

Goodbye Greek Letters

BY ROBERT E. SEGAL

It would be a shame if anyone interested in the history of the rise and decline of the American fraternity and sorority system missed the United Press report recently describing an election at Bowdoin College. An attractive co-ed, with the improbable name of Miss Barney Geller, was washing dishes in the fraternity house when she received words that she had been elected president of old Psi U's Bowdoin chapter. Promptly she dropped the dishcloth and picked up

the gavel.

This may reveal more about unisex and women's liberation than it does about the Greek letter system; but let us remember it as a saucy footnote to the saga of the dying Greeks (and no offense meant to any minority group.)

Although American social fraternities seem first to have started at Union College in Schenectady in 1825 while sororities were born in 1870, it is noteworthy that an early push was given the fraternity system shortly after the Civil War. In his excellent book, "Fraternities Without Brotherhood," Alfred McClung Lee asserts that a group "Kuklos," the Greek word for circle. "For alliterative purposes," Professor McClung points out, "The work Klan was added and Kuklos became Kuklus or Ku Klux." (Ironically, some word watchers have told us that the abrasive and thoroughly distasteful epithet, "kike," had a similar start: immigrants unable to write their names were urged to draw a circle or "kykle.")

Fraternities and sororities came to represent snobbery at its collegiate apex during the same years that teachings of modern racism by Madison Grant, Lothrop Stoddard, and Houston Stewart Chamberlain were finding acceptance by some Americans who should have known better. Into the charter of the Greek letter clubs were written such terms as "must not be of Mongolian, Malaysian, Negro, or Jewish blood;" "must be of pure Caucasian blood." Poor old Phi Delta Theta originally insisted that the brothers possess only "full Aryan blood;" but in 1953 after Phi Delta chapters were suspended at Williams and Amherst colleges for pledging "non-Aryans," the national officers found just the rhetorical blood transfusion needed by declaring all a pludge had to be was "socially acceptable."

As the battle line tightened, old guardsmen threw frantic passes: In 1946, the dean of students at the University of California, trying to buoy the sagging hopes of the brothers, declared to the applause of the National Interfraternity Conference that demands for the end of fraternity discrimination had their roots "in Marxian concepts." A year later, the chairman of the Conference asserted that fraternities had "a democratic right to discriminate."

But by 1961, Barry Goldwater had decided that

fraternities were "mere bastions of Communism" while a past president of Delta Upsilon concluded that "always behind these attacks on fraternities, you find a Jew, or a divinity student --- seldom and engineer." Well, it's been great fun; and lots of naches to the Bowdoin co-ed chosen the fraternity president of the year.

TEL AVIV (WNS) -- Israel's youth basketball team defeated the defending champion Soviet team 70-63 in the European championship matches at Zadar, Yugoslavia.

JERUSALEM (WNS) -- Defense Minister Moshe Dayan told the Knesset that if the security situation continued to improve the number of persons held without formal charges might number less than 25 by September as compared with 600 two years ago.

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