

Reflections of a Greek

By Jane Buchanan

It seems an impossible task to write objectively about an over-discussed, over-mystified, rather moribund system called "Greek," for those outside its hallowed walls view it with mixed feelings of abhorrence, disappointment, disgust, and longing, and those entrenched in it have ceased to view it in the total university scheme at all. Lest I risk biting the hand that fed me for four years, I must readily admit the intrinsic worth of collectivizing students of the University, that they may govern and take care of themselves. However, whatever possibilities for a major contribution to academic life there are in the fraternal system have in too many instances remained unexplored, and we have become saddled with an out-dated mode of life on the OU campus, a ghetto of its own right—or wrong.

Since we are discussing the Greeks as a subculture on campus it would perhaps be worthwhile to view a particular in order to see the general. Although "typical" may describe few other groups accurately, it applies rather correctly to those who are Greeks. The typical Greek dresses expensively with clothes from a few select stores, has his own verbal shorthand, is seen in all the campus ads, and inhabits places fashionable to Greeks. His parents are footing his college bill although he may work at a resort in the summer to help pay for his ski trips or runs to Mexico during the winter. He may feel a closeness to his parents although they really have no idea what he does while in college. His status is found in dating in the right house and in consuming large quantities of alcohol. He is usually polite and poised and was hand-picked as one of the best his particular town had to offer. He

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is against the war but too conservative and conscious of his position to burn his draft card or actually do more than complain to his friends over a bottle of beer. He may use pep pills to get through finals, and he trades "files" which hold past examinations with his friends in other groups. He used to be concerned about campus affairs and was fairly powerful, but his interest and position have waned considerably. He is an enigma to and disliked by independent students, inaccessible to the campus ministry, and looked upon skeptically by faculty at times. If he is a she, she is probably an education major.

The major Greek phenomenon is appropriately called "rush" and involves hundreds of hopefuls migrating to the University for the first time and hundreds of Greeks who have already gone through the dreary process in previous years. It begins with a round of gay, frivolous parties, and heated, grim "cutting" sessions in the summer and culminates in a grueling week of final selections. The chief beneficiaries of rush week (aside from the fraternities and sororities which augment their membership) are the purveyors of food, beer, clothing, and tranquilizers. The Greek system during this time without doubt damages more people than it helps. Obviously only the select few can join the group of their choice. The others are left with bruised egos which lead to bitterness and unhappiness and may even result in a transfer to another school. Also to be considered are disgruntled parents and alumni who make pressures much more acute than they would otherwise be.

Once a student has "pledged," he is submitted to regimentation and pressures beyond his wildest surmise. He must begin attending mandatory study hall, pledge meetings, house "functions," meals, phone duty, work details, etc., plus becoming involved in campus activities and hitting up dad for the additional cash it takes to keep a Greek stylish. In charge of a large University function during

"Mothers Day" once, I found all applicants for committee work were from one fraternity. Checking into this, I found it had been made a "pledge class function," and that no interest on the part of individuals was involved at all.

After living for three semesters in a dormitory, I see several advantages to the Greek system: 1) group solidarity (usually) due to shared goals; 2) a built-in system of orientation to the campus; 3) academic prodding to those who need it; 4) an instilled sense of identity; 5) almost unlimited resources of all nature. These types of things are difficult at best to cultivate in a rather sterile dormitory atmosphere where the sense of estrangement from others is great and identity with one's housing unit is limited. However, the Greek attitude has become apathetic. At a time when a student's destiny is determined by factors of which he is not in control, apathy is perhaps more understandable, but Greek emphasis is misplaced. The motivation for all too many things is found in a trophy or points toward one award or another. For years scholarship has been promoted through visions of retiring a silver cup. University organizations have been quick to utilize this need for tangible recognition and have bled the Greeks; as long as a large enough trophy is included, fraternities and sororities will spend a fortune in time and money to build the best Homecoming float, have the best Engine Show or Sooner Scandals act, or to elect a queen from their particular house. Although this year Panhellenic has voted to do away with some of these inane goals, it has chosen to retain the glittering reward system for such important activities as Sigma Chi Derby Day, Homecoming decorations, etc. Scholarship trophies at least have been abolished.

The University once lent its support to the Greek system because it helped to fill a housing void and thus proved useful. However, at a time when our cup runneth over with "new

Continued on page 28

Reflections of a Greek

Continued from page 24

towers," it becomes difficult to find a pragmatic reason for its existence, and administrative collars become tighter at the thought of this segregated extension of college living. Greeks point with pride to their "open" clauses of constitutions, the IFC heralds the coming of OU's first black fraternity, and the Delta Upsilon take the only step toward salvaging the system by pledging a black student. The rest of us squirm or stand firm knowing that even if our group chose to pledge a Negro, alumna support would be shortly withheld and "mothers clubs" would disband. The sad fact remains that answers to social problems are not found in trophies won, at orphan party "functions" at Christmas when the haves give to the have-nots, in proving that a house is not discriminatory by having a black professor to dinner, or in the hazing process (which fraternities still carry on somewhat undercover) as a preparation for Vietnam.

In line with writing this article I asked an independent friend to do some Greek thinking and together we decided that the Greek system is a training ground for suburban living. Those who are planning a life of bridge club, marriage to a college sweetheart, a family, and a nice middle-class home in suburbia, getting along with in-laws, etc. (and what Greek isn't?) are made to order for the Greek system. And my friend finished, "For that kind of boredom you have to have conditioning." Reactions to this on a campus are understandably varied. Independents who also desire to be Establishment are annoyed by the Greek facade because it dwarfs their own. Others who react against the Establishment by assuming nonconforming roles will naturally detest this extension of suburban exclusiveness, and those who want to "get ahead" independently resent the value system that parallels that of the Greeks in campus politics and activities.

Another friend, a veteran of a fraternity, in criticizing my critique, commented that this article sounds as if it were written in 1959. However,

I hold that this is not because my criticism is out-dated, but rather because the system is. Of course it is much less difficult to expound upon the fallacies of the Greek system than to offer constructive ideas for its betterment. However, there are some obvious things that should be done. Needing immediate attention is a system of deferred rush whereby students cannot pledge until they have attended the University at least one semester and preferably one year. This would eliminate much of the frustration and tension and distrust, which I saw first-hand as a counselor in a freshman dormitory, and leave all entering students to sink or swim from the same starting point.

Next, all fraternities and sororities should be integrated racially, which would mean inclusion of both black and foreign students. Possibly also some sort of mandatory seminars and programs of social action could be initiated so that the Greek system would be less socially and more academically oriented. Further, fraternities and sororities should be more accessible to campus ministry, professors, and students who are non-members.

Certainly the problem of the Greek system is not one easily solved. Those who have recognized the inequities of it and have tried to effect change usually become discouraged after batting their heads against walls of indifference. Others who realize the plight the Greeks are in usually say, "It's dying anyway," and bother no further about it. The fact remains that the Greek system is invalid and impotent in its present form and must be changed to endure. □

How to Succeed

Continued from page 25

by this time that his ability simply to remain in the running itself qualifies him as a leader in the eyes of many. It is not surprising to note some changes in the leadership group during the junior year. Either some learn faster than others or some hear another drummer. Previously successful leaders seem for no obvious reason to drop all activities and lose any interest in honors for which they

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