

by a more sympathetic regulator.

Some would conclude that Enron wielded so much influence over the White House personnel process because of all the money it had contributed to George W. Bush's political aspirations over the years. But it's just as plausible that Enron had so much influence because it had recently employed so many of the people involved in making White House personnel decisions. Economic adviser Lawrence Lindsey, Trade Representative Robert Zoellick, Commerce Department general counsel Theodore Kassing, and Maritime Administrator William Schubert have all been employed as Enron consultants in recent years. The *Post* recently reported that an Enron employee named Cynthia Sandherr worked on the Commerce Department transition

team. With friends like those on the inside, it's hardly surprising that Enron usually got its way on administration appointments.

John McCain, for one, seems well aware of the role of lobbyists in corrupting the political system. On the campaign trail in 2000 the Arizona senator was fond of promising to "break the iron triangle of big money, lobbyists and legislation and take the government out of the hands of the special interests." But the legislation that bears his name doesn't do anything about lobbyists. Which is why it probably wouldn't have kept Enron from wielding its dastardly influence in Washington over the past few years, and why it won't stop Enron's would-be imitators from doing the same long after today's scandal is a distant memory. ■

Alabama's new schoolhouse door.

Sorority Row

By JASON ZENGERLE

ON THE FIRST day of sorority rush last September, Melody Twilley woke up and could not find her lavender nail polish. This constituted a bit of an emergency. The night before, Twilley, an 18-year-old student at the University of Alabama, had borrowed a blue and purple slip dress with spaghetti straps from one of her roommates; the lavender nail polish, in her opinion, was essential to completing the outfit. She tore her room apart, emptying drawers and scattering papers, and after half an hour found the polish. But then, when Twilley went to fetch the dress out of the closet, it wasn't there. Another frantic search ensued until Twilley discovered the dress, laid out on a chair, where she had placed it the night before for easy detection. It was that kind of morning.

By noon, however, Twilley was put together and standing in front of the Delta Zeta house, a neoclassical mansion on sorority row. And at twelve o'clock sharp, the doors opened and the young women gathered in the foyer burst into song: "Delta Zeta is the best! Pledge Delta Zeta!" Twilley was ushered in and handed a glass of ice water. For 15 minutes she made small talk with the women who would determine whether she was Delta Zeta material. Then it was on to Zeta Tau Alpha for another round of singing and small talk. Then Alpha Delta Pi, and then Chi Omega. By eight that evening, Twilley had visited 15 sorority houses and had the same conversation 15 times. "They ask where you're from, you ask where they're from. They ask what you're majoring in, you ask what they're majoring in," Twilley recalled. "That's about all you can really do in fifteen minutes." Save for some small touches—Zeta Tau Alpha put strawberries in their ice water; Phi Mu gave the rushees a house tour—there

was little to differentiate one sorority from the next. "All of them seemed pretty much the same," Twilley said.

There was also little to differentiate Twilley from the 730 other University of Alabama women going through rush last fall. A tall, pretty girl with a fondness for shopping malls and the Jeep Grand Cherokee her father bought for her, Twilley blended right in to the roiling mix of social ambition and social privilege. But Twilley did differ in two ways. For one thing, unlike the vast majority of rushees, who are admitted into sororities as freshmen, this wasn't Twilley's first time through. She had tried—and failed—to join a sorority the year before. Which may have had something to do with the other thing that set Melody Twilley apart: She is black.

The University of Alabama was founded in 1831, but it did not enroll its first black student until 125 years later; she lasted three days before being expelled "for her own safety." In 1963 the university integrated for good, with then-Governor George Wallace making his famous "stand in the schoolhouse door" in defiance of federal marshals escorting two black students to register for classes. Since then, the university has made some impressive strides—today blacks constitute 14.5 percent of the undergraduate student body, making the university one of the most integrated state schools in the South—but social integration has been more elusive. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the university's Greek system, which is almost completely divided by race. A few of the school's eight historically black fraternities and sororities have had a handful of white members over the years, but the 37 traditionally white fraternities and sororities have not been as welcoming. Indeed, when Melody Twilley stood in front of the Delta Zeta house last September, it was believed that no white fraternity or soror-

ity at the University of Alabama had ever offered membership to a black student. More remarkably, aside from a handful of faculty and administrators, no one at the school seemed to care—least of all its black students. And the segregated Greek system is not just a campus issue. That's because in insular Alabama, where the friendships and connections that matter most in life are often made during the four years you spend in Tuscaloosa, if you can't enter the university's white Greek system, you're unlikely to enter the state's political and economic elite.

SIXTY YEARS AGO the great Southern social critic W.J. Cash wrote that at the University of Alabama “the academic department [has] the status of an appanage [i.e., adjunct] of fraternity row and a hired football team.” Today the faculty has improved, and the football team has fallen on hard times, but the fraternities—and now the sororities—still rule the school. Although only about 20 percent of the student body belong to white fraternities and sororities, the white Greeks control the student government association (SGA)—and a \$155,000 budget—through something called “the Machine,” a secret organization established in 1888. Made up of representatives from about 25 of the white Greek organizations, the Machine selects a slate of student-government candidates each year. It then organizes an impressive get-out-the-vote effort on fraternity and sorority row. “They throw you in vans, give you beer, and you go vote for the [Machine] slate,” recalls one former Machine-affiliated fraternity member. “You get fined if you don’t go vote. The social pressure is also pretty intense.” This lockstep voting by the white Greeks has ensured that since the university’s student government was created in 1915, only seven non-Machine candidates have been elected SGA president. “The Machine is like [Yale’s] Skull and Bones,” says one Alabama professor, “except that the Machine actually has real power.”

That power is not confined to the university campus. When the Machine’s members leave Tuscaloosa, they typically go on to Birmingham, Huntsville, Mobile, and Montgomery, and join Machine alums in Alabama’s political and business elite. Machine members work in Alabama’s most prestigious law firms and businesses; they have been state legislators, state party chairmen, congressmen, presidents of the state bar, members of the Public Service Commission, and federal judges. For most of the 1940s, ’50s, and ’60s, both of Alabama’s U.S. Senators, Lister Hill and John Sparkman, were Machine alums. Alabama’s current governor, Don Siegelman, was the Machine-backed SGA president in 1968; Senator Richard Shelby is also said to have been a member of the Machine (although his office has denied this). As one former member of a Machine-affiliated sorority explained to the student newspaper *The Crimson White*, “The goal is to run campus politics, but the real reason they want to run campus politics is so they themselves can run politics in Alabama.”

The first real challenge to Machine power came in the ’60s. “[A]fter desegregation,” says E. Culpepper Clark, dean of the university’s college of communications and author of *The Schoolhouse Door: Segregation’s Last Stand at the Uni-*

versity of Alabama, “the Greeks increasingly became an aberration, no longer reflecting what the university was and is.” To some administrators, the Machine and its all-white membership was too much of a reminder of the way things used to be. And they took steps to lessen its impact. For years they tried to coax the white Greeks to admit blacks. In 1993 the administration actually suspended the SGA for three years—after a non-Machine candidate claimed she was attacked by Machine supporters—in the hopes of breaking the Machine’s hold.

But the Machine stood strong. Since the SGA was reinstated in 1996, Machine candidates have not lost one presidential election. White Greeks also refused to budge on integration. And that intransigence was sometimes quite ugly. In 1986, when the black sorority Alpha Kappa Alpha was planning to move to the previously all-white sorority row, two white students burned a cross on the front lawn of the new house. In the early ’90s a black homecoming queen was booed by white fraternity members at her coronation. And three years ago, when a black student mounted a serious but unsuccessful run for SGA president, he received threats on his answering machine. “Nigger,” said one, “we’re going to hang you from a tree.”

IT WAS AGAINST this backdrop that Melody Twilley tried to join a white sorority. She was a most unlikely revolutionary. The daughter of upper-middle-class parents—her mother is a librarian; her father is the largest black landowner in the state—Twilley grew up in Alabama’s black belt. At 15 she was plucked out of her local high school and sent to the Alabama School of Mathematics and Science, a prestigious public boarding school in Mobile. There she was one of only a few black students, but her minority status never occurred to her. “Race isn’t really an issue down there,” she says. When Twilley arrived in Tuscaloosa in August 2000, it seemed perfectly logical to her that she would join a sorority. After all, her friends from Math and Science—who were white—were joining them. She had the money. (When I once asked Twilley whether sororities offered need-based assistance to students who couldn’t afford to pay the hefty dues, she said that they didn’t. “If you have a need,” she explained, “you probably won’t get in.”) She even considered herself a Republican. “I just always thought being in a sorority was part of the college experience,” she says.

On her first day of rush as a freshman, Twilley visited 15 sororities and loved every one. “I thought it was the greatest,” she recalls. “I met all these girls, and they were so cute and they were so sweet and they were doing their little door songs, beating on their windows and everything. I thought it was adorable.” When invitations went out for the second round, Twilley was invited back to seven. “It kind of surprised me,” Twilley says. “I thought they liked me a little more than that.” But she wasn’t concerned: “I went to those seven houses, and I just had a blast, and we made little arts and crafts, and I painted flower pots—that was cool.” When it came time for the third round, however, Twilley didn’t receive any invitations. “The [rush official] said, ‘Melody, I’m sorry, but I have to tell you that you’ve been dropped.’

And I was like, 'Really, are you serious? Why?' And she was like, 'I don't know, I'm really sorry. I hope you didn't have a bad rush experience, I hope you had fun anyway.' And I was like, 'Yeah, it was cool. I thought I was going to get into a sorority. But that's OK.'"

Although Twilley was one of only a handful of women not to get a bid that year, she didn't think much of her rejection at first. "I guess it occurred to me a couple of weeks later that I hadn't seen many black people wandering around [sorority row]," Twilley says, "[but] I wasn't that upset.... It wasn't like I wanted to drop out of school and move to San Francisco and play a guitar on the street or something." It wasn't until March, when Twilley attended a demonstration at the student union—protesting the Machine's all-white makeup and its control of the SGA—that she went public with her story, telling it to those assembled. Her speech caught the attention of Pat Hermann, an English professor who has been fighting to end the segregated Greek system for more than 15 years. In Twilley he saw the perfect symbol for his cause. "She's bright, she's attractive, she's a member of the upper class," Hermann says. In other words, someone whose exclusion could only be explained by race.

A scholar of medieval literature, Hermann arrived in Alabama in 1974 and, over time, has become something of an anthropologist of the school's Greek system. He also has become a bit of a zealot. Taking me around Tuscaloosa one day in his beat-up Honda Accord, he held forth on the Greeks. "The location of the houses, the nature of the houses, these things matter," he explained, as we drove down University Boulevard, past the stately mansions that make up Old Fraternity Row. Old Row, Hermann said, was where the most powerful—white—fraternities had their houses. New Fraternity Row, on a side street, was largely for the less powerful white houses and the black ones. "Anyone who thinks the Greek system is silly or a foolish thing that can be satirized is seriously underestimating the success of a racist structure that allows not particularly bright young men and young women access to worthy mates," he said.

With Hermann leading the charge, Twilley became a cause célèbre among some faculty and administrators, and the movement to end the segregated Greek system—a movement that had more or less dwindled down to only Hermann—got a shot in the arm. Some began pushing for a "unified rush" instead of the current system, under which white Greeks hold their rush in the fall and black Greeks



hold theirs in the spring. Others argued that the white Greeks should be forced to accept black students or forfeit the \$100-per-year leases on their university-owned houses, which sit on some of the choicest real estate in Tuscaloosa. In August the faculty senate unanimously passed a resolution calling on the white Greeks to desegregate or risk penalties. And a few weeks later, when rush began and Melody Twilley tried for the second time to join a sorority, she brought along written recommendations from Greek alumni that faculty and administrators had solicited for her. "I've fallen in love with her," Kathleen Cramer, the university's associate vice president for student affairs, told me last September. "I think she's incredibly brave to do it twice. I'm so hopeful it'll work this time."

BUT AS POPULAR as it is with some faculty, desegregation has not struck a chord with many black students. Indeed, just as Twilley was about to rush again last September, the president of the university's NAACP chapter, Dave Washington Jr., called a press conference to denounce efforts to desegregate the system. "We feel the faculty senate should tend to more important racial concerns on campus than the Greek system," Washington said. Washington's views were admittedly controversial and were criticized by other black students. But even those black students who supported Twilley's attempt to join a white sorority had no desire to follow in her footsteps. As one black student—a self-described "Melody Twilley fan"—said, "Why would anyone ever want to join one of those?"

The main reason black students have such little interest in joining white fraternities and sororities, of course, is that they have fraternities and sororities of their own. In the early '70s black University of Alabama undergraduates began establishing chapters of the Greek organizations commonly found at historically black colleges and universities. And the black fraternities and sororities do have unique qualities that differentiate them—sometimes for the better—from the white ones. The black Greeks tend to tap new members when they're sophomores, and even have some graduate and professional students as members; they often require members to perform community service and maintain certain GPAs. And their parties are focused more on step-dancing shows than on kegs.

But Alabama's black Greek organizations also differ from the white Greeks in another way. Once upon a time, the black Greeks aimed at producing elites. Indeed, at the historically black colleges and universities that thrived before desegregation, fraternities and sororities—particularly a group of them called the "Divine Nine"—were home to each school's best and brightest. Black Greek organizations played a vital role in nurturing members of a new black professional class. But with desegregation, the role of the black Greeks began to change. First, many top-flight black students began shunning black schools like Howard and Morehouse—and their Greek systems—in favor of non-black schools that had once been off-limits. And at those schools, the black fraternities and sororities that did spring up were less about elite creation than about a social safety net. They were places where

black students negotiating predominately white campuses could go to feel comfortable.

This is certainly the case at Alabama. "People often ... say that the whites have theirs and we have ours. But I think it's something quite different," says Amilcar Shabazz, director of Alabama's African-American studies program. Black fraternities and sororities at Alabama "allow for some psychic social release," he says. "[Black students] go to the black Greek system and they're able to find some social outlets, some humor, some people to bond with. ... [But] when it comes to the post-college network, there's no parallel to what the white Greeks here have."

ONE AFTERNOON I went to the Kappa Alpha Psi house to visit Robert Turner. A handsome 19-year-old sophomore with a shaved head and a thin moustache, Turner had been one of Twilley's most outspoken supporters and was considered a leader by a number of his fellow black students. It was a view of himself that he shared: "You're probably going to hear a lot more about me in the future," he'd told me in our first conversation over the phone. Turner met me at the door of his fraternity house, a slightly shabby brick building at the far end of New Row, and led me upstairs to his room. Sitting underneath a poster of Kobe Bryant, he talked about why he came to the University of Alabama and why he was a Kappa.

Turner had gone to what he called a "99.8 percent black" high school with an all-black faculty in Tuskegee. When it came time to choose a college, his initial inclination was to go to Morehouse. But Turner decided that wouldn't help him achieve his larger ambitions. "You have to interact with white people," he explained. "That's one of the reasons I wanted to come to Alabama. It teaches you how to interact and cooperate with them on a professional level. And that's what you need for the real world." A school like Alabama, he said, "breeds leaders of the state, like governors and senators." But once Turner got to Tuscaloosa, he found that his desire to be around white people had its limits. The thought of trying to join a white fraternity, he said, never crossed his mind. "I don't feel like I can relate to them that much," he explained. "The stuff I went through in life, I don't think they've ever gone through." Kappa Alpha Psi, on the other hand, seemed like home. "It was a no-brainer," Turner said of his decision to join a black fraternity. "It was where I felt comfortable, where I was able to relate."

After a while, I asked Turner whether he worried that by being in a black fraternity rather than a Machine-driven white one, he was jeopardizing his ambitions—that he was not making the connections and friendships critical to an aspiring Alabama politician like himself. It was clear from his expression that the thought had not occurred to him before. He paused, staring at the floor and playing with the Kappa Alpha Psi ring on his finger. Then, he raised his head and looked me in the eye. "I feel like I have the best connection in the world," he said. "That's with Jesus Christ."

Bryan Oliver's connections are more earthly. A member of Kappa Alpha—one of Alabama's oldest and most powerful fraternities—Oliver hopes to go into finance when he gradu-

ates this spring. And he's counting on getting some help. "There are old KA's who work in Tuscaloosa, Birmingham, Mobile, everywhere," he says. "If you need a job, talk to one of your fraternity brothers. Maybe his dad can help you out."

With thin brown hair and a soft round face, Oliver doesn't have Turner's charisma. But that doesn't seem to matter. Until this month he was president of the Interfraternity Council (IFC), the traditionally white fraternities' governing body. Some said Oliver was also president of the Machine, a rumor he laughingly dismissed. "It might exist on some level or another," he said, "but I've never been in contact with anybody." As IFC president, it was Oliver's job to present the white Greeks' position on segregation. He took me on a tour of the Kappa Alpha house—an antebellum-style mansion on Old Row filled with portraits of Confederate veterans—and tried to explain why the white Greeks had no black members. "The applicant pool is very small," he said in a thick Southern accent that reflected his Montgomery upbringing. "There are very few African American students who are willing to, or who want to, participate in Pan-Hellenic and IFC rush." I asked him why he thought that was. "I don't know," he said, a pained expression on his face, "maybe we don't do a very good job of reaching out to enough people.... We know we've got to do something about segregation."

But when I asked Oliver about some of the proposed reforms, he stiffened. Unified rush wasn't financially feasible, he said, and terminating leases would violate contractual agreements. He hinted at the possibility of lawsuits by the white Greeks. "I don't think sanctions are the way to go," Oliver insisted. "It's one of those things where if your mom and dad tell you not to play in the street, what's the first thing you're going to do? You're going to run out in the street." As for when the white Greeks might integrate of their own accord, Oliver didn't know. "There's really no timetable," he said. "I hope in the next couple years."

Pat Hermann has been hearing that for a long time. "They always say, 'Not on my watch,'" he fumes. "The only thing they care about is that it doesn't happen this year. It's a brilliant, self-perpetuating system." Hermann continues to push, but carefully. "I don't present myself as a proponent for integration," he says. "I only present myself as an anti-segregationist, as someone who's fighting a struggle against taxpayer-supported segregation.... I've never spoken out in favor of integration in the Greek system." That, apparently, would be far too radical for the University of Alabama.

ON THE LAST day of sorority rush 2001, hundreds of women in sundresses and sandals lined up outside Alabama's massive football stadium. It was bid day, also known as "squeal day"—the fifth and final stage of rush when sororities announce their new members—and the women were a sea of makeup, perfume, and nervous energy. The sorority houses nearby were festooned with banners: "ALPHA CHI OMEGA, ONLY THE BEST WILL DO"; "TO KNOW THE DIFFERENCE, DELTA DELTA DELTA"; "ALPHA OMICRON PI, FROM ONE GENERATION TO ANOTHER, WELCOME NEW MEMBERS." And a large crowd, filled with friends and family bearing cameras and bouquets, had gathered. At three o'clock the

rushees, some of them pausing to hug their parents one last time, filed into the stadium to learn their fates.

Melody Twilley was not among them. After the first day of rush, nine sororities had invited her back. But only one of those nine, Alpha Delta Pi, had asked her to return for the third day. Still, Twilley had been hopeful. At the third day's event, an Alpha Delta Pi sister finally brought up the elephant in the room. "Tracy took me aside and she said that she was sure a lot of people were avoiding the big issue with me, and that they were treating me like any other rushee," Twilley recalled. "Which is great and everything, but she actually wanted to talk candidly about it, which I really appreciated.... She said she had heard rumors that I was trying to prove a point with the whole thing. I cleared that up for her really fast, because nobody wants to go through rush just to prove a point and then drop out. That is so dumb." Twilley thought the conversation had reassured Alpha Delta Pi. But the next morning, at 7:21, her phone rang and she got the bad news: Alpha Delta Pi hadn't invited her back for the fourth and penultimate round of rush. "I cried for about four hours," Twilley said. "And then I got dressed and went shopping at University Mall. I got one hundred thirty dollars worth of makeup." The trip lifted her spirits, and her mother encouraged her to try again next year, "just to let them know that you won't just lay down and die about it, just to keep coming back," Twilley said. But, she added, "I don't think I'm going to do that."

AS IT TURNED out, Twilley would not have been the first black student to join a traditionally white Greek organization. In the middle of rush, a sophomore named Christina Houston—whose mother is white and whose father is black—had come forward to reveal that she had joined Gamma Phi Beta the previous year. But Houston, who looks like a white woman with a dark tan, did not mention her parents' races when she rushed, and the sorority had apparently been unaware of her racial heritage when it admitted her. Last November a small, year-old Christian fraternity that had been all white, Lambda Sigma Phi, added a black student, Calvin Johnson, to its ranks. Lambda Sigma Phi has applied for membership to the IFC; if it is admitted next January, as expected, then the traditionally white fraternities will have integrated as well. But these are less real advances than flukes. Twilley was the challenge to the system, and she was rejected.

As the young women filed into the stadium, they were handed envelopes and led to a section of bleachers. Once they were all there, a dean stood in front of them and said the magic words: "Open them up!" With that, the squeals began. The women jumped up and down, clutching the envelopes to their chests, and they began to run—down the bleachers, out of the stadium, and on to sorority row. They ran past their parents and friends and toward their new houses, where their new sisters were waiting for them. As they went, they dropped sunglasses and cell phones and purses. They yelled and screamed. Some were crying. It was, more than one of them would later say, the happiest day of their lives. ■

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