



PROJECT MUSE®

Black Haze: Violence, Sacrifice, and Manhood in Black
Greek-Letter Fraternities (review)

Lamont A. Flowers

Journal of College Student Development, Volume 46, Number 3, May/June
2005, pp. 328-331 (Review)

Published by Johns Hopkins University Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/csd.2005.0024>



➔ *For additional information about this article*

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/182832>

Black Haze: Violence, Sacrifice, and Manhood in Black Greek-Letter Fraternities

Ricky L. Jones

Albany: State University of New York Press,
2004, 158 pages, \$18.95 (softcover)

Reviewed by Lamont A. Flowers,
University of Florida

Issues and opportunities facing fraternities and sororities have received renewed scholarly interest in recent years (Nuwer, 1999; Pasarella, Flowers, & Whitt, 2001). One form of this scholarship has addressed Black fraternities and sororities and more particularly the topic of hazing. Furthermore, in light of current as well as reoccurring incidents involving the death and injury of college students who participate in traditionally Black fraternities and sororities, college administrators, parents and students have grown deeply concerned about these organizations and the safety and well-being of their members (Kimbrough, 2003; Ruffins, 1997). With more than a million members in Black Greek-letter fraternities and sororities (Evans, 2004), Ricky Jones' book *Black Haze: Violence, Sacrifice, and Manhood in Black Greek-Letter Fraternities* is an important addition to the scholarship probing this group on American college campuses. While specifically addressing incidents of hazing among Black Greek-letter fraternities (BGFs), Jones' book is relevant for student affairs professionals (particularly those who work with Greek-affiliated students and alumni) and college administrators because it documents the history of BGFs, discusses the functional and harmful effects of hazing, and explores in an academic manner the requisite knowledge that is needed to truly address the

issue of hazing in BGFs. The book contains seven chapters and an appendix.

In the first chapter, "The Problem at Hand," Jones discusses the problem of hazing in BGFs by citing particular incidents of hazing that have occurred in BGFs. Jones also compares hazing among White Greek-letter fraternities and the military. This comparison helps the reader to better understand and examine the nature, variety, and extent of hazing in social groups on college campuses and in the armed services. Also, in this chapter, Jones offers a primary hypothesis for hazing among BGFs by stating that Black males who engage in physical acts of violence do so in an attempt to reach manhood and be regarded as men among their peers. Moreover, Jones asserts:

Social and political marginalization helps to promote the black man's search for alternate arenas in which he can be regarded as a man. One way to define manhood that has emerged, particularly in black intraracial interaction, is to be physically dominant or able to withstand physical abuse. (p. 7)

By positing this explanation, Jones lays the foundation for an intellectual exploration of the reasons why hazing takes a violent form in BGFs and further probes possible insights into the minds and psyche of the individuals who perpetrate violent acts in BGFs as well as the individuals who are on the receiving end of this type of violence.

In Chapter 2, "Old Problem, New Approach," Jones discusses the problems associated with how the media reports BGFs and suggests that these reports are usually intertwined with discriminatory, as well as economic undertones. Also, in this chapter, Jones revisits and

provides additional support for the view that it is important to examine hazing among BGFs by examining the social realm in which hazing takes place in BGFs. Chapter 2 also presents a discussion on the rationale for using ethnographic research techniques in the book. Furthermore, this chapter includes a formal discussion of the methodology (e.g., sample, instrumentation, procedures) used to collect and analyze data for the book.

In Chapter 3, "The History of Black Greek-Letter Fraternities," Jones discusses the foundation of BGFs and the manner in which Black Greek-letter organizations were developed. More specifically, he cites that Black students who first entered American college campuses were excluded from participating and/or joining White Greek-letter organizations and were also subjected to other forms of discrimination and abuse which communicated to them that they were not welcomed or wanted, particularly in White social groups such as fraternities and sororities. Chapter 3 also provides historical data of the five BGFs (i.e., Alpha Phi Alpha, Kappa Alpha Psi, Omega Psi Phi, Phi Beta Sigma, and Iota Phi Theta). The chapter concludes with a discussion of how BGFs (and even White Greek-letter fraternities) were once very active in political matters, but have since developed a sense of apathy in such areas as politics and civic activity.

In Chapter 4, "The Pledge Process as Sacrifice," Jones explains the pledge process as a functional mechanism that is deeply rooted in historical significance. To do so, he convincingly cites the connection between the pledge process and other forms of initiation and rituals that have roots in Africa, Greece, and Rome as a way of debunking the assumption that BGFs are entirely unique in terms of the manner in which violence is often integrated in the pledge process. Thus, Jones

argues that the rituals associated with the pledge process are purposeful as well as meaningful and are based on the view that pledges must make sacrifices (emotional and physical) as a way of maintaining continuity within the BGF social structure and making a connection with other members of BGFs. To underscore the essence of this chapter, Jones writes, "Sacrificial rites of passage for all Greeks, whether the acts during the symbolic journey are threatened or real, have to do with the acquisition of new status for the initiate and stability for the organization" (p. 60). Jones further notes that during this sometimes-violent pledge process (i.e., sacrificial ritual), the pledge learns to adapt his thoughts and even modify or change former patterns of behavior in ways that are more congruent with fraternal patterns of thought and behavior.

In Chapter 5, "The Hegemonic Struggle and Domination in Black Greek-Letter Fraternities," Jones defines and discusses the elements of power that underlie the pledge process in BGFs. He also discusses the difference between the former and more traditional pledge process with the newer Membership Intake Process (MIP). Throughout this chapter several interview comments from members of BGFs serve to underscore the importance that is placed on violent hazing rituals in BGFs. While Jones is careful to note that the participants in his study do not represent all members of BGFs, a strong case is made that supports his view that hazing serves a functional role in the organizations and binds members of BGFs in unity and reaffirms their sense of manhood.

In Chapter 6, "Acceptance, Freedom, and Identity Construction in Black Greek-Letter Fraternities," Jones discusses that the primary mechanisms to identity formation are largely external and include economic factors as well as complex historical and contemporary

realities experienced by Black men. Jones then discusses how BGFs serve to aid in the construction and refinement of their members' individual and group identities through brotherhood, rituals, and power. Jones later discusses and even questions the view that obtaining a true sense of manhood by Black males is even possible through a pledge process involving hazing because of the larger social structures that interact to simultaneously form the Black male identity. To make this point, Jones poignantly writes, "In reality, the BGFs are not autonomous builders of the Self at all. The black male Self to date is (independent of fraternities) a decentered, fragmented, sociopolitical construct societal forces act on" (p. 109). By raising this contention, Jones summarily acknowledges that hazing is manifested in an attempt to connect BGF members to another identity pattern that is separate and unique from the perceived or real identity of the larger American society. By the end of the chapter, though, Jones notes that, "Historical and contemporary racial, economic, social, and political systemic agents are ultimately the cause of this negative interaction, not groups" (p. 111). He concludes this chapter by noting that perhaps in addition to being concerned about the physical violence associated with hazing that is observed and reported, we also should give thought to the psychological antecedents of such behaviors and the resulting consequences for all members of BGFs.

In Chapter 7, "Beyond the Fraternal Self," Jones conveys the notion that rituals play an important role in Black men's lives, particularly as they relate to developing a sense of manhood. Jones also recapitulates the core premise of the book when he writes, "violence in BGFs is the product of a particular black male identity resulting from the black man's sojourn in the United States" (p. 118). Additionally,

Jones contends that one method to help stop the violence is to focus on prevention rather than punishment. Toward this end, he suggests that student affairs professionals (e.g., Assistant Dean of Students) are needed to work with BGFs and Black Greek-letter sororities (BGSs) who themselves are also members of these groups and who have extensive knowledge about these organizations. Jones argues that these individuals will be better suited and more equipped to ensure that BGFs and BGSs follow the stated rules and regulations outlined in university guidelines as well as guidelines of their particular organizations pertaining to pledging and hazing. Jones notes that additional research is also needed to gain more information about the history and missions of BGFs in order to develop interventions with appropriate stakeholders (e.g., researchers, fraternity members, national officers, university leaders, etc.) and resolve the problem of hazing in BGFs.

Overall, I submit that Jones' book should be read by all student affairs professionals who work in Greek affairs as well as students and researchers who need to gain a more in-depth account of BGFs, such as their historical, cultural, and social foundations as well as the issues impacting hazing in BGFs. Furthermore, this book is an important contribution to the literature on this topic because of the skillful manner in which Jones incorporates and critically analyzes relevant literature and other related scholarly writings which further help to facilitate a deeper understanding of the potential causes and magnitude of the violence associated with hazing in BGFs. However, the primary strength of this book is that Jones, himself a member of Kappa Alpha Psi, offers personal observations as well as first-hand views and perceptions of hazing. In this sense, Jones met his purpose of the book, which was to probe "the root of the problem where BGF

hazing is concerned” (p. xviii). Read in concert with Lawrence C. Ross Jr.’s (2000) *The Divine Nine: The History of African American Fraternities and Sororities* and Walter M. Kimbrough’s (2003) *Black Greek 101: The Culture, Customs, and Challenges of Black Fraternities and Sororities*, readers will more fully grasp the missions, purposes, and triumphs of BGFs and BGSs. Additionally, and perhaps more importantly, readers will have the necessary academic and scholarly tools to begin to formulate practical responses to the realities that confront BGFs and BGSs on today’s college campus.

REFERENCES

- Evans, S. (2004). Black Greek-lettered organizations and civic responsibility. *Black Issues in Higher Education*, 21(17), 98.
- Kimbrough, W. M. (2003). *Black Greek 101: The culture, customs, and challenges of Black fraternities and sororities*. Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press.
- Nuwer, H. (1999). *Wrongs of passage: Fraternities, sororities, hazing, and binge drinking*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Pascarella, E. T., Flowers, L. A., & Whitt, E. J. (2001). Cognitive effects of Greek affiliation in college: Additional evidence. *NASPA Journal*, 38, 280-301.
- Ross, L. C., Jr. (2000). *The divine nine: The history of African American fraternities and sororities*. New York: Kensington Books.
- Ruffins, P. (1997). Frat-ricide: Are African American fraternities beating themselves to death? *Black Issues in Higher Education*, 14(8), 18-25.



Sustaining and Improving Learning Communities

Jodi Levine Laufgraben and
Nancy S. Shapiro

San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2004, 208
pages, \$32.00 (softcover)

Reviewed by Doug Gruenewald,
Iowa State University

Learning communities have received a great deal of national attention over the past decade. Experiments in undergraduate education have come and gone, but learning communities

appear to have “staying power.” For some the learning community movement is about deeper learning and enriching education. For others it is a retention program that seems to have potential where others have faltered. Some faculty see the learning community movement as a place for innovation and an opportunity to become immersed in what originally drew them to teaching—close connections with students. Still others, many of them student affairs professionals, have been energized by the opportunity to cross nearly impenetrable institutional boundaries.

Shapiro’s and Laufgraben’s first learning community book, *Creating Learning Communities* (1999), did a nice job of outlining the what, how, and why of learning communities. It was a clearly written practical guide for practitioners—particularly those just getting started. Their follow-up book is equally informative and helpful for beginners, but also provides suggestions to help experienced practitioners expand and improve their programs. It supports theories with a number of examples from specific learning community programs and includes numerous helpful Web sites.

Sustaining and Improving Learning Communities is clearly organized into nine chapters. In Chapter 1 the editors give us a brief review of learning community models and justification for this curricular innovation that has been used to transform many undergraduate programs.

In Chapter 2, “A Campus Culture for Sustaining Learning Communities,” author Anne Goodsell Love addresses issues of organizational change. Love also notes the importance of defining and continually revisiting the purpose of learning communities. As the author notes, if learning communities are to be sustained, they must integrate the learning community program