

RUNNING HEAD: HISTORY OF HAZING

The History of Hazing in American Higher Education

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### I. Introduction

The behaviors now known as hazing have been around for over two thousand years. Educators throughout history have had to confront the physical abuse, practical jokes, excessive alcohol consumption, and other humiliating and dangerous events that have found their way into being the rites of passage for countless young adults. In order to properly understand the history of hazing in American higher education, it is important to have a basic understanding of its roots. It is particularly important to understand the role of penmanship and flogging that took place in the English education system, as it was America's blueprint in developing its own system of higher education. It is equally important to understand the traditional reasons for hazing and how they are not very different from the reasons for continuing the practice today. Certain elements central to the formation of American higher education including the creation of class distinctions (freshman, sophomore, etc.), the formation of religiously centered colleges and the growth of extracurricular activities have had a huge impact on the history of hazing. However, it is important to realize that collegiate hazing does not simply exist within the higher education bubble. Historical events, including wars and changes in the role of the media have impacted the ways in which hazing is conducted and discussed. Although hazing has been reported among many campus groups including athletic teams, marching bands, and ROTC squads, the history of hazing within the Greek system has been well documented in American higher education and will therefore be a main focus of this paper. When discussing the effects hazing has had on the lives of past students the paper will focus on the time period between the creation of the first American colleges and the 1970s. During this time period there were many shifts in the

populations that hazed as well as the way in which the public viewed and addressed hazing. The present is distinguished from the past, by the fact that for the past twenty years, the majority of students, are members of specific, identifiable groups: males, fraternities and sports teams and the fact that the public has maintained a rather consistent, critical view of hazing over this same period of time. Current trends and topics related to hazing will be included as well as strategies for the reduction, if not elimination of such dangerous practices in the future.

## II. Hazing in the Past

The origins of hazing can be traced back to the founding of Plato's academy in 387 B.C. (Nuwer, 1990, 1999). Plato likened such acts to those of wild animals and was quick to criticize the "practical jokes played by unruly young men that injured the hazed and citizens who got in the way" (Nuwer, 1999, p.92). Hazing incidents, which at the time were known as pennialism, became increasingly well documented in the Middle Ages as the prevalence of these incidents caused increasing problems for educators at all levels. Students of the time considered hazing to be a natural way to teach newcomers precedence:

The underlying idea ... was that the newcomer to the university was an untutored, uncivilized man, who had first to be polished before he could become a regular member of the university; before he could taste the sweets of a student's life he should suffer hardships (History of Hazing).

These hardships included physical abuse, subjection to course jokes and general humiliation; the later often taking the form of being forced to wear inappropriate clothes. All hardships were

designed to make new students recognize their inferiority to upperclassman and to promote their substandard status. Traditional pennialism frequently ended after a student finished his first year of schooling and was celebrated with the newcomer paying for food and drink for all those present at his induction. In addition to the practices of pennialism, the English practice of fagging flourished at places like Cambridge and Oxford. Fagging was defined as “the right exercised by the older boy to make the younger do what he likes and what the younger one generally dislikes” (Nuwer, 1990, p. 117). Essentially every new student learned humility and etiquette by becoming a man-servant to an upperclassman.

In the English system, it was not only underclassmen who were subjected to the hardships of initiation (Nuwer, 1990, 1999). “By the seventeenth century, masters degree students needed to obtain a document that affirmed they had gone through the equivalent of a Middle Ages hell night” (Nuwer, 1990, p.117). The situation was not any better for faculty. To receive a teaching license, scholars underwent many indignities before they were judged worthy of future employment. Hazing was used as a prevention technique to keep “charlatans from passing themselves off as scholars and in part to raise standards. Would be scholars endured a training period that lasted years and was characterized by poverty and many trials” (Nuwer, 1999, p.94). As such, it was scholars that moved from school to school and transplanted their individual brands of pennialism to universities throughout Western Europe and America.

Although the term “hazing” would not be commonly used until after the Civil War, acts similar to European fagging were found at Harvard as early as 1657 (Nuwer, 1999). Early hazing at America’s colleges, like those in England centered upon personal servitude. However, unlike their English predecessors, fellow students did not dictate the terms of servitude, the faculty did.

At Harvard, college laws required that “freshmen run errands for all upperclassmen, never be ‘saucy’, and obey every upperclassman's order” (History of Hazing). Joseph Webb, Class of 1684, was the first Harvard student to be punished for hazing. He was expelled from Harvard for hitting freshmen and having them perform acts of servitude. However, Joseph was allowed to return to his studies after only two months, having successfully convinced Harvard’s president that he had sufficiently repented for his crime. This type of repentance was quite common at this time, in fact, “a public confession in front of the student body and a formal petition to return were the usual conditions for returning to Harvard College after a student had been caught committing a series offense” (Nuwer, p.100). Because most college administrators of the time were members of the clergy they were often deeply pulled by a belief that “no sin was too great for God’s grace” (Nuwer, p.101) and so the cycle of hazing, punishment, repentance, and re-admittance continued throughout the eighteenth century.

It was during the first quarter of the nineteenth century when student organizations began to develop that hazing found a new role within extracurricular student groups (Nuwer, 1999). Literary societies, which were the first extracurricular student groups, were not social organizations, as fraternities are today. Instead they served to complement the educational role of the university by allowing students to “discuss philosophy, literature and serious issues of the day” (p.102). Despite the focus on intellectual enlightenment, silly stunts and pranks were common among literary society members. One of Edward Evertt’s first jobs as President of Harvard was to punish a second-year member of the Hasty Pudding Club “for pinning the coattail of the boy who sat before him to the settee” (pp.102-103). In another incident, members of a Harvard University society wrote the Czar of Russia, Alexander I offering him an honorary degree. Alexander shipped gifts to the Society as a sign of gratitude, which the university seized

when the prank leaked out. In time these primarily intellectual groups evolved into social fraternities of today and the pranks associated with them began devolving into the dangerous hazing practices of today.

Social fraternities did not begin flourishing until the ninetieth and twentieth centuries (Nuwer, 1999). The reason for their growth was attributed to the fact that more and more young men were leaving behind the brotherhood, friendship and camaraderie they had in their close-knit frontier communities and fraternity membership was an easy way to re-establish close social and emotional connections with other students. Early fraternities prided themselves on demonstrating the American virtues of scholarship, democracy, and moral conviction. “Moreover, fraternities founded between 1825 and 1890 were very much religiously influenced, and they considered fagging both undemocratic and vaguely immoral” (History of Hazing). The most serious cases of hazing during this period of time continued to be those sparked by class rivalries, particularly between freshman and sophomores. However, as more and more social fraternities came into existence and began to compete with one another for students’ loyalty, the best way to compel students to join and start new chapters was through the creation of rituals and myths of membership. By the 1880s hazing was becoming a common initiation practice for fraternity membership. It had a similar purpose to the pennialism and fagging of an early time period: to teach newcomers respect for fraternity policies, rules and leaders. The storied, often factious history of these rites of passages also gave students a distorted, romantic view of the trials and suffering they faced in order to join the brotherhood.

The first fraternity-related hazing death to receive extensive newspaper coverage took place in 1873 (Nuwer, 1990). Former deaths dismissed as “unfortunate consequences of male

horseplay” (Nuwer, 1999, p.123) had occurred up until this time, but none had been directly connected with hazing. The incident occurred at Cornell University and involved members of the Kappa Alpha Society. Two society members blindfolded a pledge, Mortimer N. Leggett, and left him alone in the dark to gather his bearings. Leggett got disoriented and fell into a gorge. Kappa Alpha members testified that there had been no drinking or membership sponsored hazing going on that night and the two senior members were never punished. The Society was allowed to continue operating with no official sanctions from Cornell or the government. Twenty six years later, having not learned its lesson from Leggett’s death, the fraternity ordered eight pledges to get off a train in a rural area and hike back to Cornell. A pledge named Edward Fairchild Berkeley, got disoriented, fell into a canal and drowned. Although hazing deaths such as these were finally being classified as such, they continued to receive little attention until the beginning of the 1900’s. It was only after several researchers and college administrators started to openly critique the Greek system that the public once again took notice of the damage hazing was doing on college campuses throughout the country.

By 1912 hazing related injuries and deaths among college students had become so common place that a London Morning Post correspondent wrote that “Death at a fraternity” or “Seriously injured while being initiated” (Nuwer, 1990, p.120) were standing headlines in American newspaper offices. It was in this same year that a North Carolina researcher concluded that collective scholastic achievement was lower among newly initiated Greeks than of non-fraternity men. As a result of these reports, educators began to look at fraternities with a critical eye and before long several administrators were calling for an end to the Greek system. In an effort to fight off growing criticism, the organization now known as the National Interfraternity Conference (NIC) was created in 1910. The NIC was established to be an umbrella organization

dedicated to the “enrichment of the fraternity experience; as well as the advancement and growth of the fraternity community” (Who We Are). Despite the great hopes surrounding its creation, the NIC was rendered ineffectual in monitoring and decreasing hazing incidents among the countless chapters it was commissioned to oversee. The NIC was quickly recognized as an organization that would always be at the mercy of students to decide what it could or could not do and the negative feelings between college administrations and Greek associations continued to grow (Nuwer, 1999). By the early 1930s numerous college administrators were once again calling for the elimination of all hazing practices and Greek houses that preformed such acts. However, due to popular support, particularly among influential, prominent alumni, fraternities were usually able to turn their backs on pressure to change their ways. Although hazing continued throughout the 1930’s and 40’s, the Great Depression and World War II took their toll on the college population and in particular fraternity numbers. Many chapter houses were left empty and only stayed afloat through the generosity of alumni gifts or by doubling as rental apartments for servicemen.

After World War II, the G.I. Bill provided a large number of veterans with the opportunity to attend colleges throughout the United States and thrust a new image of glorified hazing into the fraternities (Nuwer, 1990). Although veterans were often unwilling to tolerate being hazed by younger students, they were more than willing to introduce toned down versions of military hazing into fraternity initiations. Veterans were eager to rekindle the brotherhood and camaraderie they had experienced in the military and joined fraternities in record numbers. Returning veterans added excessive physical exercise and calisthenics to the long list of hazing activities new pledges were expected to complete. At the same time that fraternities and hazing

were being reborn and redefined so was the field of journalism. Greek organizations were quickly confronted with public criticism for hazing incidents gone wrong.

The first nationally covered hazing scandal took place at the University of Southern California in 1959 (Nuwer, 1999). The incident involved a Kappa Sigma pledge named Richard Swanson, who choked to death after being forced to eat a quarter-pound of raw liver. Public indignation was strong not only as a result of the repulsiveness of the ritual but because emergency medical personnel indicated that Swanson may have survived had his fellow fraternity brothers divulged the cause of his choking. Instead fraternity members remained uncooperative both at the scene and during the investigation. The NIC was slow to respond to the matter and once again showed its ineffectiveness as a governing body. Its only response was to do what it had done for the past fifty years, make a strong plea to fraternities to take a stronger stand against hazing. Despite the public disgust over the matter, a bigger issue was taking up much of the nation's attention and it would soon impact hazing incidents as well.

During the Vietnam War, college students became more politically active and began disassociating themselves with groups tied to the establishment and status quo (Nuwer, 1999). Fraternities were often perceived as pro-establishment given their predominantly white, upper-class membership and were therefore deemed "unhip". Membership rates declined and in an effort to retain membership numbers, some chapters did away with intense hazing. The huge decrease in Greek membership during the 1960's led to an unprecedented drop in hazing incidents, only two pledging deaths were reported from 1960-1970.

Unfortunately as the Vietnam War wound down, alcohol consumption began to rise both among the general population and among college students. Greek membership increased as well

and dangerous hazing incidents followed the same trend. While there were only thirty five hazing related deaths from 1838 until 1969, the following decade saw an additional thirty one students lose their lives to such incidents (Holloman, 2002). The popularity of fraternity sponsored road trips began to have a disastrous effect on the health and wellbeing of newcomers and seasoned members alike. It was also during the 70's that "new members began to chug grotesque quantities of beer, wine, and liquor as a pre-initiation ritual" (Nuwer, 1999, p. 133) and as a result began to die in increasingly bizarre ways. In a particularly disturbing case, members of Monmouth College's Zeta Beta Tau took pledges to the ocean and made them dig their own graves. A member was killed when a mound of sand collapsed on top of him and he suffocated before anyone could come to his rescue. The public's response to the increasing number of alcohol related deaths included the formation of groups like Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD) and the call for more studies about alcohol abuse among college students. The NIC was initially supportive of such studies and the reforms they suggested. Several leaders within the NIC went so far as to "urge their national fraternities to adopt reforms to eliminate alcohol from houses, to adopt a statement on fraternal values and ethics, and to end pledging abuses" (Nuwer, p. 135). However, in the approximately twenty plus years since these changes have come about, hazing has continued to have disastrous consequences on college campuses throughout the nation and the NIC leadership has been in continuous upheaval which has left it completely unable to react.

### III. Present-Day Hazing

Current hazing practices, much like those of the past, continue to present difficulties to college administrators, staff and students. Hollmann (2002) reports that “since 1990 more deaths have occurred on college and university campuses as a result of hazing, pledging and initiation accidents, and fraternal alcohol-related incidents than in all recorded history of such deaths” (p.11). Hollmann continues on to report about the dramatic increase in deaths per year from 5.5 in the 1980s to 18 in 2000. In a survey of 2000 undergraduate students, 6.7% reported that they had hazed another student and 12.4% report being hazed (Campo, Poulous, and Sipple, 2005). Of those surveyed, the majority were Greeks, males, and/or varsity athletes. Campo et. al.’s research shows that drinking contests are the most popular hazing activity with sleep deprivation being the second most popular. While positive team-building activities like community service, academic requirements, and playing recreation sports more are prevalent in Greek societies today, they are typically viewed as a supplement not a replacement to hazing.

Currently one of the largest obstacles in trying to cut down on Greek hazing is the lack of any central, authoritative body that all Greek organizations fit under. The NIC is the largest umbrella organization with fifty nine member fraternities and sororities (Who We Are). However, the NIC, as well as several other umbrella groups, including the National Panhellenic Conference (NPC) and National Panhellenic Council (NPHC), have vague policies with regard to hazing and no authority to discipline their members. For example, fraternities that are recognized by the NIC are currently required to have risk management policies that address hazing and must report to the NIC regarding the participation of all members “in educational programming covering any of the following: academic achievement, alcohol consumption, career preparation, civic engagement, hazing, leadership development, sexual assault, and values &

ethics” (Standards for Members). However, the NIC has been given no authority to discipline chapters and when asked whether or not it can take action against hazing members responded by saying “the NIC is completely focused on its member fraternities, not their chapters or members” (FAQ).

While national leadership is still weak within the Greek system, the recent decline in Greek membership has got individual fraternities “overhauling their organizations to improve recruitment, behavior and especially reputation” (Reisberg, 2000, p.A59).

As Reisberg reports:

fewer students now seem inclined to shell out hundreds of dollars in dues to be part of a system that has a reputation for physically abusing its pledges, engaging in offensive campus activities, and in some cases, endangering members’ lives with excessive drinking (p.A59).

Today’s students are more concerned with their academics and career goals. Students are pushing Greek chapters to adopt new rules that enforce high academic requirements and promote civic engagement. New students are also unwilling to pay the high costs associated with living in houses that allow alcohol and as a result many Greek houses are going dry. The decrease in alcohol availability and the increase in students wanting to rush houses with strong academic and civic minded reputations have lead to decreased hazing incidents among such chapters. At some schools it has been campus leaders, instead of students, cracking down on the illegal and destructive behaviors of fraternities. Colby, Williams, Amherst, and Bowdoin have banned Greek-letter societies in order to cut down on hazing, excessive drinking, sexual harassment, and

other illegal behaviors that have been associated with such groups (Dungy, 1999). Fraternities and sororities at Dartmouth College, which inspired the movie *Animal House*, have been pushed in recent years to go coeducational. The requirement of a Greek accreditation system is another action being handed down by a number of college administrators. At Southwest Texas State and Miami University fraternity chapters must create university approved academic standards and codes of values, including the abolishment of hazing, in order to be considered legitimate college groups (Reisberg). The future will tell which methods, student or administration lead, will create the most notable changes to Greek hazing practices.

Hazing is not unique to white fraternities and in recent years there has been increased concern in regards to the increasingly violent hazing being done to Black fraternity pledges (Ruffins, 1997, 1998). The National Pan-Hellenic Council, which oversees all Black Greek organizations, banned hazing in 1990 and replaced it with a “New Member Intake Process”. However, hazing continues to be a huge problem and some administrators suggest that the ban has forced hazing to go underground and therefore increased the dangers faced by new pledges. According to Ruffins, black students are much more likely than white students to go through ritualistic brandings and physical beatings in order to gain Greek membership. This physical hazing can be traced back to early traditions among Black fraternities. When Black fraternities got their start, pledges needed to be able withstand physical violence: “as many of [those early] pledges were faced with a physical threat from their White counterparts who were opposed to the idea of Black fraternities” (Ruffins, 1998, p.16). Early black fraternity pledges often practices hazing traditions such as “Line walking”, which involved close physical contact between pledges as well as paddling and caning. It became a dominant form of hazing because fraternity brothers “wanted to see if you were able to protect one another in those kinds of situations” (Ruffins,

1998, p.16). Many black leaders, psychologists and student affairs professionals worry about the close link, if not direct throw back, between current hazing practices and those of slavery. As Dr. Antonio McDaniel, a sociologist at the University of Pennsylvania reports, “Black fraternity hazing reflects a very profound problem in the way Black men have internalized society’s treatment of themselves” (Ruffins, 1997, p.20). Administrators also worry about reports that suggest that the severity of the beatings have only gotten worse as society continues to support images that “equate Black masculinity with violence” (Ruffins, 1997, p.21).

#### IV. Hazing in the Future

There are several key developments that could influence what becomes of hazing practices in the future. Some issues are specific to Greek hazing while others will affect hazing practices among all groups: high school, higher education, military, etc. If federal and/or state laws become more consistent as to what constitutes hazing, then all groups that haze could be deeply affected. While Hollmann (2002) reports that forty three states have anti-hazing statutes, they are not consistent in either their description of hazing or in the punishment for such action:

Some states punish mental hazing while others do not, a handful provide for civil remedies and some allow consent as a defense while others do not.... Definitions are widely scattered.... Most punish hazing as a misdemeanor....a few states.... Hazing is punishable as a felony (p. 16).

It appears that as more and more cases of hazing related injury and death are brought into the court system the ambiguity surrounding the issue will dissolve one case at a time.

At the higher education level, changes seem to be headed in the direction of making colleges and universities face greater accountability for individual student's or fraternal organization's misconduct (Hollmann, 2002). In the past, courts have been charged with finding an individual or organization liable for injury, particularly in cases where there was coerced consumption of alcohol involved. The majority of courts "had found that the college has no duty to protect an individual from injury resulting from a student's or fraternal organization's misconduct" (Hollman, p. 16). However, the tide is turning. Hollmann references two court cases: *Furek v. University of Delaware/ Knoll vs. The Board of Regents of the University of Nebraska*, in which the courts held that the universities had an obligation to protect students from hazing when they "reasonably knew such activity was taking place" (p.17). If these cases are any indication of the future trends in hazing litigation, it is likely that more and more colleges and universities will choose to impose strict guidelines on student groups and/or outlaw some of them entirely after the first instances of hazing are reported.

The future student body: their goals, values, and needs, will ultimately shape how student group membership is structured and if hazing methods are used by extracurricular clubs. As the cost of higher education continues to rise, fewer and fewer students will be willing to pay high costs to belong to social organizations, particularly those with high liability fees due to excessive partying and potential hazing litigation. As college degrees become more and more ubiquitous among the general population, college students will be looking for more and more ways to make themselves stand out in a crowd. They will be looking to join clubs and organizations that promote academic and civic excellence instead of those that simply offer up the best parties. Another huge factor in the future of student organizations is the ever-increasing participation in distance learning and part-time programs. In an effort to retain membership numbers,

organizations will have to find new ways to reach out to these students. The traditional initiation processes, hazing included, may face a radical shift as a result of these changes in student populations.

#### V. Conclusions/Further Study/Remaining Questions:

Hazing has a longstanding presence in the fabric of American higher education. It was initially used as a method to subdue and integrate entire freshman classes into the college way of life. In time, hazing became a traditional way to initiate new members into extracurricular groups, in particular fraternal organizations. As fraternities evolved from clubs dedicated to scholarship and moral conviction into social clubs dedicated to partying and entertainment, hazing traditions have become more and more dangerous. Despite small decreases in hazing practices, usually brought about by dips in Greek membership over the past fifty years, hazing remains a huge problem on college campuses. Student affairs professionals struggle to find new ways to cut down on dangerous, often deadly hazing behaviors including excessive drinking and drugging, sleep deprivation, and physical abuse.

Further study must be done on the effectiveness of programs like those at Southwest Texas State and Miami University, which enforce strict regulations, with regards to hazing, on fraternities and other student groups in order for them to receive accreditation. In addition, the effectiveness of coeducational programs like the one proposed at Dartmouth need to be investigated more thoroughly. Ultimately there needs to be recognition by college administrators that the problem of current hazing practices is intrinsically tied to unhealthy, dangerous drinking habits among college students. It would be in the best interest of all parties involved to advocate, create, and support an extensive alcohol education program for all new college students. Whether

this educational programming can be automatically integrated into an entire school's curriculum or needs to start out in smaller extracurricular groups depends greatly on the individual colleges and universities. However, it is imperative that students understand the short and long-term effects that alcohol has on their behaviors, physical and mental development. Learning how to drink responsibly is not only a life-long lesson, but it will make students think twice before engaging in dangerous drinking habits directly or indirectly associated with hazing.

The future of hazing remains completely unknown and as such there are many unanswered questions. Is it too late to give the NIC or another national organization authoritative control over the Greek system? On a bigger scale, could there be an organization dedicated to policing anti-hazing laws among all college groups? What benefits would such an overarching system of regulation produce and how quickly would it produce them? Would the introduction of a strong hand force hazing activities to go even further underground and therefore make them more dangerous and deadly? If this were the case, how severely would the American public need to be shaken by a hazing tragedy to compel them to act and what kind of action would they take? Would a federal hazing ban be the answer or would the public call for the elimination of all groups with connections to hazing incidents? Time will tell whether hazing remains a key issue in American higher education or if it fades away and is only remembered as an archaic tradition of misguiding college students.

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