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James Rueff  
*DePauw University*

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Bursting the Bubble: The 1988 “Ghetto Party” and DePauw’s Problem with Diversity

James Rueff

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“[Greek Life] has allowed the members, including those not prejudiced, to go through college without ever really dealing with the diversity of the larger society around us. It is easy to understand how many, within such a setting, would not be sensitive to the fact that black students would be terribly offended and hurt by the comments displayed Friday night.”<sup>1</sup>

- Doug Driemeier, *The DePauw*, October 18, 1988

In the fall of 1988, Jay Bennett was on duty as a Residential Assistant in Mason Hall when several black students pounded on his door. They were upset about a party that a fraternity, Alpha Tau Omega, hosted that night.<sup>2</sup> Fraternity members wore blackface and dressed as the homeless while party guests came dressed like pimps and prostitutes.<sup>3</sup> Racial slurs and graffiti on the basement walls read, “Ku Klux Klan” and “Jesse Jackson sucks cock” among others.<sup>4</sup> This “Ghetto Party” as it would become known, revealed the underlying racist tensions on DePauw’s campus and within the University’s Greek system.

DePauw as an institution historically had been an overwhelmingly white school. Even as other similar-sized liberal arts colleges and universities in the early 1980s increased emphasis on integrating their student body and faculty, DePauw stagnated.<sup>5</sup> It was not until the appointment of Robert G. Bottoms as University President in the summer of 1986 that DePauw finally started pushing for more diversity on campus.<sup>6</sup> The influx of non-white students and faculty to DePauw would alter culture, tradition, and space on a campus that had built itself around these three pillars of community. The “Ghetto Party” was what finally burst the tension of the DePauw bubble and made it clear to minority students that they could not rely on the administration or the white student body.

I argue that in response to the “Ghetto Party” perpetrated by white, Greek life students who were intentionally ignorant of their racist actions, black students established black Greek Life on DePauw’s campus as a space for black culture and representation on campus. Bottoms wanted DePauw to become nationally recognized, but the University would never achieve this because of the strength of the Greek system.<sup>7</sup> Forming spaces and culture other than the white, Greek system was the focus of President Bottoms’s tenure, but it was the black students who took it upon themselves to bring black Greek Life to DePauw. Only by diversifying the student body and faculty could DePauw become a nationally recognized school.<sup>8</sup> The “Ghetto Party” encapsulated a switch in culture at DePauw between the assumptions and imaginations of race formed by white students versus the lived reality of minority students.

DePauw’s so-called “Ghetto party” has not been covered in any substantial, historical manner before. This paper establishes the timeline of the party. It then explains the culture of the 1980s, and how that culture effected how white students responded to the party as well as the active role black students took in carving out spaces to express themselves. Other “Ghetto” parties are a phenomenon beyond DePauw’s campus that hint at a larger structure at place that DePauw is but one instance. The narrative that I have chosen however, is rooted in rich source material present at DePauw and emphasizes conditions unique to DePauw.

To tell this story, I pinpointed three main collections: *The DePauw* newspaper, the archival collection of President Robert Bottoms, and interviews that I conducted with people personally involved in the party. *The DePauw* newspaper articles for the academic year 1988-89 provide a plethora of information surrounding the “Ghetto Party” and student reactions to the party. Other newspaper articles between the years of 1986-2018 provide further information on context and aftermath of the party. Robert Bottom’s archival collection points towards the

administration's role in trying to diversify DePauw's population and how the Board of Trustees felt about the efforts of black students trying to bring black Greek life to DePauw.

The party took place only 31 years ago. The oral history provided by interviews gave insight and viewpoints that *The DePauw* and other documents could not. President Bottoms was the man responsible for the push to diversify DePauw. Bottoms answered why the administration heavily recruited minority students and what impact the party had on race relations on campus and on himself. Dorothy Brown offered a perspective as an administrator and a woman of color at DePauw. She advised minority students on campus and has direct experience with how DePauw changed over the past three decades. Jay Hoffman was the President of Alpha Tau Omega at the time of the party and he had a direct role in the party and how the fraternity dealt with the post-party aftermath. Jay Bennett, the President of the Association of Afro-American Students at the time of the party, offered perspective on the black responses on campus not fully captured anywhere else.

This paper will delve first into the background information surrounding race relations at the national level, collegiate level, and at DePauw. Next, the paper will investigate how the University started to recruit minority students and faculty as a precursor to campus culture in the 1988-89 academic year of the party and its aftermath. How white people reacted to the event will be put into conversation with Barbara Applebaum's book, *Being White, Being Good*. The book tackles how and why white people believe themselves to either be non-racist or unaware of their racist actions. In tandem with *The DePauw* articles that highlight frustration surrounding the continued coverage of the "Ghetto Party", the book adds a nuanced, layered argument to the why the racism of the party persisted months after the event occurred. Finally, this paper will end with exploring the origins of black Greek Life on DePauw's campus and how the "Ghetto Party" had

a role in shaping its arrival in the spring of 1991. The party was a culmination of DePauw's emphasis on diversifying the community combined with students' lack of racial sensitivity that led to black students forming spaces for their own culture on campus.

### **America, Universities, and Black Bodies**

Dating back to the seventeenth century, prominent universities in America were founded by men involved with the slave trade. Universities such as Yale, Princeton, and Harvard benefited from the slave economy as it was a fundamental aspect of colony building. The Trustees of these colleges relied on the financial support of slaveholders and the attendance of their sons to survive.<sup>9</sup> Slaves were also used to build up campuses and maintain its cleanliness. In fact, ideas that embraced white racial superiority, the continued enslavement of Africans, and the dispossession of Native American lands were taught and cultivated within American universities.<sup>10</sup> Universities have long been spaces where systemic racism persists. Creating a racism-free environment on campus was never a priority for much of history. It does not bring in the money like making donors happy and keeping the tuition money flowing in.<sup>11</sup>

Through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the trend continued for slaves playing a role in building the infrastructure of universities across the country. Following the emancipation of the slaves and the Reconstruction era, the Tuskegee Institute founded in 1881 gave a roadmap for a successful black college. Yet, this roadmap laid out by Booker T. Washington meant churning out black college graduates that did what they were told and followed the racist rules of the land. In the 1920s, many black students led rebellions on their campus to take back control of their education and get rid of the white presidents of their black colleges.<sup>12</sup>

The second half of the twentieth century saw students participate in the civil rights movement. In addition, they fought for colleges to start offering African American history and related courses. The rise in the idea of “Black Power”, an advocacy for black racial pride, self-sufficiency, and equality for all people of Black and African descent, was given credence as students took hold of buildings at universities such as Cornell, Voorhees, and Cheney State to protest the unfair treatment of black students by the administration and student body.<sup>13</sup> By the time the 1980s rolled around, many universities had integrated African American studies into their academia.<sup>14</sup> Yet, racism and displays of racism still lingered.

Mimicking and “celebrating” black bodies and culture was a fond pastime of the American people in the nineteenth century. Blackface minstrelsy is an entertainment practice where white performers dress up in blackface and put on shows that caricature people of African descent. The minstrel shows were an established part of culture in the northern United States during the nineteenth century.<sup>15</sup> These minstrel shows explicitly took from black culture and obscured race relations by pretending that slavery was amusing, right, and natural.<sup>16</sup>

Moving into the twentieth century, blackface started to be portrayed in new media forms. The blockbuster film *The Birth of a Nation* (1915) had blackface characters depicted as rapists. The stereotypes were powerful as a recruiting tool for the Ku Klux Klan in the 1920s. The first film with synchronized sound and music track, *The Jazz Singer* (1927), had blackface as a prominent part of its story narrative.<sup>17</sup> By the 1930s and the following decades, blackface as a form in media declined.<sup>18</sup>

The stigma against blackface and minstrel shows did not disappear from public view until after the 1950s. Blackface performances were still a part of many college campuses, but happened behind closed doors, away from public viewing. In 1958, a sorority at the University of

Alabama staged a blackface re-enactment of the first African American student to attend the university.<sup>19</sup> A member of a fraternity at George State University in the late 1960s and early 1970s remembered the time his fraternity put on a “Soul Review” party that featured white members dressing up in blackface and pretending to be groups such as the Temptations and the Four Tops. To this day, he defends his actions as homages to black performers and that what his fraternity did was totally innocent.<sup>20</sup>

In the 1980s, President Reagan brought to the White House a record of race relations that was unfavorable to black Americans. His status as the major conservative political figure of the 1980s influenced how Americans perceived race relations. Reagan had opposed major civil rights legislation such as the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Voting Rights Act of 1965, and the Fair Housing Act of 1968.<sup>21</sup> During his presidency, Reagan also supported tax breaks for schools that discriminated based on race and vetoed the Civil Rights Restoration Act of 1987. A large portion of his impact on race was felt internationally when he refused to support sanctions against the racist, Apartheid government of South Africa. The anti-Apartheid movement was widespread on college campuses, including DePauw. This campaign tried to get DePauw to stop investing endowments in United States corporations doing business in South Africa.<sup>22</sup>

The 1980s were a false-apex in race relations in the United States. The sputtering out of the civil rights movement in the 1970s combined with the legislation passed for equal rights in the 1960s meant that many white Americans believed that racism and the fight for equality were over. The mission had been accomplished. There was a feeling that the 1980s were a new age of positive race relations. People viewed racism as being defeated and now being “colorblind” was tolerant and non-racist.<sup>23</sup>

The rise of blaxploitation films and TV shows in the 1970s seemed to hint at a new wave for representation for America's black population in popular culture and the media. Blaxploitation was a new subgenre of films that depicted African-Americans in starring roles and were produced for a predominantly black audience.<sup>24</sup> Films such as *Shaft* and *Dolemite* were big successes that popularized stereotypical images of black crime, black pimps, and black sex drive.<sup>25</sup> These films were popular with African-American audiences, but the production and release were still fully in the hands of white, Hollywood executives.<sup>26</sup> These images of the black community influenced those that had no other relationship to black people to draw them in their mind as the stereotypes portrayed on screen. Being born into existence, these stereotypes grew with the white adolescents that viewed them. These ideas of the black community were brought to college and thus the idea of a "Ghetto Party" was born.

From this context, the ghetto parties and blackface of white students of the 1970s and 1980s was an homage to the culture and people they tried to emulate. Some imagine these practices as innocent and devoid of hate.<sup>27</sup> Yet, there were 280 racial incidents on white college campuses between 1986-1989.<sup>28</sup> During this time frame, incidents of harassment and violence occurred at the University of Michigan and the University of Massachusetts. More than 34% of racial incidents happened in the Midwest in the 1986-87 school year, more than any other region of the United States.<sup>29</sup> It is unlikely that such a high number of racist events across multiple campuses is a coincidence. Alpha Tau Omega's "Ghetto Party" is in line with this historical context. The "Ghetto Party" occurred on DePauw's campus because of the monolithic culture established by the Greek system.

A "ghetto party" is an event hosted by a predominately white organization, usually a fraternity, that features costumes that white people dress up in such as prostitutes, pimps, and

soul musicians. Some white attendants may be wearing blackface to fully represent the black people that they dress up as. The music is soul, hip-hop, and rap, music forms closely associated with black culture, especially in the 1970s and 80s.<sup>30</sup> These parties belittled minority students' culture. An invitation to a party hosted by a fraternity at UC San Diego asserted, "Ghetto chicks have a very limited vocabulary."<sup>31</sup> At DePauw, members of Alpha Tau Omega asked their black guests if the party was offensive. "You're not ignorant if they ask you."<sup>32</sup> This phrase by one of the black students that attended the party emphasized DePauw's place as a continued bastion of racism and white ignorance.

Founded in 1837, DePauw's motto reads, "the college is the light and the splendor of the common good."<sup>33</sup> Despite DePauw residing in the free-slavery state of Indiana, it took over fifty years for the first African-American, Tucker E. Wilson, to graduate from the institution in 1888.<sup>34</sup> DePauw's famous chemist, Percy L. Julian, a 1920 graduate, whose name graces the science building on campus, had to live as a butler for Sigma Chi because blacks were banned from living on campus.<sup>35</sup> Not until the 1960s did black students officially organize in Greencastle and on DePauw's campus. The Greencastle chapter of the National Association of Colored People formed in 1963 while the Association of Afro-American Students (AAAS) at DePauw started in the following years.<sup>36</sup> At this time, some fraternity and sorority chapters also opened their membership to black students.<sup>37</sup> Not until 1986, the start of Bottoms's presidency would a substantial number of minority students attend DePauw.

### **The Administration's Aggressive Recruitment of Minority Students and Faculty**

In the summer of 1986, newly-appointed President Bottoms walked on DePauw's campus with Stuart Watson, a DePauw alum, class of 1938, who asked Bottoms what his main goal was for DePauw.<sup>38</sup> Bottoms said he wanted to enhance DePauw's national reputation. Stuart told him

that he would never increase DePauw's national reputation if the Greek system stayed dominant.<sup>39</sup> Over 80 percent of DePauw students were associated with Greek life at the start of Bottoms's presidency.<sup>40</sup> On a campus with a 1.3 percent black population in 1987, a study of DePauw's social environment conducted the same year found that DePauw students "have little tolerance for differences. Diversity of any kind is viewed as a weakness or as a threat."<sup>41</sup> Greek life made DePauw less appealing to minority students and faculty because of the overwhelmingly white culture associated with the system. As President, Bottoms set his administration up to counteract this established culture of DePauw by aggressively recruiting minority students and faculty.

President Bottoms's stressed the changing demographics of America in his Inauguration Address in 1986. He asked "How will DePauw be relevant to the young people growing up in this diverse culture? Many contemporary students are more familiar with European culture than with life in the Bronx or Chicago's south side."<sup>42</sup> With this in mind, Bottoms and the administration developed the Black Student Leader Award and similar scholarship for minority students and recruited vigorously at minority high schools.<sup>43</sup> This recruitment also meant special minority student/parent overnights at DePauw to come and experience what a day at DePauw would be like.<sup>44</sup> The recruitment did not end when the students enrolled at DePauw, however. Bottoms spent a lot of time with the minority students he recruited. There were many social gatherings at the President's House including a picnic every month with the black faculty and students. Bottoms got to know the black students personally.<sup>45</sup> He tried to create a welcoming environment for the minority students and doing this meant focusing on the recruitment of black faculty as well.

There was only one black faculty member when Bottoms became President, Stanley Warren in the Education Department. Bottoms thought that making DePauw a better school started with diversifying the faculty. He believed that black students would be more open to coming to DePauw if its professors were also diverse.<sup>46</sup> Dorothy Brown was Bottoms's first minority administrative hire. She was Assistant Dean and Director of Minority Affairs when the "Ghetto Party" occurred.<sup>47</sup> Brown was President Bottoms's first minority faculty hire in 1986. She was hired into the Education department after she was a principal in the Warren Township schools in Indianapolis.<sup>48</sup> She left Indianapolis after a white mom threatened to, "whip my black ass."<sup>49</sup>

Brown made the transition from faculty to administration after she had a chat with President Bottoms. He wanted Brown to be a part of his vision to make DePauw truer to the real world. She was to be a role model for the growing number of black students. At the time, there were only twenty-nine black students on campus when Brown was hired.<sup>50</sup> Bottoms also wanted to make sure that when DePauw had a faculty or administration opening that there was a minority candidate being interviewed each time.<sup>51</sup> This emphasis put on minority students over the majority white students is highlighted by a staff member, "If difference becomes 'acceptable', the students will suddenly be faced with no boundaries and no rigid guidelines to govern their behavior.' If this happens, the bubble will have burst!"<sup>52</sup> The "Ghetto Party" combined with the blackface burst the DePauw bubble wide open. Systemic racism at a predominantly, white institution is the crux of DePauw's problem with diversity.

### **Campus Culture before the "Ghetto Party"**

DePauw students were involved with discrimination in the Greencastle community. Jay Bartelt's "A man's home is his Greencastle" outlined the author's hateful view of the citizens of

Greencastle. Bartelt remarked that “for two years, I have watched, heard, and smelled (sometimes from a great distance) the Townies.”<sup>53</sup> Bartelt emphasized how townies are part of a Liberal Arts Education because they offer no apparent purpose or benefit to a college student.<sup>54</sup> He then offered an example of their appearance, language, and rituals that included insulting their IQ, compared the Greencastle Marsh and Hardees to hunting grounds, and equated Greencastle women and their makeup to bulldozers.<sup>55</sup>

The backlash from Bartelt’s opinion piece was fierce with three letters to the editor appearing in the very next addition of the newspaper. The first was from Debbi Bernsee, Operations Coordinator at WGRE, DePauw’s radio station. She exploded on Bartelt, emphasizing that he needed to learn compassion, take a journalism course, and that he added to the negative depiction of DePauw students that many Greencastle residents hold.<sup>56</sup> The next letter by Jay Hosler, a DePauw senior, criticized Bartelt for his unconstructive, self-righteous article. Hosler then added he half expected a line from Kipling dealing with the white man’s burden.<sup>57</sup> The poem “White Man’s Burden” by Rudyard Kipling stated that white men must bring order and civilization to the Philippines as a part of the United States colonization efforts.<sup>58</sup> The final letter from another DePauw senior, Karen Napoli, explained how living in Greencastle for over four years meant she cannot hold these same prejudices as Bartelt. She acknowledged how many DePauw alumni, current DePauw students, and other Greencastle residents are successful and contribute to the town and are not the sub-human species that Bartelt made them out to be.<sup>59</sup>

The quick responses to Bartelt’s piece showcased a desire to appreciate the townspeople that DePauw resided in. People felt strongly about Greencastle and about the backwards views Bartelt expressed. This same response was felt in the aftermath of the “Ghetto Party”. The

DePauw community came together in condemnation of Bartlet's article just as they did the "Ghetto Party". However, the party and the events surrounding it developed into a bigger issue that exposed DePauw to how racism affects the less privileged.

### **The "Ghetto Party" and Aftermath**

On the night of Friday, October 14, 1988, Alpha Tau Omega hosted its twelfth annual "Ghetto Party" during Old Gold Weekend. The party was a six-way collaboration between the Greek houses of Alpha Tau Omega, Beta Theta Pi, Sigma Chi, Alpha Chi Omega, Kappa Alpha Theta, and Kappa Kappa Gamma. By the time the party was in full swing around 11 PM, President of Alpha Tau Omega at the time, George (Jay) Hoffman, remembered seeing two members of his fraternity with blackface on and telling them "you gotta get that shit off your face now."<sup>60</sup> Black students invited by members of Alpha Tau Omega were shocked by what they saw.<sup>61</sup> Hallways decorated with graffiti on newspaper that expressed hateful phrases such as "Ku Klux Klan", "Jesse Jackson sucks cock", "F- South Africa", and "Spook". Attendees of the party dressed up like pimps and prostitutes. Three members of Alpha Tau Omega decorated in blackface. Members of the fraternity asked black students if the party offended them.<sup>62</sup>

Jay Bennett, President of the Association of Afro-American Students at the time, remembered black students pounding on his door the night of the "Ghetto Party" and described to him what went down at Alpha Tau Omega.<sup>63</sup> Gatherings were held with black students and administration including Dorothy Brown and the University chaplain, Stuart Lord, an African-American man. Lord expressed these meetings were extremely emotional: "you could wrench the carpet; it was full of tears."<sup>64</sup> AAAS decided its first action would be to have a protest during the Old Gold football game that Saturday. They made up signs that said, "Ghetto Party?" and

“No more Ghetto Parties!” and paraded them out during halftime of the football game right before the crowning of the Old Gold King and Queen.<sup>65</sup>

After the game, President Bottoms went down to the field to talk to Jay Bennett and found out what occurred the night before. Bennett told him that they were staging a silent march that evening where they would march to each house involved in the “Ghetto Party”. The marchers planned to gather at the AAAS house, located at the time on Anderson Street, starting at 5 pm. Bennett invited Bottoms to attend the march. Bottoms told Bennett that he had a party for major DePauw donors that night at the Walden Inn and may not be able to attend.<sup>66</sup> However, Bottoms thought it over and decided to attend the march after thinking about his professors he had during Divinity school who were active in the civil rights movement, “I could remember those professors at Vanderbilt, and I thought if I don’t participate in this march, I would never be able to face those folks again after all the sacrifices they had made. It had become apparent to me I needed to participate in the march.”<sup>67</sup> By the time the march started around 6:15 pm, there were about two hundred people waiting to join AAAS, President Bottoms, as well as other administration and faculty members.

The marchers traveled first to Alpha Tau Omega where they were greeted by loud rap music with one member of the fraternity shouting “Silver-spooned liberals!” at the crowd. After the marchers sang “We Shall Overcome” they were asked to leave the property by president Jay Hoffman.<sup>68</sup> Hoffman expressed in the interview that he wanted the marchers to leave the property because of the number of drunk fraternity members and alumni that were at the house. He told the marchers ““I don’t want anything to go wrong, is there any way you could back up a bit?”” Hoping that there would not be a serious escalation between members and alumni of the fraternity and the marchers.<sup>69</sup> “The perception was that I was throwing them off.”<sup>70</sup> That the

marchers were being rejected by the house whereas Hoffman wanted to minimize any potential risk of injury.

After Alpha Tau Omega, the marchers moved to each of the other houses involved where they received more positive responses. Members of Sigma Chi cheered the marchers on, while members of Kappa Kappa Gamma held hands and sang “We Shall Overcome” with the marchers. By the time the marchers got to the last house, Beta Theta Pi, the crowd had grown to over three hundred people. The members of Beta Theta Pi were grouped on their front porch and their president at the time apologized for the fraternity’s role in the party: “This [the party] in no way reflects how we feel. If we had known about the decorations, we would have done something to stop it. We support you.”<sup>71</sup>

The campus cheered the silent march as an overall success and Bennett described the march as helpful in venting black anger. The march made a statement and gave people a chance to come together in likeminded support.<sup>72</sup> A cartoon published in *The DePauw* compared the blackface depicted at the “Ghetto Party” to the Nazis [Fig.1]. The cartoon showed four people, one Jewish boy, a Nazi in one room and a man dressed in blackface with a black man in another room. The Nazi and the man in blackface are both saying, “Excuse me, but does this offend you?” directed at the Jewish boy by the Nazi and to the black man by the man in blackface. The comparison made between Nazis and blackface exemplified how the incident was being portrayed at DePauw. The campus was taking the party seriously.

The march also gave credence to the fact that racism was still alive at DePauw. Red ribbons could be picked up at the Campus Ministries Center, the AAAS house or from a AAAS member to be worn as a show of solidarity with people that were grieving following the “Ghetto Party”.<sup>73</sup> Hoffman tried to call Bottoms’s office to figure out what his next steps would be, but

Bottoms had left campus after the silent march and did not return until Wednesday for the Community Healing Rally.<sup>74</sup> On that Sunday, the media descended onto DePauw's campus. Newspapers such as the *Chicago Tribune*, *Orlando Sentinel*, and *AP News* reported on the "Ghetto Party".<sup>75</sup> Jay Hoffman even gave a statement for *Good Morning America*.<sup>76</sup> The nation's eye had come to DePauw.

The administration organized the Community Healing Rally for the Wednesday following the "Ghetto Party", October 19, to bring the community together. The campus packed into Kresge Auditorium with over two thousand people in attendance.<sup>77</sup> Some black students protested the Healing Rally outside the auditorium. These black students felt that a healing rally sponsored and imposed by a majority white institution would not bring about change, but was intended to quiet down the aftereffects of the "Ghetto Party".<sup>78</sup> The program included prepared speeches by Jay Hoffman, Jay Bennett, President Bottoms, and Stuart Lord among others.<sup>79</sup> Hoffman and the rest of Alpha Tau Omega as a house decided on self-sanctions before the administration could punish them with the other houses involved. Hoffman and the social committee of Alpha Tau Omega would resign effective-immediately. All members of the house were now on social probation. The fraternity cancelled all social events for the rest of the year. Members of the fraternity would have to do a thousand hours of community service and a planned philanthropy with AAAS was in the works.<sup>80</sup>

Bottoms addressed the community with his speech by promoting strength and learning from the events of the previous weekend. He stressed:

"I am convinced based on my conversations with so many of you, we are sorry we hurt our friends. We are sorry we embarrassed our living unit. We are sorry we embarrassed

the University. And many others are sorry we did not notice. But the real test is not how sorry we are, but what we can do so to ensure this does not happen again.”<sup>81</sup>

Bottoms used the word “we” to speak about the six Greek houses that were involved with the party. The remorse of these white, Greek students was emphasized in the context that the community of DePauw and Greencastle was overwhelmingly white. It is the white students who must recognize the prejudice and then change for the black students to be fully accepted. Stuart Lord ended the Rally with a DePauw rendition of Martin Luther King’s “I Have A Dream” speech. Lord expressed:

“I have a dream that right here on this campus, DePauw University will be an inclusive campus. A diverse community where all persons will come together and take advantage of *all* of this opportunities: educationally, socially, morally, politically, ethically, and religiously. And feel that they add to the richness of this campus.”<sup>82</sup>

Lord’s comparison of DePauw and the “Ghetto Party” to the March on Washington and the civil rights movement is indicative of how these two events shared similarities. A nation struggling with racism and the fight for civil rights reached an apex with the famous speech by Dr. King. At DePauw, a University amid the movement of increasing minority students dealt with racism on its campus. Lord believed this Rally to be that March on Washington moment. By emphasizing DePauw as a “diverse community” Lord expressed that the campus is open to everyone and that everyone benefited from diversity.

With this same sentiment, students at the Rally signed their name to the Pledge Statement [Fig. 2] which expressed an urgency for students to take a stand against racism and to be sensitive to those impacted by prejudice and discrimination.<sup>83</sup> This pledge was a key part in

growing support from members of DePauw's campus to change and eradicate discrimination and prejudice from their lives. Other people were against the pledge statement however. Brandt Sakakeeny criticized the pledge and wrote "I will not sign my name declaring the 'morally reprehensibility' of ATO's action, and I will not wear a red ribbon demonstrating solidarity for a cause about which many of the ribbon-wearers know very little."<sup>84</sup> Sakakeeny criticized the way in which the community tried to go about bringing change and understanding to a community that did not have much exposure to non-whites before President Bottoms's implemented his minority recruitment programs. DePauw's deep-rooted systemic racism had been revealed in an unsettling and shocking way because of the "Ghetto Party".

The "Ghetto Party" delved into the deeper issues of predominately white institutions and the Greek system. As President Bottoms said, "many others are sorry we did not notice."<sup>85</sup> How is it that no one did notice? What are the implications for no one noticing that such behavior was wrong? White ignorance was a product of DePauw's community and the world that produced its culture.

### **Systemic White Ignorance**

The unpacking of white innocence is the focus of Barbara Applebaum's pedagogy on white complicity and systemic white ignorance. It helped unpack the white backlash against the outrage of Alpha Tau Omega's "Ghetto Party". The white complicity claim asserts that the practices of whiteness and benefiting from white privilege, contribute to the maintenance of systemic racial injustice.<sup>86</sup> A *The DePauw* article two weeks removed from the "Ghetto Party" questioned the extent to which the party was offensive. White students at the party exclaimed "'I was there and I didn't see anything.' If most students didn't notice anything, the statements must have 1) not offended many; or 2) been taken into context with the party."<sup>87</sup> The claim that

because individuals did not see anything wrong with the party was how Applebaum constructed how most white people see racism as individual rather than systematic.<sup>88</sup> The author of the article was not factoring in race in understanding if people were offended by the party. However, the reality of racism is never understood as systemic because well-intending whites do not want to see themselves as racist.

The “Ghetto Party” was a result of systemic racism. President of Alpha Tau Omega at the time, Jay Hoffman reflected, “why didn’t we individually or collectively realize it was wrong?”<sup>89</sup> The tradition of the party at Alpha Tau Omega goes back twelve years prior to 1988 which puts the original “Ghetto Party” in the fall of 1977. It was always Old Gold Weekend which gave the opportunity for alumni to come back each year to reinforce the party’s tradition; thereby making sure the party was as great as it had been in previous years.<sup>90</sup> Looking through yearbooks, there was no reference or picture to the “Ghetto Party” before 1988.<sup>91</sup> Every registered party had to be approved by the Student Affairs branch of DePauw’s administration. The form stated explicitly the theme of the party and what that theme entailed.<sup>92</sup> For twelve years, the administration signed off on their approval of the “Ghetto Party”. Alpha Tau Omega’s statement in the aftermath of the party asserted that “this was not a deliberate or overt racist act on the part of this living unit.”<sup>93</sup> While this quote is debatable, the party itself is a systemic, racist event that correlated with what Applebaum terms, The Racial Contract.

The Racial Contract is “an agreement to not know and *an assurance that this will count as a true version of reality* by those who benefit from the account.” White ignorance will feel like knowledge to those who benefited from the system because it is supported by the social [Greek] system as knowledge.<sup>94</sup> What the members of Alpha Tau Omega knew about the ghetto from media and popular culture is repurposed to create the “Ghetto Party”. Not realizing that the

version of the ghetto created for the party was hurtful to the black students who it offended, some members of Alpha Tau Omega thus dressed up in blackface and even invited black students to the party.<sup>95</sup> There is an ignorance involved with the party that dealt with being woefully uneducated and unknowing of other cultures and races. However, this ignorance does not justify the appropriation of other races. Following the party, the aftermath meant more misunderstanding and attempts by a predominantly white institution to deal with its growing body of minority students.

The study conducted in February 1987 on DePauw's social environment also noted that students in support of adding diversity did so because of the educational value the black students would bring to the white students. They viewed it as making DePauw more "true to life".<sup>96</sup> Jay Bennett remembered that during the silent march the night after the "Ghetto Party", a black student yelled out at the white majority marchers, "They can't do that! They shouldn't be doing that!" This black student was still so angered by the "Ghetto Party" and did not want to see or feel white support.<sup>97</sup> The silent protest at the Old Gold football game and the ensuing march both started as ideas of AAAS, but the march was commandeered by the white, DePauw community. Black students viewed the white support and condemnation of the racist event as a loss of agency of events that they had started. Opinion pieces that supported the black students and condemned the "Ghetto Party" also had the same problems.

In Chris Stoll's emotional piece "The march: a statement of hope" Stoll never mentions the affected subject of the "Ghetto Party": the black students. Instead he praised the rapid spread of the silent march and that the march was an issue of American values more than anything. For Stoll, the issue of tolerance of diversity is "beyond money or race"; unfortunately for Stoll, the "Ghetto Party" and silent march were explicitly about race.<sup>98</sup> Stoll's view was very much aligned

with how the generation growing up in the 1980s did not see race and believe they were free of racial prejudice.<sup>99</sup> Pablo McCloud's editorial remarked that "The less privileged populous in this country are not here to be mocked, but to be lifted up with a brotherly hand to a level at which they themselves will be proud." McCloud continued to criticize the overwhelmingly, white population of DePauw was not conducive to minorities.<sup>100</sup> Using the phrase "lifted up with a brotherly hand" is in line with white, liberal thought. As DePauw started to diversify, white liberals were overly eager to help.

In 2019, Jay Hoffman expressed his full support of the diversity campaign; in 1986, everyone on campus was "100% supportive of [the minority recruitment campaign]."<sup>101</sup> Hoffman lamented that he took part in a party that was so stupid. He described the setup of the "Ghetto Party" as taping up newspaper all over the basement room. Anyone who came into the room the night before or the day of the party would be handed a spray can to write anything they wanted on the walls like the graffiti was in the ghetto.<sup>102</sup> Alpha Tau Omega's would dress up as bums or rappers while women would come dressed as prostitutes.<sup>103</sup> Hoffman expressed he felt Alpha Tau Omega received a fair treatment from the administration and that the story of the "Ghetto Party" was only important to Alpha Tau Omega in so far as they owned up to their mistake.<sup>104</sup>

On top of these points, the administration's creation of the Community Healing Rally was also a white attempt at solving the situation. Hoffman agreed that the Rally was a great, well-executed idea. Hoffman expected the Rally to be contrived because of how specific people were chosen to speak and had to say these prepared statements, but the event itself did not have the same feeling as the build-up.<sup>105</sup> Jay Bennett felt that the Rally was a mixed bag. Black students felt "there should be some other, more pointed action taken with respect to the house [ATO] or

something different than, you know, a healing or a kumbaya thing. It just wasn't a strong enough event in their minds."<sup>106</sup> A portion of the rally's pledge statement that people were highly encouraged to sign read, "I agree to accept individualism among others and to refrain from categorizing any persons."<sup>107</sup> This statement is again evidence of the "colorblindness" of the era, and reinforced the stigma that the DePauw community was not consciously aware of the impact of social customs.<sup>108</sup> Not noticing race meant that white people did not need to engage with themselves in racial terms or acknowledge that race mattered specifically in the context of an event such as the "Ghetto Party".<sup>109</sup>

AAAS felt more action needed to be taken even after the Alpha Tau Omega's self-sanctions. Members felt that the sanctions were too loosely structured and would only force the houses involved to rearrange their social programs. Other AAAS members felt that individual action should have been taken instead of finding general fault with the entire houses.<sup>110</sup> Bennett also stated he did not recall the self-sanctions posed by Alpha Tau Omega. If the President of AAAS could not remember what the sanctions were, then it was unlikely to have made a big impression on the people that the "Ghetto Party" directly affected.<sup>111</sup> The administration's decision did not account for the feelings of black students, nor was their decision explained or investigated in *The DePauw* newspaper articles. Relating to this, Jay Bennett reflected on his time at DePauw and even now as an involved alum:

"You always felt that as though you were trying to justify why you were there. You know, were you there just because Dr. Bottoms had this initiative and you were part of this social experiment and went out and found some kids that probably wouldn't have been here otherwise?"<sup>112</sup>

Bennett felt the effects of silent racism. Barbara Trepagnier defines silent racism as the beliefs and emotions that are unspoken but fuel everyday racism and other racist actions.<sup>113</sup> White people always have their privilege and bias with them. Good-intending whites and unintentional racist actions make up the bulk of racism in American society.<sup>114</sup> It is easy to point to blatant acts of racism, but much harder to pinpoint the microaggressions that target blacks and other minorities every day. This was especially true when minorities finally arrive on predominantly-white campuses to find the structure of racism already soundly in place.

Bennett's feeling of constantly justifying himself at DePauw were confirmed when looking at articles that attacked the reaction to the "Ghetto Party". Brandt Sakakeeny lamented the "bandwagon against the entire ATO house demonstrates the same close-minded prejudice that was responsible for the act in the first place" because of the attention Alpha Tau Omega received without taking into account the entire racism of DePauw.<sup>115</sup> Sakakeeny criticized the effort to make Alpha Tau Omega a scapegoat of the "Ghetto Party" when racism was prevalent on all parts of campus. He argued that other organizations and individuals were just as guilty of racism as Alpha Tau Omega. Walt Duncan, a recent alum, criticized the reaction for being blown out of proportion, "I DOUBT that the young men were white supremacists, however, you would have thought...a three fraternity, three sorority, white supremacists, KKK coalition [was] operating secretly on campus."<sup>116</sup> Whether the party was intentional or not did not matter. The party mattered because of the power dynamics of society that Bennett expressed. Many black students had culture shock coming from cities and urban areas where they lived in majority black communities. Coming to DePauw where that community had shrunk to less than five percent of the campus population, the "Ghetto Party" represented a mocking of their very identity in a hostile, white community.<sup>117</sup>

The “Ghetto Party” threatened the agency of the black students through the party’s historical context which gave the party so much weight and power.<sup>118</sup> These events did not form in a vacuum. They are formed from stereotypes and assumptions about another culture. There is an unspoken belief when speaking about race politics; that “Black people don’t matter.”<sup>119</sup> White American look at black opinions and beliefs as not standing for the entirety of America. Yet, white people will leave out black opinion and beliefs and still say these opinions are about all American opinions.<sup>120</sup> In accordance with believing that black people did not matter was the result of another incident that occurred at Alpha Tau Omega later that same school year.

During DePauw’s winter term of 1989, Alpha Tau Omega hosted a party with Alpha Chi Omega that broke both Greek house’s social probations. Ironically, members of Alpha Chi Omega called the campus police because members of Alpha Tau Omega had stolen composites, a framed collection of photos displaying all current members of a Greek house, from the sorority. When campus police went to investigate Alpha Tau Omega, they found a party in progress.<sup>121</sup> The fraternity had to go to a hearing with the Student Conduct Board, a court made up of selected faculty, administrators and students to hear questionable student activity, to find out if they violated the sanctions of their social probation and lose their charter.<sup>122</sup> Alpha Tau Omega faced three charges: violation of pledge training, violation of alcohol rules, and violation of probationary status.<sup>123</sup> The President of Delta Tau Delta defended Alpha Tau Omega by explaining that “ATO has already served its University sanctioned penalty. What is more significant is that ATO will continue to pay for its mistake now and in the future by having to respond to charges of past racism.”<sup>124</sup> These charges made it seem as though black students would not be traumatized by the impact of the “Ghetto Party” for the rest of their lives. The

administration backed up the position of Delta Tau Delta's president with their ruling in the hearing.

Alpha Tau Omega was found guilty of only one of three charges at their hearing. The Student Conduct Board found "that, notwithstanding the violation on January 26, Alpha Tau Omega has taken a number of positive steps since its previous violation [the "Ghetto Party"] of University policy."<sup>125</sup> The justification by the conduct board reiterated the power of the Greek system. AAAS members wanted individual punishment over the general sanctions Alpha Tau Omega put on themselves. The administration did not hold the Greek houses responsible enough over the course of their sanctions. The end result: a house with a traditional, racist party got let off with a loose punishment after just three months of making amends. The president of Alpha Tau Omega even criticized the reporting of the trial, "To see this as an Administration victory is to distort reality to the breaking point. What happened was that the conduct board reached a reasonable resolution and we at ATO, having lived through weeks of dire threats, are both relieved and grateful."<sup>126</sup> Alpha Tau Omega saw the hearing as a blessing for not losing their charter emphasized again the power of the Greek system and the lack of support for minority students.

The systemic racism of DePauw and the Greek system clashed with the increased number of minority students on campus. During the consulting report on DePauw's social environment in February of 1987, when asked about the diversity program to bring more students to DePauw, one student stated, "I am not opposed if academic standards are not lowered."<sup>127</sup> Resistance and assumptions about race made up how the resurgence of racism in the 1980s was linked to the group-generated attitudes about the meaning of race and structural inequalities. Minorities found themselves disproportionately excluded from mainstream opportunities.<sup>128</sup> Yet, students believed

that these disadvantages were because of the fault of the community or individual rather than the structures of society that benefited white people and disadvantage everyone else.

The result of Alpha Tau Omega's hearing flow strongly into Marion Young's Social Connection Model of Responsibility that claims, "all agents that contribute by their actions to the structural processes that produce injustice have responsibilities to work to remedy these injustices." Everyone that was involved with producing and reproducing structures of injustice are implicated in the outcomes of those structures.<sup>129</sup> That included other Greek houses, the administration, and every individual white person involved with DePauw's campus. Sakakeeny was right in defending Alpha Tau Omega's place as a racism scapegoat when he said, "There is racism [at DePauw], just as there is racism and discrimination elsewhere, but ATO is not the only defendant."<sup>130</sup> DePauw's entire community needed to take responsibility for the "Ghetto Party". The sanctions Alpha Tau Omega imposed on themselves were a good step in the short-term; especially the philanthropy with AAAS which ended up being a three-on-three basketball tournament; a cause where connections could be formed around a common interest.<sup>131</sup> However, there was not an attempt at a long-term strategy of years-and-years of building better race relations within the fraternity or the Greek system at larger. The self-sanctions did not leave a lasting impression and resulted in no substantial growth or punishment for Alpha Tau Omega. The administration also did not sanction the fraternity further; a misstep that could have led to more pointed action being taken. Action that the black students wanted.

### **Campus Culture after the "Ghetto Party"**

The "Ghetto Party" and events that followed indicated a bursting of tension of a campus going through a fundamental change in culture and demographics. This tension forced DePauw to question the institution's dedication to diversifying its community and to preparing

the student body for a rapidly changing world. Professor of Spanish, Ann Rambo put a satirical article in *The DePauw* that discussed the value of having a party that was racist against Hispanics. She wrote: “I do believe a Barrio Party should be the very next thing on your social agendas. How could you have forgone it all this time? I mean, there are so many of them out there, and they’re all so funny.” Rambo also suggested a party in honor of Pearl Harbor calling it “Nuke the Nips.”<sup>132</sup> A freshman wrote to the paper and found Rambo’s letter in poor taste because it was prejudice towards Greek living units.<sup>133</sup> Rambo apologized for anyone she affronted, especially the World War II veteran that told her the Pearl Harbor remark was hurtful.<sup>134</sup> In retaliating against the racism of the “Ghetto Party”, Rambo took on racist language that degraded another minority in America. Whether used in satire or not, the sensitive nature of the party revealed that tempers were high, and satire was not the appropriate response for a community reeling from racism.

Debates about the increased recruitment of minority students took center stage in the opinion pieces of *The DePauw*. Steven Duffield’s article, “Reverse Discrimination” attacked the affirmative action policies of Universities. He argued, “if we are to have a color-blind society, we must recognize that a society of quotas only exasperates racism and discrimination.”<sup>135</sup> He pointed out that Asians did much better academically to Hispanics even when having a similar history of discrimination.<sup>136</sup> He made similar points about how minority students will not have to work as hard because affirmative action opportunities will be given to them by a generous white society.<sup>137</sup> Duffield made a final point referencing how affirmative action scoffs on Martin Luther King Jr’s vision of a society judged by character and not skin color. Duffield argued that whites who expressed this viewpoint will be labeled racist.<sup>138</sup>

The reaction to Duffield's article started with Vikash Yadav's letter to the editor that called out Duffield for using faulty reasoning in his claim that affirmative action perpetuated racism and discrimination.<sup>139</sup> Yadav claimed that admittance scores were not the only criteria for admittance to DePauw; cultural factors were also accounted for.<sup>140</sup> Yadav then took a shot at Duffield's academic record: "If Duffield had taken an intro to psychology course (Basic Psychologic...chap. 15) he would also realize that it is illogical to compare the scores of two separate racial and cultural groups."<sup>141</sup> This personal attack was directed back at Duffield for his comment about the historical discrimination of Asians and Hispanics being similar. Yadav then remarked that because of the society of America, there were inherent differences between black students and white students.<sup>142</sup>

Doug Driemeier, a future Rhodes scholar, also weighed in on Duffield's article. Driemeier stated that Duffield used the same logic as David Duke, the leader of the Ku Klux Klan. Driemeier supposed Duke would use Duffield's stance about affirmative action to put blacks back in their place.<sup>143</sup> Driemeier then called Duffield a cultural bigot for saying that blacks had lower aptitude scores because of their culture and not their race, yet Asians rose out of these same conditions because of their culture. Duffield did not account for the debilitating effects of a culture of poverty and segregations in the ghetto that blacks were afflicted by.<sup>144</sup> Driemeier agreed with Duffield that the goal eventually is to do away with affirmative action, but the disease of racism will take a long time to combat.<sup>145</sup>

Duffield responded to Driemeier directly by reemphasizing how Asian and Jewish-Americans have risen above their struggle.<sup>146</sup> Duffield then noted how victims of reverse discrimination now have new feelings of prejudice because of how race factors into employment, education, and housing.<sup>147</sup> Duffield expressed that affirmative action led to a less equitable

society and that racism will worsen as a result.<sup>148</sup> Duffield took a final shot at Driemeier by suggesting that Driemeier is more culturally deprived than him because Duffield is from San Diego and Driemeier is from Florissant, Missouri.<sup>149</sup> Duffield would transfer to Georgetown University for the last three years of his undergraduate degree.<sup>150</sup>

The black voice not present in *The DePauw* after the “Ghetto Party” surfaced with Toya Sherrod-Sarpy’s opinion articles in the spring of 1989. In her first article, Sherrod-Sarpy called out DePauw students because of their lack of conviction in challenging real issues such as poverty, racism, and gay and lesbian rights.<sup>151</sup> She wondered how many students were unmoved by the racial incidents in the previous semester and criticized the apathetic nature that resulted after the events of the “Ghetto Party” occurred. After the issue was quieted, it was quickly forgotten.<sup>152</sup> In a later piece, Sherrod-Sarpy questioned the extent to which the achievement of civil rights resulted in lasting change. Even with civil rights legislation, black people are still not automatically granted respect and equality.<sup>153</sup>

### **Establishment of Black Greek Life**

During the opening convocation at DePauw for the 1988-1989 academic year, President Bottoms reiterated DePauw’s short-term success in increasing its minority percentage in faculty and the student body. “We have proven, in a short time, that we can [attract minority students]. A far more important issue is whether or not we learn to use the new environment to learn how to live together as equals.”<sup>154</sup> The environment and setting is not new however. With the “Ghetto Party” as an example of the continued systemic racism of the Greek system, there needed to be a new systemic community for black students to be a part of, not just the white, Greek system. That establishment of black Greek Life came in the next years after the “Ghetto Party”.

Black Greek Life tried to be established at DePauw for a few years before the “Ghetto Party” by Kappa Alpha Psi fraternity.<sup>155</sup> The founding four members of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority Inc., Joy Armstead, Robin Batties, Ronda Henry, and Gina Ross, “The Pearls of DePauw” were initiated in May of 1988. Unfortunately, they needed twelve members to establish a DePauw chapter.<sup>156</sup> Jay Bennett explained that it was the students who went out and looked for this sense of community apart from the efforts of the administration:

“From a social aspect that was a really good thing for students. That the AKAs and the Kappas were on campus. It opened DePauw up to black students from other campuses who would come and visit and socialize. So, you didn’t feel as if you had to leave DePauw to have a social life or have a Greek experience.”<sup>157</sup>

The reaction by the student body was foretold in the consulting report done on DePauw’s social environment in 1987, “when the black students seek affiliation with national black fraternities and sororities or other types of group affiliation, there will be an outcry that such activities are counterproductive to diversity.”<sup>158</sup> The arrival of black Greek life prompted questions from the majority white student body and administration. Mainly, the traditional, white Greek system had the infrastructure at DePauw already; why not join any of the Interfraternity or Panhellenic houses on campus? James Schlegel, assistant dean of students at the time of Alpha Kappa Alpha’s initiation in 1988 wondered, “‘It’s too early to tell’ if DePauw needs a black sorority. ‘We would need to find out why the current system does not meet the needs of black students.’”<sup>159</sup> This thinking falls in line with student opinion at the time. Many white students felt that black students were going out and bringing their own Greek houses to campus. Yet, they did not realize that historically black Greek life had its own deep roots and traditions with many prominent African-Americans as members. Kappa Alpha Psi was founded at Indiana University

in 1911. The founding members came together to form a Greek-letter fraternity because of the limits put on them in the University's social life.<sup>160</sup> Alpha Kappa Alpha was founded at Howard University in 1908. The founders came together to form a network of supportive women against the segregated and male-dominated culture of the era.<sup>161</sup> Alpha Kappa Alpha become recognized by the Board of Trustees as the eleventh sorority at DePauw on October 26, 1990; two years after being formed.<sup>162</sup>

Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity Inc. formed in the fall of 1989. Their arrival and pledgship traditions shocked many on DePauw's campus. The eight pledges appeared in class with black turtle necks, black patent leather shoes, blue stocking caps and shaved heads. They moved in a strict formation and observed silence.<sup>163</sup> This type of activity was in line with hazing which was officially condoned at Kappa Alpha Psi in September of 1988. Kappa Alpha Psi's National Pledge Committee Chairman called the pledges' actions, "foolish and less than human" and reminded him of the old animal house days.<sup>164</sup> One of the men involved in the incident said it was "a symbol of unification done for our own personal benefit."<sup>165</sup> This type of behavior by the pledges spoke to how they wanted to perform their culture's own traditions on campus; a hazing mandate was not going to stop them from forging their own path at DePauw. Barriers had been struck down for the black students to come to DePauw and now it was their turn to establish themselves on the campus. Pledgship took another semester, but the seven DePauw men were initiated out of the Kappa Alpha Psi Indiana chapter in February of 1990.<sup>166</sup> The fraternity was officially recognized by the Interfraternity Council on February 27, 1991.<sup>167</sup>

Bennett believed that the administration struggled with the arrival of black Greek life. Many black students had an interest in black Greek life because of family members or role models that were Greek. Yet, DePauw was in the midst of limiting its Greek houses.<sup>168</sup> One

opinion piece pointed out the allegedly hypocritical stance the administration was taking towards Greek life. Why do these black Greek organizations get special privileges to form at DePauw, that a hypothetical Tau Kappa Epsilon Fraternity chapter looking to form would not receive?<sup>169</sup> Infrastructure and tradition of white, Greek houses are not valid reasoning to disallow the traditions and organizations of other cultural groups from coming to campus.

With Kappa Alpha Psi and Alpha Kappa Alpha becoming part of DePauw community's, the increase in minority enrollment went up by almost fifty percent from the previous year. This increase extended beyond black student enrollment. In 1991, Hispanic applications increased from 21 to 78. Asian applications increased from 21 to 75.<sup>170</sup> In Bottoms's first year as President, 1986, there were just 4 black students. By 1991, there were 57 at DePauw.<sup>171</sup> A big factor in the increase in DePauw's image for prospective black students was the arrival and establishment of black Greek life. Director of Minority Recruitment at the time Charles Richardson commented, "Kappa Alpha Psi and Alpha Kappa Alpha have legitimized DePauw in the eyes of many middle-class and college educated blacks... Their presence shows that DePauw has recognized the presence and influence of the black students here." This reaction was important, especially from a member of the administration. Richardson's response showed that there was incremental improvement made by the administration at acknowledging the actions of its students. However, not all the administration reacted as positively as Richardson.

The struggle of the administration that Bennett spoke of translated into whether the administration was on the side of the black students' efforts to form black Greek life at DePauw. Meeting minutes from a Board of Trustees meeting on April 26, 1990 stated that the colonizing of minority Greek student organizations was an "issue".<sup>172</sup> The administration had a fear that Greek life was too big and adding black Greeks to the mix would just bring more division

between students and take away from academics and other collegiate aspects.<sup>173</sup> To the administration, the issue was not with the historical race of the Greek house, but with how the system affected the students ability to be more academically driven.

This DePauw administration also wanted more minority students, so any positive impact that they brought to campus would be supported.<sup>174</sup> Although black Greek life went against the direct interest of the administration to limit the size of Greek life at DePauw, bringing black houses to campus was neither promoted or maligned by the administration.<sup>175</sup> Alpha Kappa Alpha and Kappa Alpha Psi had to be involved through the structures of the white Greek councils as there were no other councils for the houses to join. Alpha Kappa Alpha joined the Panhellenic Council while Kappa Alpha Psi joined the Interfraternity Council.<sup>176</sup> Again, the system in place was not prepared to offer more than a white structure for the first black sorority and fraternity on campus.

The “Ghetto Party” was an offshoot of a tradition of white ignorance enforced by the privilege to belittle and make fun of someone’s race without massive consequences. With these spaces closed to the full self-expression of black students, they sought the establishment of their own spaces on campus. A place to etch out a community in a town filled with homogenous, white spaces. Bennett noted “How am I being perceived? And is every time that I open my mouth a test? Or, you know, some way of me kinda having to speak on behalf of everyone that other folks in the class might not be as aware of.”<sup>177</sup> These questions point out that there was an ignorance not only about black people, but about how they function as members of their community.

Bennett could not speak for the entirety of the black community during his time at DePauw, but he mentioned a few times the arguing back and forth with other members of AAAS whether

Alpha Tau Omega's sanctions were enough or if the silent march was the right course of action.<sup>178</sup> No one white person speaks for white people, it is the same for black people. Yet, the history of white stereotypes about black people is never questioned by white people.<sup>179</sup> Until black students came and witnessed the "Ghetto Party", it was not something that sparked concern in the minds of the white students. Blatant racism at the party prompted the need for black spaces. Without the party receiving such widespread, national coverage, the efforts to establish and buildup Black Greek life would have taken many more years to gain traction; even with the increasing number of minority students coming to campus.

### **Conclusion**

The "Ghetto Party" was the result of systemic, white ignorance rooted in the dominant Greek system at DePauw. The rapid increase of minority students and faculty exposed the racist tendencies that had been deemed acceptable by the predominantly white DePauw community. While the administration wanted minorities at DePauw, the culture of the school had to change for more representation to take hold. Black students sought their own space and community. They brought in black Greek Life to have their culture finally represented at DePauw.

The establishment of black Greek Life was only the start of the foundation for more diversity and inclusion on campus. The Posse Foundation, a New York City-based organization started in 1989 that recruits minority students from inner-city high schools to attend liberal arts institutions came to DePauw in 1996.<sup>180</sup> One of the primary goals of Posse is to create social diversity and change on predominately-white colleges.<sup>181</sup> Posse is still a major part of DePauw's appeal to draw in students from inner-city New York City and Chicago.

DePauw during the 2019-20 academic year has an African-American student population of 5.7%; an increase from 2.4% in 1988-89.<sup>182</sup> The most significant change in student population has been the rapid increase in international students at DePauw. In 1988-89, international students only made up 1.3% of the student body. In 2019-20, international students made up 13.5% of all students on campus; an over 1300% increase in the past 31 years.<sup>183</sup> As DePauw became more diverse, Greek Life participation decreased over the same period. The percentage of students involved in Greek Life in the 1980s was well over 80%. As of the 2018-2019 school year, 63% of students are involved with Greek Life with only 52% of first-year students choosing to go into the Greek system. The figure of 52% of first-year students is by far the lowest number since the statistic began to be recorded in the 1990-91 academic year.<sup>184</sup> As DePauw continued to diversify, the Greek system has suffered for it. The exclusionary, socio-political, systemically racist, factors of the system have determined that Greek life will persist in its downward trend for the foreseeable future. Diversity and inclusion still struggle to be conversation pieces for the entirety of the majority white community to be involved in.

In 2008, a campus climate task force found that some students, faculty and staff of color were uncomfortable in DePauw's community.<sup>185</sup> This included reported instances of stereotyping, discrimination and harassment inside and outside of the classroom.<sup>186</sup> By 2014, campus social climate regressed to a point that the faculty voted to take a day out of their schedule to have a University-wide conversation about inclusiveness.<sup>187</sup> On January 28, 2015, DePauw's Day of Inclusion was hosted in Neal Fieldhouse for the first time.<sup>188</sup> Presently called DePauw Day of Dialogue, the event still takes place each year, but many students wonder whether the event achieves its stated goals. Like the silent march and the community healing rally that were reactions to the "Ghetto Party" and campus culture, the Day of Dialogue is a

continuation of the same trend of conversations and discussions held because of racist tensions and incidents at DePauw.

On April 13, 2018, a senior from Kappa Alpha Theta sorority wore black paint with purple glitter on her face while wearing a nametag that read, “Blackie”. She walked to the Fluttering Duck Restaurant on DePauw’s campus where minority students were shocked by the blatant act of racism. The student did not intend to be racist, as she was dressing up as one of her friends who blacks out a lot from drinking alcohol. During this same week, five other racist actions rocked DePauw’s campus. Among them were incidents such as the n-word spelled out with rocks in the Nature Park and the sentence, “All n\*\*\*\*\*s must die -KKK” found in a bathroom stall at the DePauw Inn.<sup>189</sup> Black students led a protest during an Ubben Lecture on April 17, 2018. They unfurled a banner that read, “We are not safe #DePauwKKK.” An emergency press conference held by the administration the next day was halted by protesters.<sup>190</sup> This tumultuous week in April 2018 mirrored the frenzy of events that followed the “Ghetto Party” in October 1988.

These two series of events happened 30 years apart on the same campus which indicates there has been no concrete change in the culture of race relations at DePauw. In the United States, the situation is much the same. Barack Obama was elected as the first African-American President in America’s history. Yet, he was replaced by Donald Trump, a man whose racist comments in interviews, on the campaign trail, and in the Oval Office inspired the neo-Nazi rally in Charlottesville, Virginia on August 11, 2017. David Duke, former Ku Klux Klan leader, believed the purpose of the rally was to fulfill the promises laid out by of Donald Trump.<sup>191</sup> These wider influences establish the wider problem in America: race relations for many Americans have not changed.

Dorothy Brown has spent every year since the “Ghetto Party” occurred on DePauw’s campus. Brown explained:

“We keep having the same things going over and over and over again. There are things that are happening today that happened when I was a little girl in Tennessee. It’s been slow. And I just don’t understand what people were thinking. Change, there hasn’t been a lot of change as far as I’m concerned. We’re still doing stuff that shouldn’t even cross our mind, but it does.”<sup>192</sup>

For all the progress that has been made towards creating a diverse community on DePauw’s campus, the same patterns of systemic racism and white ignorance remain. There are white people in the DePauw community who continue to be ignorant about how their peers feel on campus. A silent majority of white students and administrators situated in Greek Life at DePauw remain ignorant and continue to choose every day through their actions to not change.

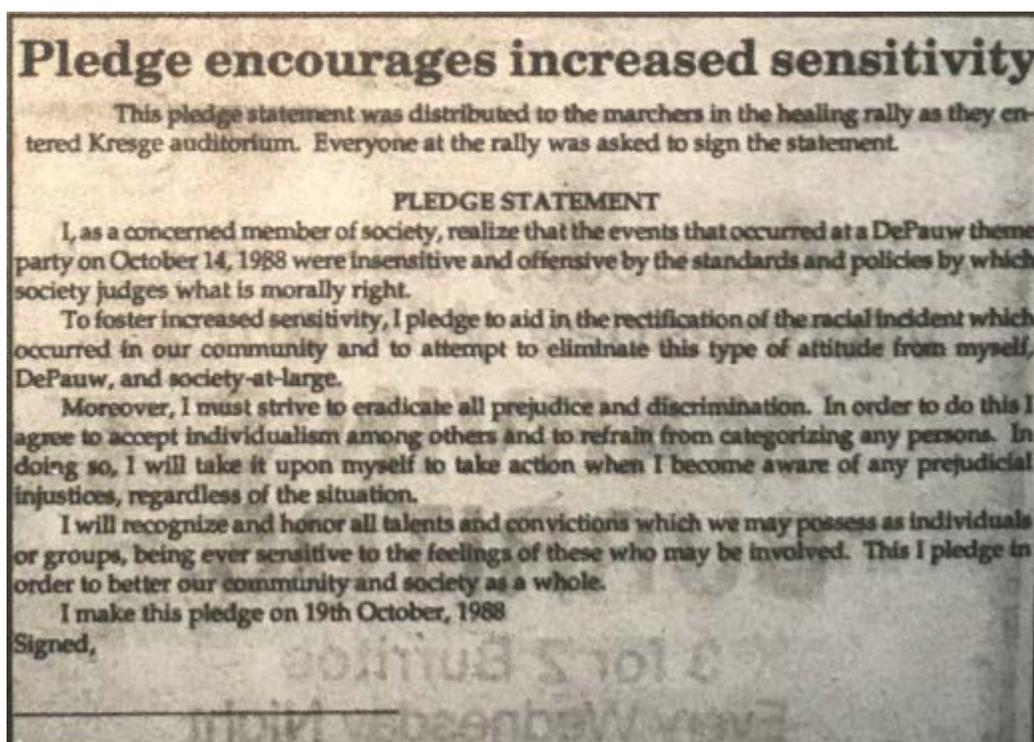
**Figures**

Figure 1



Cartoon comparing blackface to Nazism, October 18, 1988.

Figure 2



Pledge Statement for the DePauw Community, October 19, 1988.

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Jim Rueff

### **Statement of Archival Use**

The archival use of this History Seminar Thesis started with a examination of each issue of *The DePauw* newspaper in the 1988-89 school year and in the surrounding years and also articles from the 1990s, 2000s and 2010s. My search then expanded as I looked at President Bottoms Archive Collection. The speech he gave at his inauguration in 1986 as well as the student convocation in 1988 were used. The reports he commissioned comparing DePauw's demographics to similar Liberal Arts institutions as well as a report on the social atmosphere at DePauw were valuable resources. The yearbooks from 1977-1988 were also consulted to check for any photographic evidence of the Ghetto Party.