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COLUMN TUESDAY, MARCH 16, 2004

Thought Police Haze Fraternity

Hallelujah! Cornell has finally discovered the root cause of racial tension on campus. After thousands of hours of painstaking research, the



No Shades of Gray
By JOE SABIA

powers that be have determined a Zeta Beta Tau (ZBT) "ghetto fabulous" party -- not racial quotas, segregated dormitories, racially exclusive academic fields, or Cynthia McKinney's appointment -- is the proximate cause of Cornell's hostile racial climate.

Thank goodness that mystery is solved. Now all that's left to do is to send ZBT members to Room 101 for some re-education. And if that doesn't work, we can just shoot them.

The hubbub started a few weeks ago when a disgruntled ZBT partygoer whined to the Interfraternity Council (IFC), as reported in The Sun about "apparent disrespectful stereotypes regarding people of color." Apparently, the malcontent was offended by ZBT's "ghetto fabulous" party, which entailed students dressing up like rappers who made the climb from rags (the ghetto) to riches (bling-bling). [Note: A rapper's transformation to "ghetto fabulous" is a lot like what happened in every Horatio Alger tale, except that it involves significantly more crack and murder.]

Immediately bowing to pressure, the IFC released a statement saying that "it does not sponsor, endorse, or

support such events or attitudes" and that ZBT's "coinciding way of thinking [has] no place within the Greek community or the University as a whole."

Hilariously, all of the other campus Greek organizations then simultaneously issued statements decrying racism, though they had done nothing wrong. Prof. Robert Harris, Africana studies, vice provost for diversity and faculty development, nodded approvingly at these letters, saying Greek leaders "affirmed their commitment to a diverse and multicultural campus free of bias."

And so, the mau-mauing was complete. Collective guilt was affirmed. As a sign of good will, Leo Pedraza, Cornell's assistant dean of fraternity and sorority affairs, announced that ZBT would face a judicial investigation for their "ghetto fabulous" party.

What the heck is going on here? These fraternity brothers are not accused of breaking New York State law, federal law, or local ordinances. They did absolutely nothing wrong. And, yet, because of the politically correct mob-mentality of the diversity police, these students are being persecuted, intimidated, and forced to submit to judicial investigation.

The brothers at ZBT have every right to put on whatever theme-party they like, within the limits of the law. Blowhard deans, useless provosts, renegade judicial boards, and self-important trustees should not be intimidating them. If students on campus disagree with the actions of ZBT, they can pen newspaper articles, organize student protests, or encourage students to not pledge the fraternity. But university officials should not be using the power of their offices to force their psychotic vision of

racial bliss on the rest of us.

Cornell operates under the assumption that white students -- particularly white fraternity brothers -- are racists who need to be "enlightened" by one of the 75,893 diversity officers on campus. This is insulting and preposterous. No one at ZBT is a racist and everyone knows it. They did not put on a "ghetto fabulous" party to offend anyone and, in fact, no normal person could have been offended by it. The only types of people who are offended by such things are those who walk around every day looking (and hoping) to be offended.

Diversity deans and provosts love provoking campus racial tension because it allows them to spring into action, thereby justifying their exorbitant salaries. That is what has happened in the ZBT case. In the wake of the "ghetto fabulous" controversy, there are new proposals for diversity course requirements and mandatory indoctrination seminars. Cha-ching!

University officials have an unhealthy obsession with taking extra-constitutional actions to impose their politically correct worldview on undergraduates. Fraternities, evangelical Christians, and conservatives are all targets at America's elite institutions of higher learning. Cornell's recent past is quite blemished in this regard. In 1995, the administration punished four students for forwarding a politically incorrect email about women. That same year, a Christian professor was investigated for sexual harassment because he openly opposed homosexuality. In 1997 and 1998, administrators supported sanctions against the Cornell Review for its "offensive" racial content. In the context of Cornell's history, the latest ZBT flap should not be surprising.

Fortunately, there are some positive signs nationally. The Foundation for Individual Rights in Education (FIRE) is at the forefront of protecting students' liberties against the onslaught of political correctness from college administrators. FIRE has successfully intervened on behalf of fraternities under attack at many campuses, including the University of Georgia and the University of Tennessee.

Thor Halvorssen, a member of FIRE's board of advisors, has warned, "Fraternity students, unpopular in the eyes of administrators, very frequently find their rights deliberately disregarded ... [Universities] should not have the power to call upon the selective and heavy hand of coercive authority and censorship."

In order to combat oppressive university administrators, students must speak out and stand up for themselves. Unfortunately, most are too scared of the consequences and instead choose to shut up, be publicly humiliated, and accept unwarranted punishment. This is what we are seeing from Cornell's Greek system right now. Understandably, ZBT wants the bad press to go away and for the entire "ghetto fabulous" incident to be over. The brothers want to get on with their lives in peace.

But there will never be peace as long as Cornell's politically correct administrators are allowed to continue coercing and cowering generation after generation of students. These people must be stopped.

Let me offer a bit of unsolicited advice to Cornell's fraternity presidents. Issue a new, defiant letter to Dr. Harris with the following message: "ZBT did absolutely nothing wrong. If Cornell's politically correct thugs continue to intimidate our brothers, we will not

only arrange for a boycott of alumni donations, thereby ensuring a lot of embarrassing national press, but we will also consider filing a lawsuit against Cornell for violating our constitutional rights. Now go away. 'Ghetto fabulous' regards."

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