

## Introduction

Writing in his diary in 1847, Amherst College student William Gardiner Hammond described one of his fraternity brothers: “Seelye is a man of no ordinary mold: uniting in greatest abundance the virtues and talents of the head and heart. Not a man in our class is as *strong* a character as he.” In 1892 a brother in Kappa Sigma at the University of Virginia wrote to another about a group of men at Trinity College (later Duke University) that he hoped would be initiated into their fraternity. He described two of them: “Daniels is the best all-round athlete in the South undoubtedly. He is a Ph.B. from Trinity and is back taking law. He is about 22 years old. Houston is an A.B. from Trinity, is about 21 years old, and is taking a post-graduate course in Political Economy. His family is one of the best in Monroe, N.C., as Daniels’ is in New Bern.” In 1924 brothers in Dartmouth College’s Zeta Psi chapter characterized one of their own in the following manner: “Brother ‘Stan’ Lonsdale has improved the already magnificent reputation he had attained in past years as Lothario and Don Juan put together, and as representative of the chapter in all women’s colleges within a radius of several hundred miles.” On the same campus in the year 2000, a pledge in Chi Gamma Epsilon listed the following as important aspects of the biography of an elder fraternity brother: “He was going out with jane doe for the past month but he just dumped her yesterday. He speaks Izzo. He said ‘weeeeeee’ after he shot his gf’s pooper hence the name wiegel [nickname of the brother that rhymed with his surname]. . . . [H]is throw up song is hava nagila.”<sup>1</sup>

These passages, all penned by fraternity brothers, depict very different kinds of men. Each of them emphasizes and applauds different characteristics; each is typical of its time. This book examines men like those described and traces the changes that occurred in archetypes of masculinity

from the founding of college fraternities in 1825 to the present day. In doing so, it documents three related claims that structure the larger historical arguments herein. The first is that men have gained prestige and respect, especially from other men, by being masculine—or, in nineteenth-century terminology, by being “manly.” While the elements of what constitutes masculinity or manliness have changed, what remains consistent is that performing masculinity in particular ways establishes men as worthy of respect and emulation, especially by other men. Many factors—class, race, religiosity, sexuality, athleticism, recklessness—contribute to particular versions of masculinity at different times, but the end result is the same: some men are considered more masculine than others, and those men are the ones who gain the most approbation. The second finding is that most American men have been well aware of these standards, and many of them quite consciously have tried their best to meet them. Whether or not they have done so successfully is another matter, one adjudicated by their male peers. The fact remains, however, that men know the standards of their time and are usually aware of their ability to live up to them. The third finding, following from the prior two, is that some men have been made anxious by standards of masculinity. This anxiety has led to overcompensation, to increased efforts to meet the standards by doing whatever it is that comprises masculinity at a given time.

Sociologist Erving Goffman described all three of these findings in his 1963 classic, *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*. While some of the characteristics may have changed, what is important about Goffman’s description is the notion of a standard for masculinity, a standard understood by men in a given time and place.

There is only one complete unblushing male in America: a young, married, white, urban, northern, heterosexual Protestant father of college education, fully employed, of good complexion, weight, and height, and a recent record in sports. Every American male tends to look out upon the world from this perspective. . . . Any male who fails to qualify in any of these ways is likely to view himself—during moments at least—as unworthy, incomplete, and inferior; at times he is likely to pass and at times he is likely to find himself being apologetic or aggressive concerning known-about aspects of himself he knows are probably seen as undesirable.

While Goffman was probably right that men tend either to conceal aspects of their identity out of shame, apologize for them, or become confronta-

tional about them, it is also possible that men might try to change themselves and become more acceptably masculine. *The Company He Keeps* argues exactly that and explores the ways that men in fraternities have done so throughout the history of these organizations.<sup>2</sup>

Fraternal masculinity, from 1825 to at least 1970, was regarded by most college students as the preeminent or hegemonic form of masculinity on college campuses, the standard by which all other college men were measured. While there were always those willing to abandon the standards that fraternity men set, such detractors were often regarded by many, and certainly by fraternity men, as being less than fully men. These detractors were different types of people in different eras, but they all differed from fraternity men in terms of their masculinity—some by choice, others by circumstance.<sup>3</sup>

In examining fraternal masculinity, and in contrast to much of the recent cultural and social history of men and masculinity, I am less concerned with how men understood or perceived ideals of masculinity and more focused on the ways that men reacted to those ideals.<sup>4</sup> In other words, some men may have been made anxious by standards of masculinity, but what much of the current literature ignores is that they sometimes took steps to remedy that anxiety. In search of respect and prestige, men have performed particular acts, behaved in particular ways, and made particular decisions. In so doing, men in fraternities have structured not only their own lives, but also the lives of many of their fellow students.

From the beginning, fraternity brothers have defined their masculinity through the exclusion of other college students. In this exclusion—not just from their own ranks but often from college life more broadly—they affected the outsiders' lives as well as their own. As masculinity became increasingly defined through active heterosexuality during the twentieth century, many fraternity men used women, often against their will, to bolster their masculinity. While fraternities have influenced the lives of students on campus, the values they inculcated in their members and the standards of behavior they demanded also reached beyond collegiate environs. Fraternity men were sent off into the world with these values, beliefs, and behaviors; because those who joined fraternities were often middle- and upper-class white men bound for careers in business, law, medicine, and politics—positions of prestige and power in the United States—fraternal masculinity has set standards for life beyond the college campus.

While at times acknowledging the more inane aspects of fraternities, this book insists upon their significance in U.S. society. They have long

been one of the most influential forces on the college campus and are worthy of study for this reason alone. The connections and opportunities afforded by membership in a college fraternity have also done much to advance the careers and achievements of countless fraternity men. Further, many who learn certain standards of masculinity in college fraternities go on to rule our country, quite literally: disproportionate numbers of the nation's senators and congressmen were in fraternities, and the vast majority of presidents since the 1870s have been members.<sup>5</sup>

Looked at broadly, fraternities have always been about class status, about the establishment and maintenance of what Pierre Bourdieu called "social capital." They have been training grounds for the middle and upper class and vehicles for the perpetuation of those classes. By banding together in exclusive classed groups, fraternity men reproduce the very class status that qualified them for membership in the first place. This was most true for the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries but remains so to a certain degree to this day. Men who are already privileged by dint of their attendance at a college or university are further elevated above their less wealthy peers through fraternity membership. The same can be said for fraternities' racial makeup. While this is less true today, at least in some regions of the country, many college fraternities have consistently relied upon race and religion—whiteness and Protestantism—as important criteria for membership.<sup>6</sup>

Class and race have been, in many respects, the driving force behind the exclusivity of fraternities—and hence structuring elements of fraternal masculinity—but other factors have also been at work, particularly in the twentieth century. Two deserve special mention: the roles of women and of homosexuality. For the bulk of the nineteenth century, most schools with fraternities were masculine strongholds, enrolling men only. Those in fraternities were selected for membership based on issues of class and, toward the end of the century, race and ethnicity. The excluded were the foils for fraternal masculinity: in the earliest days, fraternity men's poor and pious classmates training for the ministry; later, simply the less wealthy; and toward the end of the century, newly arrived second-generation immigrant classmates. Manliness throughout the nineteenth century was also defined more generally in opposition to boyhood. A man was the opposite of a boy, and fraternity men were often very eager to define themselves as men.<sup>7</sup>

By the end of the nineteenth century, however, as gender roles became somewhat more malleable and women began to assert greater autonomy in public, the definition of manhood shifted. Men embraced a more aggres-

sive and virile masculinity that took womanhood or femininity as its foil. This shift was in part a reaction to women's increased demands for equality and an effort to ensure that power remained a masculine prerogative. At least by the 1920s, if not earlier, masculinity had also incorporated heterosexuality as a constitutive element. For most of the nineteenth century, there had been no specter of the effeminate homosexual as a distinct kind of man. By the early twentieth century, however, this had changed, and masculine men were understood to be heterosexual men; they were defined not only in opposition to women but also in comparison to those men who were thought to be like women: homosexuals.<sup>8</sup>

As groups of men who lived, ate, slept, and bathed together, men in fraternities attracted suspicion. Could this intimate friendship between young men be a cover for a den of homosexual vice? In some cases, as we shall see, that was indeed the case. That this was not so for the vast majority of fraternities did not lessen the burden under which fraternity men found themselves laboring by the early twentieth century. In order to prove that they were in no way homosexual, they would have to demonstrate their heterosexuality, which they did through dating and sexual conquest. They boasted about both, not only to each other but also to others on campus. Fraternal masculinity became characterized by successful heterosexuality and by popularity among women. Fraternity men began to take these factors into consideration when making decisions about membership. This shift in masculinity to self-consciously valorize heterosexual activity was perhaps the most decisive development in fraternities' history and would have some of the most profound effects for other college students, particularly women. By the postwar period (and this remains abundantly clear today), fraternity men used and abused women in order to establish themselves as masculine men, gaining prestige and respect from their brothers through exploitative sex with women for whom they publicly demonstrated no affection. The pages that follow elucidate just how fraternity men—among others—came to embrace this practice as an element of their masculinity. Broadly, then, this book argues that ideals of fraternal manliness originated around class status, had begun to encompass whiteness and Protestantism by the turn of the century, and by the post-World War II period were anchored in the performance of an aggressive heterosexuality.<sup>9</sup>

A NUMBER OF CAVEATS are in order; foremost among them is that not all fraternities are as bad as this book makes them out to be. To read this study

is to take a journey into the seamy underside of fraternity life. To be sure, some fraternities have resisted the most appalling aspects of fraternal masculinity, and, especially in the twentieth century, a number of national fraternities and chapters have done so quite publicly. For instance, in the wake of the racial exclusions of the early twentieth century, some men formed explicitly multicultural fraternities that admitted members regardless of creed, color, or religion.<sup>10</sup> Others in the late twentieth century founded openly gay fraternities.<sup>11</sup> Today some fraternities vehemently oppose the excessive drinking and sexual exploitation that characterize so many other organizations. But that these organizations style themselves so explicitly as multicultural or gay or anti-binge drinking indicates the degree to which so many others do not. Even if one could determine exactly how many individual men and fraternities have self-consciously developed alternative models for college fraternity life, they would still remain exceptions to the rule. *The Company He Keeps* focuses on the masculine ideals and standards throughout the history of college fraternities that have been embraced by large segments of the fraternal world.

Not everything promoted and celebrated in fraternity life is negative. Fraternities have always offered a way for men to form friendships that often last a lifetime. Fraternities provide a congenial, social way of life for their members. They also are a major source of housing on many campuses, a fact of financial significance for colleges and universities. Fraternity membership also provides graduates with connections that have been of great assistance to them in their careers. Further—and perhaps most important—they provide what fraternity men call “brotherhood.” As someone who never joined a college fraternity, I am perhaps less qualified to speak about the subject of brotherhood, but suffice it to say that many fraternity men attach great sentimental importance to the concept, considering it sacred at times. These themes are not the primary focus of this book, but each will be considered because of what its importance to fraternity men tells us about brothers’ perceptions of themselves and of the purposes of their organizations.

It should also be noted that the versions of masculinity discussed in these pages are by no means limited to men in fraternities. In a sense, a history of fraternities is a case study in changes in masculinity that have occurred much more broadly among youth throughout the nation. Fraternities are a unique case, however, because of their insistence upon group loyalty and conformity. Further, from the 1920s onward, the mainstream media has almost always portrayed the most successful collegian as a fra-

ternity man. Thus, standards of fraternal masculinity have often come to stand in for college culture more generally.<sup>12</sup>

In focusing upon the masculinity of white men in traditionally white and Protestant college fraternities, this book is not meant to be descriptive of Jewish, Catholic, African American, Asian American, Latino, multicultural, or gay fraternities. While many of these organizations share similarities with white and Protestant fraternities, there are also key differences between them, not least of which is that all of the above-mentioned organizations were formed precisely because the men in them were at least initially excluded from white, straight, Protestant fraternities. That exclusion is part of the story, however, integral to fraternity men's conceptions of their own masculinity. And while college sororities and coeducational fraternities are discussed in the pages that follow, these organizations, too, are not broadly represented here.<sup>13</sup>

Critics of Greek life have had varied concerns throughout the almost 200-year history of college fraternities. In their earliest days, ministerial faculties objected to fraternal secrecy as being sacrilegious. Later, college administrators complained about wealthy fraternity men's drinking and spending habits. Mid-twentieth-century concerns were also related to alcohol, as well as to the antidemocratic nature of fraternities. Contemporary detractors focus upon binge drinking, hazing violence and deaths, and sexual assault. I address all of these problems throughout; the importance of any of them lies in what they can tell us about fraternity men as men, and further, what they have meant for other students on campus who were not fraternity members. Readers can extrapolate from the analysis a moral or commonsense argument about any and all of these activities, but my purpose is not to indict fraternity men for what they do to each other in the name of proving masculinity. This is history, in other words, and not educational policy. The exceptions to this rule are sexual assault and racial, sexual, and heterosexist harassment and bigotry. What fraternity men do among themselves to feel masculine, while often foolhardy, is in most respects their own business. As soon as they enlist others, however unwillingly, in the service of establishing masculinity, they have crossed a line, and for that they come in for censure in the pages that follow.

THIS IS A BOOK about the history of gender, about how men in college fraternities have thought about masculinity and how they have acted it out. Much of what we think of as the substance of gender—what makes us masculine and feminine human beings—may seem beyond our control. We