraternities differ is because members of his fraternity are more unified nationally.

"You pledge Kappa Alpha Psi nationally — more so than white fraternities," he said. "We've spent a great deal of time traveling all over the east coast just to visit our brothers (in other chapters)."

"The only thing we ever paid for was gas. They welcomed us with open arms, gave us food and a place to sleep. You might relate this back to slave days, when they were trying to escape and there was a network of homes who opened up to help the runaway slaves."

Brotherhood takes on a different — perhaps stronger — meaning for members of all three black fraternities, Horsey said some members of his fraternity brand their skin with the insignia of the fraternity.

"It's a great feeling to wear the brand of my fraternity," he said. "In a sense, it's identity. You have pride, because everyone can't have the brand — you have to earn it. It's like the lady who wins the beauty pageant wearing her crown."

"You don't get branded until after you're brotherized — and it's an optional thing. I have so much love for Kappa Alpha Psi that I wanted everyone to know that I am a Kappa. I don't think white fraternities can ever have the pride to take a brand."

By consenting to being branded, the member in a sense consecrates himself to the fraternity, said Steve Davis, a member of Omega Psi Phi.

"To me it's a symbol of devotion — something that you care so much about that you're willing to brandish it your arm," he said. "It doesn't hurt much more than a tattoo would hurt. In fact, a couple of brothers did get tattooed instead."

"There's usually someone in the house who's pretty good at doing it (the branding) — we don't just have anyone do it."

The black greek system has its own council which the different groups communicate through — another area that sets

James Horsey, former president of Kappa Alpha Psi fraternity, displays his fraternity's emblem, which he recently had branded on his chest. The branding makes brotherhood take on a different meaning for members of the fraternity.

Photo by Barb Parkyn

these fraternities apart from white fraternities. This council legislates rules and regulations concerning everything from parties to rush which black greek fraternities and sororities must adhere to.

"The black fraternities and sororities have their own executive greek council," Horsey said. "The council says that we can only have parties twice a term."

Ball said, "Through a lottery system, we choose dates on which to hold parties. It's this way because there is such a limited number of blacks up here that we don't want to have competing parties on the same night."

"These functions are sometimes held in the HUB or Walnut Building on campus, he said, or at the Vet's house, or just about anywhere else that a dance floor is available."

Horsey said that because his is the only black fraternity that has a house, they occasionally have additional parties on Wednesday nights.

He added that although he and many of his brothers attend parties at white fraternities, the same does not hold true for whites with black fraternity parties.

"We, the brothers, have been to nearly every fraternity and between us all, we probably know everyone of (the members)," he said. "We wish that they would come to our parties once in a while."

"I realize that a lot of whites who come up to Penn State had never known blacks in their life. The average white person doesn't realize that, say, when I'm the only black in a group of people — I've had to overcome feeling uncomfortable in such situations."

"Many whites talk about 'the blacks don't do this, and they don't do that' — that we don't make an effort — yet they never come to our parties. Since we live their life 24 hours a day, seven days a week, we feel they could make the effort. They don't give it a chance."

Besides enveloping the social atmosphere for blacks on campus, these groups also work to serve both blacks and whites in the community.

"They raise funds to aid in the fight against diseases such as sickle cell anemia, cancer and alcoholism. They contribute to the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, the Urban League, and the United Negro College Fund. Omega Psi Phi sponsors a Miss Black Penn State pageant during Spring Term."

The black fraternity representatives said they are also involved with the Interfraternity Council, although they agreed that IFC business is seldom pertinent to their fraternities.

"We go to the meetings," Ball said. "However, IFC is more geared to fraternities with houses — they help you out a lot in that way. But most of the issues they bring up don't pertain to black fraternities on the whole."

Horsey agreed: "I feel that blacks and whites have different lifestyles, and you can't cater the whole system to three fraternities when you have 50 of them to deal with. We're in a minority in a sense of not being black, but in the way that we function — the programs that we have."

"We're not into the things they provide. IFC does a good job, however they're not catering to what we want to do — or perhaps we're not doing what they want to do. We're not into the things they provide."

Pollock said the difference in size separates the black fraternities from the rest of the IFC members.

"Being so small, we have a hard time involving ourselves with what they do — like building a float for Homecoming," Pollock said. "But we're trying to put ourselves in the position to do things with other white fraternities. For example, we did a window for Homecoming — and to us, that was a big thing."

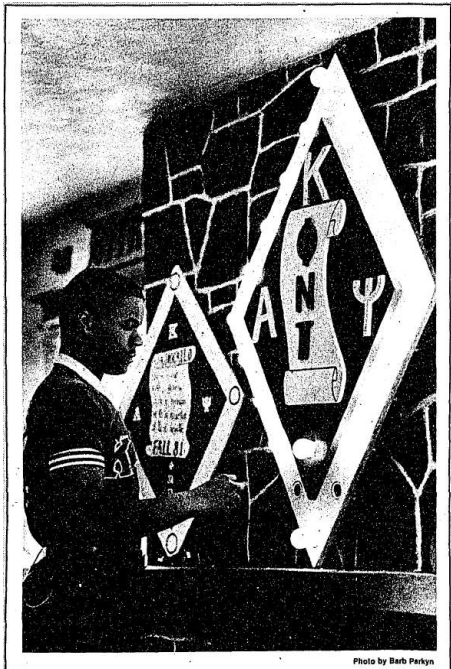
"We're trying to bring ourselves closer to IFC — to have a liaison between black organizations and IFC so they can better understand us."

"If they can see what we're about, then they can understand us," he said. "The communication has to be there in order to understand each other more. Then a lot of problems — if there are any — will cease."

Black fraternities essentially provide a useful setting for positive interaction between black and white men alike, although no white men belong to these fraternities at the present time, Horsey said. Often the fraternities can change their members' lifestyles to the benefit of the men, he said.

Horsey's bedroom, where emblems and symbols of his fraternity are prominently displayed, clearly illustrates his deep devotion and attachment to his fraternity — and in a way, expresses his gratitude to the fraternity for what it has done to him.

"Before I pledged, I was very selfish, very self-centered and just didn't give a damn about anyone but my family and girlfriend," he said. "Kappa Alpha Psi taught me to love everyone for what they are, and not try to make them what you want them to be."



James Horsey lights a plaque displayed above the mantle of Kappa Alpha Psi fraternity, 320 S. Fraser St. The plaque contains the fraternity's insignia.

Photo by Barb Parkyn