

No Mutually Acceptable Solution: The Struggle to Integrate Campus-Life at the University of Nebraska-Omaha, 1968-1972.

Abstract

Historical interest in student anti-racism activism on U.S. college campuses generally focuses on integration battles in the South in the early 1960s, and coastal sit-ins and student-occupation of administration buildings in the late-1960s and early-1970s. Recent studies of Midwestern campus activism illustrate the challenges of activating and sustaining White students' interest in supporting the anti-racism efforts of Black peers. This article examines two incidents at the University of Nebraska at Omaha: The Black Liberators for Action on Campus's sit-in at the President's office, and the Student Senate's investigation into discriminatory membership standards of the Chi Omega sorority. It illustrates the power of student activism to prod meaningful reform in university curriculum and extra-curricular life, as well as its limits.¹

It must have been a nice moment of reprieve for the freshmen women at Omaha University who completed their academic year by being sworn in as new initiates to the academic honor society Alpha Lambda Delta on April 23, 1968. At OU, notorious segregationist George Wallace had appeared on campus on March 3rd to address a political science class, where students met him with protest. Noting student efforts to block traffic to the event, Wallace promised that, were he elected president, he would run over any "anarchist" who tried to lay down in front of his car. The class applauded.² At his rally later that evening at the Civic Auditorium, Wallace commanded the police to remove the mostly Black protesters in attendance, sparking a larger attack from the pro-Wallace audience that spilled outside, sparking three days of violence.³ The chaos left Howard Stevenson, a 16-year-old African American dead, killed by twenty-three year-old white police officer James

¹ Celine Butler would like to thank West Chester University's History faculty for demonstrating and disclosing the habits of a good historian. She would also like to thank the West Chester University Library personnel for acquiring the necessary materials for this project. Mary Anne and Brian Butler also provided ample encouragement. Brent Ruswick would like to thank Allison Ross, Les Valentin, and Amy Schindler for their help in locating and reproducing the images used in this article. Anne Gould, Carol Sorensen (formerly Gould) and Nancy Thornblad offered valuable feedback. He also would like to thank Laura Simon and his colleagues in the West Chester University history department for their unwavering support.

² Ashley M. Howard, "Then the Burning Began: Omaha, Riots, and the Growth of Black Radicalism, 1966-1969," M.A. Thesis, 2006, p. 58. <https://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/studentwork/552> Accessed September 4, 2020; *Tomahawk: 1969* p. 80 <https://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/yearbooks/51/> Accessed September 4, 2020.

³ Ashley M. Howard, "Then the Burnings Began: Omaha's Urban Revolts and the Meaning of Political Violence," *Nebraska History Magazine* 98, no. 2 (Summer 2017), 93 <https://history.nebraska.gov/sites/history.nebraska.gov/files/doc/publications/NH2017Burnings.pdf> Accessed September 7, 2020; "Then Amy Helene Forss, *Black Print with a White Carnation: Mildred Brown and the Omaha Star Newspaper 1938-1989*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2013), p. 151.

Abbott. Another seventeen people were injured and fifty-five arrested.⁴ April then just kept getting worse. Three days before the students' initiation event, the FBI had added James Earl Ray to its Most Wanted List for his assassination of Martin Luther King Jr., as protests and rebellion churned through the cities and university campuses.

In this brief moment of quiet, professor of political science Orville Menard congratulated the students, all white women, on their fine adjustment to university life, before offering one of his characteristically understated yet astute observations of the times. Students these days, he noted, possessed a "deep aversion and hostility to hypocrisy" and were "going out and doing something."⁵ Such remarks are as common as the initiation ceremonies where they are delivered, but few other than Menard must have considered the university a likely candidate to become a hotbed of student activism. The "West Dodge [Street] High [School]" nickname commonly used to refer to the university was perhaps a more polite measure of its academic reputation than its other moniker, the University of No Opportunity.⁶ As it merged with the University of Nebraska system later in 1968, becoming the University of Nebraska at Omaha, the regional four-year university struggled to preserve its identity. With no dorms and little to speak of in athletics, sororities and fraternities tended to dominate social life. The Greek system similarly exerted much influence in student government.

⁴ Howard, pgs. 57-65; Erin Grace, "The Night George Wallace Came to Omaha," *Omaha World Herald* March 6, 2018. https://omaha.com/news/grace-the-night-george-wallace-came-to-omaha-and-the-1968-race-riot-began/article_00bf521a-7a68-51c2-bbde-fbddaedaef92.html Accessed September 4, 2020.

⁵ "Youth Show More Political Interest," *Gateway*, April 26, 1968, p. 6. *Gateway* articles can be found using the search function at <http://digital.olivesoftware.com/olive/apa/unomaha> Accessed September 3, 2020. The site does not provide practical hyperlinks for inclusion in footnotes.

⁶ Dick Ulmer, "New Senators Enjoy Midwest," *Gateway*, Dec. 5, 1973, p. 5.



Alpha Lambda Delta

ROW ONE: Cindy Miller, Susie Haas, Karen Rozgall, Julie Grimm, Gail Christensen
 ROW TWO: Jeannie Werthman, Jeannie Blakey, Carol Gould. ROW THREE: Liz Porker-
 son, Morsha Hoffman, Marilyn Russo, Judy Houchin, Cathy Burgess, Mory Kulo,
 Lynne London, LoRae Koppit, Mortha Grant, Jo Hemoth, Nancy Dellere, Susie
 Bobendure.

Image 1: Alpha Lambda Delta Initiation. Tomahawk 1969 yearbook, p. 116

Menard's assessment suggested a deeper set of tensions running through the university, ones recognizable across the country. Between Menard's remarks in 1968 through 1971, UNO's students debated the merits of and eventually retired from use the racist school mascot Ouampi, argued over ending all sports programs, occupied the main administration building in the name of racial justice, ran advertisements for abortion providers in the school newspaper, the *Gateway*, two years before *Roe v. Wade* legalized abortion in Nebraska, and struggled to calm tensions between traditional students and veterans returning from Vietnam. Leading the way, Black Liberators for Action on Campus (BLAC), UNO's chapter of Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) the editorial team of the *Gateway* and activist presidents of student senate all demanded changes in UNO's staid student culture. But the incident in the Spring of 1971 that sparked open rebellion of the newspaper and Student Senate against the administration, most divided the student body, and led to the Senate censuring the President and Board of Regents, started with, in her own words, "the most unlikely person in the world" to cause such a fuss: the exiting president of the most popular sorority on campus.⁷ Listening as a Freshman in 1968, Carol Gould was not among those who envisioned the sort of political activism Menard spoke of. But that "hostility to hypocrisy" the genial professor noted in the youth eventually

⁷ "Naylor Waylays Senate Decision," *Gateway*, June 18, 1971, p. 1.

prompted Gould to identify the de facto racial segregation within her sorority, which provoked a larger reckoning among UNO's white students about their complicity in the causal racism of campus life.

“Gradual and Somewhat Winding”: Student Activism in the Midwest

The day after Menard's remarks, the Student Afro Society and Students for a Democratic Society began their takeovers of Columbia University buildings, followed two days later by a walkout of high school students across New York City in response to a call from the Student Mobilization Committee To End the War in Vietnam. Historical scholarship on the Columbia protests and, more generally, the “New Left” emphasizes the “continual tension” in sustaining “cooperation between black and white activists,” a tension borne out in the history of campus-activism at UNO. While it was possible to consolidate all student issues into a unified “Movement,” historian Blake Slonecker observed that it would only be done “in an ad hoc fashion around local initiatives. Efforts to create a formal Movement across race lines were prevalent in the late 1960s. They were also disastrous failures.” SDS leaders at Columbia recognized that success depended on mobilizing moderate and conservative white students in support of the interests of minority groups.⁸ Similarly, as Katherine Wheatle and Felicia Commodore observe, some of the most recent historical scholarship on desegregation shifted its focus, away from the 1950s and early 1960s struggles for civil rights in the South, and toward examinations of the “personal and logistical challenges” of organizing protests.⁹ Or, as Susan Cahn asked, “What conditions and discourses enable social movements to come together, articulate grievances, and enter into controversial protests against the political and social “common sense” of their time?”¹⁰

These historical inquiries have brought two changes to the history of campus activism, each reflected in our examination of UNO: they center the stories of students in issues where, once, historians had been more interested in institutional responses, and they expand the map of where we might search for stories of students working to navigate these challenges. Increasingly that examination has looked toward the Midwest. As Mary Ann Wnykoop explained in her survey of the history of protest at Indiana University, activism in the Midwest unfolded in a “gradual and somewhat winding” fashion compared to more prominent hot-spots.¹¹ Physically and metaphorically, thousands of miles separated UNO from Columbia, Berkeley, or the other sites of campus protest that captured first the

⁸ Blake Slonecker, “The Columbia Coalition: African Americans, New Leftists, and Counterculture at the Columbia University Protest of 1968,” *Journal of Social History* 41, no. 4 (Summer 2008), 969, 972; Robert A. McCaughey, *Stand, Columbia: A History of Columbia University* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 442-461.

⁹ Katherine I.E. Wheatle and Felicia Commodore, “Reaching Back to Move Forward: The Historic and Contemporary Role of Student Activism in the Implementation of Higher Education Policy,” *Review of Higher Education*, 42 (April 2019), p. 7.

¹⁰ Susan K. Cahn, “If We Got That Freedom: ‘Integration’ and the Sexual Politics of Southern College Women, 1940-1960,” in *Connexions: Histories of Race and Sex in North America*, ed. Jennifer Brier, Jim Downs, and Jennifer L. Morgan (Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 2016), 230.

¹¹ Mary Ann Wnykoop, *Dissent in the Heartland: The Sixties at Indiana University*, rev. ed. (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2017), 22

attention of the national media and then historians of student activism. But studying the upheaval at UNO affords an opportunity to see how familiar challenges in civil rights and social activism played out in smaller campus locales, and continues recent trends in historical scholarship that emphasize the local contingencies of student protest.

UNO's upheavals also point to another issue that recently has gained greater attention in historical studies of campus activism: the centering of minority students' efforts to decolonize and diversify the curriculum. As Martha Biondi recounts, African American students undertook great efforts in the 1960s to take control of their "educational destiny," but the historical record has been slow to recognize these efforts or to amplify the voices of Black student activists.¹² Biondi flags 1968 in particular as the year of Black student activism, as students questioned a higher education curriculum tailored towards whiteness.¹³ Her focus on the Black Student Movement as a component of the Black Power movement and on Black agency in and out of the classroom highlights the common tendency for "integration" to result in acculturation. On campuses across the nation, Biondi notes, administrators assigned the sole responsibility of integration to Black students. As many Americans both Black and White understood the term, this meant assimilating into the White mainstream.¹⁴ The Black Student Movement challenged that understanding of integration by recognizing and restoring the African heritage of Black students, giving students a chance to identify and renounce internalized racism, and to think critically about and "identify with global anticolonial struggles."¹⁵ As Biondi explained, the growing recognition that White racism perpetuated inequality more than any real or imagined "deficiency in skills or preparedness" pushed Black student to "embrace a Black identity, actively reframe blackness in a positive fashion, push back against white conceits, and organize new, Black-identified social, cultural, and political spaces on campuses."¹⁶ However, Black students who dared to resist acculturation confronted charges of "separatism," with critics believing that "they were undermining progress towards integration, that they were afraid of competing with Whites, or that they were practicing reverse racism."¹⁷ In reality, the Black Student Movement sought to redefine integration as multiculturalism while pushing back against pressures to create a homogeneous student body. Regardless of their associations with the Black Student Movement, Black students faced a double-bind that characterized their college experience: risk the physical, social, and emotional pushback of joining predominantly white organizations, or face accusations of self-imposed segregation from White students, staff, and faculty.

Though the *Brown v. Board of Education* cases of 1954 and 1955 did not specifically address public higher education, the decisions effectively implied integration of all public facilities, which accelerated the integration of colleges classrooms. Left unstated from the

¹² Martha Biondi, *The Black Revolution on Campus*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 57

¹³ Biondi, 13-15.

¹⁴ Biondi, 19.

¹⁵ Biondi, 269

¹⁶ Biondi, 20.

¹⁷ Biondi, 19.

decisions, however, was just what an integrated campus might look like.¹⁸ On college campuses institutional efforts often stopped at the classroom door, as administrations pursued reactive policies that merely responded to integration mandates, rather than actively attempting to form an integrated campus. But as Dwonna Goldstone explained, “Many civil rights activists saw integration of the classrooms as only half the fight.”¹⁹ Would integration also include efforts to integrate educational facilities, housing, athletics, and other extracurricular activities? At the University of Texas, for instance, the regents “emphasized total integration in the academic process while disavowing any major responsibility for African American students’ social and extracurricular integration.”²⁰

Though social integration may have constituted a lesser concern than classroom integration for some Black students, continued segregation of campus life meant missing out on the activities that forged a unique campus-centric identity. White students participating in integrated activities perhaps risked diminished social standing among white peers, but Black students faced potential backlash from antagonistic whites, school administrators, and other Black peers who emphasized creating organizations specifically to promote Black culture and identity. Natalie G. and James H. Adams have established how students of the late 1960s used extracurricular activities to demarcate new racial boundaries. They observe that extracurricular life functioned as a space where crucial questions about interracial contact could be scrutinized, granting these activities unforeseen significance.²¹ Integration, of course, invited backlash: not just from White students but also potentially from other Black students as well. Upon joining a white fraternity at the University of North Carolina in 1971, Alvin Kellog was subsequently “ostracized from the larger black campus community and ignored by many of his fraternity brothers.”²² Returning to Biondi’s work, Black students entering higher education often felt compelled to demonstrate loyalty to poor Black communities, as their entrance could be perceived as them distancing themselves from their former associations.²³

The integration of Greek life throughout the 1960s and 1970s elicited high levels of concern from white students and community members who feared the dissolution of racial boundaries and from Black students who experienced discrimination and alienation within White Greek-letter organizations. Biondi described Greek life at Northwestern University

¹⁸ William B. Harvey, Adia M. Harvey, and Mark King, “The Impact of the Brown v. Board of Education Decision on Postsecondary Participation of African Americans,” *The Journal of Negro Education* 73, no. 3 (Summer 2004), 335; Kristen Stallion, “Brown v. Board of Education and its Impact on Admissions in Higher Education,” *LOGOS* v. 6 (Fall 2013), pgs. 65-6.

¹⁹ Dwonna Goldstone, *Integrating the 40 Acres: The Fifty-Year Struggle for Racial Equality at the University of Texas*, (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 2006), 101, 92.

²⁰ Goldstone, p. 11.

²¹ Natalie G. Adams and James H. Adams, *Just Trying to Have School: The Struggle for Desegregation in Mississippi*, (Jackson, Mississippi: University Press of Mississippi, 2018), 147.

²² Matthew W. Hughey, “Rushing the Wall, Crossing the Sands: Cross-Racial Membership in U.S. College Fraternities and Sororities,” in *Brothers and Sisters: Diversity in College Fraternities and Sororities*, ed. Craig L. Torbenson and Gregory S. Parks (Madison, WI: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2009), 250.

²³ Biondi, 22

as a particularly potent “source of racial animus and friction and friction on campus,” with all-White Greek orgs hotspots of racist ideology. According to Wynkoop, the “all-white Greek system symbolized university administrators’ acceptance of organizations whose very existence was based on racial exclusion.” Though many of these organizations erased racially restrictive clauses in their constitutions by the 1960s, Wynkoop, Goldstone, and Biondi all demonstrate the ways in which fraternities and sororities continued to exclude Black students and other racial-ethnic minorities, demonstrating the ongoing failures of attempts at desegregation. Craig Torbenson explained that in the first wave of Greek life establishment, from 1825 to 1875, fraternities tended to reflect the “homogeneity” of the typical college student: white, male, Protestant, and wealthy. As student bodies became increasingly (though still minimally) diverse in the early 1900s, older fraternities often reacted by passing “exclusionary clauses” that limited membership to “white, male, Protestant students to ensure a homogenous group... Thus, by 1928, more than half the national fraternities had membership rules based on race or religion.”

“There Cannot Be Discrimination on Campus”: Black Liberators for Action on Campus and Anti-discrimination Clauses

UNO became a part of the University of Nebraska system in the summer of 1968, and with it came an immediate sense of student consternation at its status within the system, especially *vis a vis* the flagship university in Lincoln. Funding lagged, efforts to expand the campus southward and westward foundered, and enrollment struggled.²⁴ The *Gateway* regularly featured articles discussing the poor attendance at sporting events. The football team might draw about 5000 spectators to a game—a notable increase from the attendance at football’s nadir in 1959, when the team heard the lusty cheers of a crowd of twenty-four. Still, proposals flied for how to encourage, or compel, faculty and student attendance at football games, while at the start of the 1971 academic year, the Arts and Sciences department passed a resolution recommending “all intercollegiate athletic programs be discontinued” the next year.²⁵ Students clustered into those affiliated with fraternities and sororities, athletes, older “bootstrapper” students taking advantage of then Omaha University’s “Operation Bootstrap” program to help active-duty military personnel complete their degrees and left-leaning activists.²⁶ Historically, the first two groups had dominated student government, which held a reputation for being more interested in socializing than governing.

In spite of the prominent bootstrapper population—or perhaps, because of it—UNO avoided the most intense anti-war protests; issues of racial justice instead drove campus activism. In 1969 students applied for the creation of a new organization, Black Liberators for Action on Campus (BLAC). From its initial application, the campus met BLAC with resistance and controversy. The Student Senate reconsidered its initial approval of the

²⁴ Oliver B. Pollak and Les Valentine, *University of Nebraska at Omaha* Charleston, (South Carolina: Arcadia Publishing, 200), 89.

²⁵ “The Chalkbox” *Gateway*, Nov. 15, 1968, p. 4; Steve Priesman, “A & S Drops Bombshell, ‘Get Rid of Athletics’” *Gateway* Sept. 22, 1971 p. 1; “Athletics: ‘Anything Within Reason.’” *Gateway*, Sept. 22, 1971, p. 8

²⁶ Pollak and Valentine, 93.

BLAC constitution because of wording regarding whom was eligible for membership. At issue, a Board of Regents policy that “in no instance will these criteria for membership (in a student organization) include race or color.” Some in the Senate presumed that language opening membership to anyone “sincerely interested in promoting the purpose of this organization,” with its purpose being “to promote better representation and a closer relationship of black students on campus and in the community” implied that membership in effect was limited by race, and asked for the removal of “the discriminatory clauses.” Senator Jim DOW, a BLAC member, noted that it was unlikely that a white student would be interested in joining.²⁷ More broadly, Dow noted “the black student is seeking to relate to his culture and his heritage—that in actuality, it should be happening in the class room” but that, since it is not, required BLAC and its nearly fifty members to “take the initiative.”²⁸ With membership status clarified, approval followed without much further difficulty.

BLAC’s agenda began with one specific goal: the introduction of a course on African American history at UNO.²⁹ But continued university indifference to BLAC’s efforts at diversifying the curriculum and outright sabotage of its social events soon provoked larger confrontations. For a Friday-night Halloween dance BLAC hosted, the group asked the director of student activities to staff it with a black police officer and ticket taker; a black policeman had volunteered to do so for free. University Social Director Thelma Engles rebuked the request and declared they would “have to take who she assigned,” which proved to be an all-white team. The audio-visual department then provided a single record player, and failed to deliver the requested loud-speakers necessary for anyone in the ballroom to hear the DJs who had volunteered to perform for free.

The following Friday, BLAC held a press conference after which “about 50 Black students marched quietly” to meet with UNO President Kirk Naylor in his office. Their they demanded the resignation of Engles and the director of student activities Fred Ray, reimbursement for the event, and:

- student control of the student center and its staff
- a voice in the Black Studies curriculum and the selection of Black speakers and instructors
- Extension of certain privileges to all athletes including training table or meal card, and assistance in finding meaningful employment
- An explanation for the allegedly 95 per cent reduction in the budget for Black oriented student activities³⁰

Naylor and the students scheduled another meeting for Monday the 10th, and in his press statement described BLAC’s actions as an “attack” on Engles and Ray and deflected responsibility for meeting any of the student requests to other administrative units.

²⁷ “BLAC Organization Stalled by Student Senate Decision,” *Gateway*, Nov. 12, 1968, p.1

²⁸ Ken Whittle, “BLAC Seeks UNO Recognition,” *Gateway* Nov 22, 1968, p. 6.

²⁹ “BLAC Mum about Plans,” *Gateway*, Feb. 7, 1969, p. 3

³⁰ “Black Students Make Demands,” *Gateway*, Nov. 12, 1969, p. 1

Misrepresenting BLAC's position, Naylor asserted "there is no intention ... to negate the effectiveness" of the rest of the university administration "or to usurp their prerogatives by establishing the President's office as the one and only source for the adjudication of concerns."³¹ BLAC president Robert "Jericho" Honore met with Naylor in front of the local press, and upon hearing Naylor's response, announced students would occupy the President's office until he met their demands. Dean of Student Personnel Donald Pflasterer called Omaha police, who arrived at 1:00pm and arrested over 40 students, all African Americans, on state charges of unlawful assembly. An assembly of "students, faculty, staff, and administrators" watching from the hallways sang "We Shall Overcome" as the police removed the students.³² The police filed fifty-four felony charges against the protestors. Naylor, who had the power to drop the charges against the students, chose not to.³³



Image 2: BLAC Membership Tomahawk: 1969 yearbook, p. 113

³¹ Naylor letter, Nov, 10, 1969, published as "President's Answer to Black Students" *Gateway* Nov. 12, 1969, p. 2.

³² "Students Occupy President's Office" *Gateway* Nov. 12, 1969 p. 1.

³³ Administrative Action Shows No Equity" *Gateway* June 25, 1971, p. 2.

A dance, a list of black student demands, a sit-in, police, and a general upheaval of university life characterized November 11, 1969 at UNO. Approximately 100 students participated in a sit-in in Dr. Naylor's office. The group mainly responsible for the sit-in was an organization known as BLAC. The outcome of the protest was to point up many outdated practices of the University.



Image 3: BLAC sit-in Tomahawk: 1970 yearbook, p. 64

Students Stage Sit-In



Image 4: Police arrests of BLAC sit-in protestors: Tomahawk: 1970 yearbook, p. 65

Naylor insisted that “there cannot be discrimination on campus,” though whether he meant this as a statement of aspiration, or a description of reality is open to interpretation. He knew of “no discrimination on campus,” dismissing BLAC’s complaints as “references and allegations” not yet proven, and that more than accusations were needed to warrant action. Naylor seemingly limited his view of discrimination to forms that were “overt ... proven and substantiated.” Had he evidence of overt discrimination that met his standard—as opaque as it may have been—he “would attack it with every strength.”³⁴

The students involved in the sit-in, unsurprisingly, disagreed, and insisted that elements of the administration either “actively or passively” maintained systems of discrimination on campus. BLAC’s hopes for “an honest discussion of black and white student grievances ... were drowned in floods of evasion, homilies, and vague denials” by Naylor, who insisted he “built a “nice home” across the street from “Negroes.”” The protesting students sardonically rued their failure to “fully appreciate President Naylor’s autobiographical account of his love for the black man” and that his actions “condone discrimination on campus.” Expanding their critique, they called for a greater student voice in all university operations.³⁵

This call found a welcome audience in the white President of the Student Senate, Steve Wild, who blamed the events on the administration’s lack of responsiveness to campus-climate and racial discrimination issues raised by student government. Wild believed that while the students in BLAC “have faith in student government” they also knew it “doesn’t have much power because of the administration.”³⁶ The Senate criticized the police’s intervention as unnecessary and called for the dropping of all charges. Wild criticized Naylor for shutting the student government out of the deliberations and for not expressing more sympathy toward the students’ demands. He proposed a five-step process for handling student complaints that would include the University formalizing the process for hearing student grievances, faculty drafting a Black Studies curriculum, increased efforts to hire black faculty, administrators collaborating with BLAC to reschedule their dance, and meetings of the faculty senate’s Athletic Committee to discuss the BLAC demands. Wild seized the incident as an opportunity to advocate for greater student senate influence on campus, arguing that it ought to function as “the supreme governing body to which all student grievances must initially be presented.” Since BLAC, according to Wild, knew that the senate did not have the power to solve their dispute, they instead pursued direct action. Wild speculated that if student government was indeed “a viable, integral part of the University—as the President has stated” then the action would not have happened at all.³⁷ The *Gateway* agreed, approvingly editorializing that “The Senate has now proven it can

³⁴ “Human Relations Committee Acts on BLAC Wants” *Gateway* Nov. 14, 1969 p. 1

³⁵ Concerned Black Students, “BLAC Defends Position” *Gateway* Nov. 14, 1969 p. 2.

³⁶ “Black Students Make Demands” *Gateway* Nov. 12, 1969 p. 1

³⁷ “Use of Police “Unnecessary”” *Gateway* Nov. 14, 1969 p. 1.

take effective action if a situation warrants" it, and that perhaps now the senators will "understand their role" on campus.³⁸

Wild's resolve to make the Senate relevant and the scrutiny of BLAC's constitution portended further challenges to the established social hierarchy in UNO's student life. The senate examination of BLAC's constitution for signs of discrimination occurred as part of a larger senate effort to exercise authority over all recognized student organizations. Wild's predecessor as Senate President, Randy Owens, had argued that Article 1 section 5 of the Student Senate Constitution, which gave the Senate "the power to regulate and supervise all student organizations" implied a right to review all constitutions to establish that they adhered to the Board of Regents non-discrimination policy. To that end, in the Spring 1968 semester the senate had requested constitutions from all student organizations. Failure to do so could result in suspending an organization's status as a recognized student group. By the time BLAC's constitution passed the Senate, no sorority and only half the fraternities had submitted theirs. Four sororities insisted that only the National Panhellenic Council, the governing body of sororities, could respond to the request, citing a resolution it passed twenty years earlier. As this challenge to the sororities began, the director of student activities Fred Ray demurred that "it is a student matter only."³⁹ This elided the reality that the University possessed the sorority constitutions and could make them available to the Senate, if President Naylor wished.⁴⁰

Within a month, the Senate suspended twenty-five student organizations for noncompliance. The standoff between the Senate and the student groups whittled down to the National Panhellenic Council's insistence that "no student groups may have access to the constitutions of legally-incorporated National Greek-Letter Societies," and the Senate's concern that submitting local by-laws of a student group instead of the national constitution might be an evasion.⁴¹ The disagreement risked splitting both the student organizations and the Senate itself, which was "predominantly composed of Greeks" and had resolved to suspend recognition of noncompliant student-groups on just a 13-9 vote.⁴²

Arguably the most prominent sorority on campus, Chi Omega, led the opposition to Senate oversight. Sorority president Diane Desler suggested that the recalcitrance was not to protect the Omaha chapter's reputation, but that keeping the national constitution private was instead "to protect chapters on other campuses such as Berkeley where such information might be used unwisely."⁴³ This seems to be an oblique reference to the commonplace use of "mutual acceptability" clauses in sorority constitutions. The requirement held that any recruit must be acceptable not just to the local chapter, but to all

³⁸ "Student Senate Key to Communications" *Gateway* Nov. 14, 1969 p. 2.

³⁹ "Student Senate Gets Static from UNO Organizations" *Gateway* Dec. 13, 1968 p. 1.

⁴⁰ "Suspension Confronts Sororities As Constitution Deadline Nears." *Gateway* March 5, 1969 p. 1; James Dow, "Skeleton's in Closet?" *Gateway* March 5, 1969 p.2.

⁴¹ "UNO Senate Suspends 25 Student Groups" *Gateway* Jan. 10, 1969 p. 1.

⁴² "Senate's Power Under Fire" *Gateway* Feb. 28, 1969 p. 2; "Student Senate Defines New Suspension Policy" *Gateway* Feb. 26, 1969 p. 3.

⁴³ "Suspension Confronts Sororities As Constitution Deadline Nears" *Gateway* March 5, 1969 p. 1.

chapters of the sorority. These clauses “were particularly problematic for fraternities and sororities that were heavily associated with the South,” including Chi Omega, founded at the University of Arkansas in 1895.⁴⁴ A 1962 letter to the President of Colby College in Maine, for instance, warned that the local chapter’s efforts to recruit an African American woman likely would result in the national organization trying to drop the local chapter from its affiliates. The local alumna adviser to the chapter had already warned that an African American pledge would not be accepted by the National office.⁴⁵ The Colby College chapter eventually sought to remove the “mutual acceptability” clause from its recommendation requirements in 1964. For their efforts, they were accused of being “nearly Communistic.” Given how close sorority sisters were supposed to be, Southern chapters equated interracial sorority chapters as tantamount to interracial marriages.⁴⁶ Such problems for Chi Omega were not uncommon: the same year that the “mutual acceptability” issue came to a head at UNO, 1971, at Dickinson College that October. the local chapter disaffiliated from Chi Omega after the national chapter threatened to sue over their recruitment of an African American woman.⁴⁷ A *Gateway* editorial in 1969 recognized where the conflict would likely head, warning that the UNO sororities’ “complete dependence on their dixie-based national offices” would “come back to haunt them.”⁴⁸ Fraternities similarly expended little effort to end de-facto segregation. Theta Chi President Tim Vail noted that his national chapter had “blacks” which in turn “speaks well for our chapter locally, too.” Explaining the absence of any actual minority students in his fraternity, Vail rationalized that “If you pledge a black and he can’t make the pledge program after he is accepted, we are caught in the middle and lose both ways. In Lincoln there is a forced pledging of minority groups, I can’t see it here.” President Tom Hawkinson of Lambda Chi Alpha added that his fraternity was “not interested in tokenism; we are not interested in pledging someone ... just so we can say we have someone who is a member of a minority race.” He noted that there were no Black brothers in his fraternity, and none had rushed in the last four years.”⁴⁹

In spite of Ray’s insistence that the matter was exclusively a student issue, an ad hoc committee of the University Senate quickly stepped into the controversy, and with President Naylor’s support determined that the Student Senate would, with the endorsement of the Board of Regents, write to the National Panhellenic Council to request

⁴⁴ Katie Daigle, “Prejudicial Preferences: The Discriminatory Selection Practices of Colby’s Greek Letter Societies” p. 5 <https://www.colby.edu/specialcollections/wp-content/uploads/sites/114/2014/09/Online-Descriptions.pdf>

⁴⁵ “Letter from Robert Barlow to President Strider,” Colby College Special Collections quoted in “Prejudicial Preferences: The Discriminatory Selection Practices of Colby’s Greek Letter Societies” p. 12 <https://www.colby.edu/specialcollections/wp-content/uploads/sites/114/2014/09/Fraternity-and-Sorority-Presentation-Website-Final.pdf> Accessed September 1, 2020

⁴⁶ Katie Daigle, “Prejudicial Preferences: The Discriminatory Practices of Colby’s Greek Letter Societies” <https://www.colby.edu/specialcollections/wp-content/uploads/sites/114/2014/09/Fraternity-and-Sorority-Presentation-Website-Final.pdf> Accessed September 1, 2020

⁴⁷ Matt Getty, “Looking Back to Move Forward” *Dickinson Magazine* Spring 2018, p. 23. <https://www.dickinson.edu/news/article/3153/> Accessed September 1, 2020.

⁴⁸ “Student Activities” *Gateway* Oct. 3, 1969 p. 3.

⁴⁹ *Tomahawk: Winter 1970-1971* p. 17.

that it waive the 1949 agreement that forbid the sharing of the constitution. Student Senate president Randy Owens hopefully noted that other universities had made similar requests that the NPC complied with.⁵⁰ What happened with that request is unknown, and it is worth noting, as Mary Ann Wynkoop has, that “most African-American students did not want to join white fraternities or sororities, and most could not have afforded the house bills and dues even if they had been allowed to join. Rather, the all-white Greek system symbolized university administrators’ acceptance of organizations whose very existence was based on racial exclusion.”⁵¹ Naylor’s clumsy, seemingly patronizing response to BLAC belied his professed opposition to discrimination, and the Student Senate seemingly never trusted his halting efforts to support their inquiries into discrimination in other campus-groups.

The Chi Omega Investigation

The controversy over the anti-discrimination clauses at UNO died down until the Spring 1971 semester. That January, the Board of Regents “demanded the constitutions” of all student-organizations at the three campuses in the Nebraska system, “checking for discriminatory and other unhealthy clauses.”⁵² As departing president of the all-white Chi Omega sorority, Carol Gould did so. This was consistent with the results of a meeting with an alumni group of the sorority from Ames, Iowa, which, at an unspecified date before February 1971, asked the UNO chapter—the Zeta Deltas—to offer their opinion on revising the national constitution to specify that it did not discriminate by race. The UNO chapter unanimously favored the change. But at a subsequent visit on February 7th by Linda MacIntosh, a representative of the national Chi Omega body conducting officer training at UNO, MacIntosh discussed the “mutual acceptability” membership clause with the officers. As the *Gateway* summarized the Student Senate’s findings, “In the course of the discussion, the question arose as to whether [sic] or not a black person would be considered mutually acceptable and/or harmonious with members of other chapters.” MacIntosh’s answer led at least some of the officers in attendance “to believe that Zeta Delta would lose its national charter should a black person be initiated and activated since, in her interpretation, such an action would not be in agreement” with the mutual acceptability clause. She then won a vote of the officers in favor of her understanding of the terms of the clause.⁵³ This prompted the resignation of fellow Chi Omega sorority sister Diane Mancuso, the President of the 1970 Panhellenic governing-body, as well as Jan Nelson, Mary Ellen Lynch and Karen Hanna, who refused to “rationalize discriminatory practices.”⁵⁴ Shortly thereafter, Gould, who had just graduated and no longer served as the UNO Chi Omega president, wrote to the

⁵⁰ “Attorney King Delivers Legal Opinion; Naylor Agrees with Senate Decision.” *Gateway* March 26, 1969 p. 1.

⁵¹ Mary Ann Wynkoop, *Dissent in the Heartland, Revised and Expanded Edition: The Sixties at Indiana University* Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2017, 120.

⁵² Todd Simon, “Discrimination Investigated” *Gateway* April 14, 1971; p. 2.

⁵³ “First Findings Are Released in Chi Omega Investigation” *Gateway* May 21, 1971; p. 1.

⁵⁴ Karen Hanna, “Discrimination,” *Gateway* April 23, 1971; p. 4; Simon, “Discrimination Investigated,” p. 2; *Tomahawk : Summer 1971* p. 4. <https://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/yearbooks/58> Accessed September 4, 1971.

same Dean of Student Personnel who had called the police on the BLAC activists, Donald Pflasterer. In light of MacIntosh's remarks about mutual acceptability and the subsequent Chi Omega ratification, Gould requested that her name be removed from the letter she had earlier submitted to the Board of Regents, affirming that that sorority "did not discriminate on the basis of race, color, creed, or national origin." As she later explained, Gould "did it because I didn't want Chi Omega or the local chapter to get away with blatant discrimination."⁵⁵



CHI OMEGA — Kevin Dolen, Cleo Aulner; Row 2: Jan Nelson, Margie Hargleroad, Carol Strother, Robin McNutt, Jane Harrow, Jeannine Giller, Laura Chavez, Jo Barlande; Row 3: Marina Montalud, Diana Fuller, Cindy Sheldon, Lynn Nielsen, Carol Mayhan, Sue Hale, Mary Ellen Lynch, Cheryl Shreeves, Joyce Klingforth, Mary Jochim, Cris Kay, Peggy Kansler, Barb Eastep, Carol Knapp, JoMarie Cech, Violet Kazlauskas, Deborah Magee, Gaylene Wagman.

Image 5: Chi Omega Tomahawk: Summer 1971 p. 6.

It is unclear how Gould's letter came to the attention of the Student Senate, but by April it had learned of its existence. An unidentified *Gateway* source noted that it was, in the source's words, "written out of conscience," and that it went on to make "several allegations against the sorority and its stand concerning discrimination."⁵⁶ This sparked a new round of investigations into the sororities' constitutions and discrimination in student organizations more broadly. Student Senators Cliff Herd and Danny Powers won approval to create an ad hoc committee to investigate the accusation of racial as well as religious exclusion at the sorority.⁵⁷ Steve Wild, who had stormed out of the last meeting in frustration at the Senate's rejection of his proposal to bring the *Gateway* within the supervisory jurisdiction of the Senate, was replaced as Senate President by Jim Zadina, who

⁵⁵ "Naylor Waylays Senate Decision" *Gateway* June 18, 1971; p. 1.

⁵⁶ John Malone, "Chi O's Investigated" *Gateway* April 21, 1971; p. 3.

⁵⁷ Simon, "Discrimination Investigated," p. 2.

would oversee the committee's work.⁵⁸ As the former-member Karen Hanna articulated the problem, the matter centered on "whether or not an organization should be permitted to use University facilities when membership in the group is not open to students regardless of race, color, creed, or national origin."⁵⁹

The investigation immediately precipitated a larger cultural and political conflict on campus. The same day that the *Gateway* revealed to readers that the Senate was investigating Chi Omega for discrimination on page two, on page one it cheekily reported on the winner of the Miss UNO Pageant: Mary Jochim, the new Chi Omega president, and runner-up Jeanine Giller, also a Chi Omega. The *Gateway's* tenor in reporting on the pageant vividly illustrated the counter-culture sympathies of its writers and editors, portending their involvement in the ensuing discrimination controversy. Comparing the event to a popular carhop-service franchise that served hot dogs and root beer, the paper described the event as having "all the gaiety and beauty of a Dog 'N' Suds opening ... All that was missing was the flashing white teeth and dulcet tones of Bert Parks," the debonair host of Miss America at the time. The ceremonies for the pageant were "UNO's own Frick and Frack, Jon Bridgewater and Pat Anderson," referencing a pair of Swiss comedy ice-skaters who dressed in lederhosen for their performances.⁶⁰ Recognizing the cultural divide between Chi Omega on one side and the *Gateway* and Senate on the other, Jochim rejoined that the discrimination accusations were nothing more than "personal animosities between ingoing and outgoing officers," amplified by a Senate intent on making the sorority a "scapegoat." Many likely were sympathetic to the charge: In a Winter 1970-71 interview with sorority presidents for the yearbook, an interviewer had asked, "it has often been noted that the *Gateway* is "anti-Greek."" and asked the Presidents' opinion of that claim. Two said yes, two more said it had been; only Gould said it was not.⁶¹ MacIntosh's visit to campus to train the new officers, Jochim explained, was necessary due to the unusual circumstances of all the incoming officers being sophomores who "needed the training. She said nothing about discrimination." Mildred Hollingsowrth, the "personnel advisor to Chi Omega at UNO" dismissed the matter as a case of jealousy, which Jochim speculated might have originated from a couple of sorority ratings that placed Chi Omega first and second.⁶²

Although both had a well-deserved reputation for pursuing liberal politics, the transition from Wild to Zadina proved essential to furthering the investigation. Gould remarked at the time that she likely would not have pursued the issue with Wild or gotten "involved in his type of politics." She did however trust Zadina's motives, and "felt it would keep open discrimination off campus" if he pursued the matter. His first controversy-provoking decision was to hold investigatory hearings into the matter behind closed doors. With witnesses inside hearing and receiving the message of sorority sisters singing "at the top of their lungs" outside, Gould and another former sorority sister, Jeannie Sue Brayman,

⁵⁸ Simon, "Discrimination Investigated" p. 2; Malone, "Chi O's Investigated," p. 3.

⁵⁹ Hanna, "Discrimination," 4.

⁶⁰ "Mary Jochim Crowned in Miss UNO Pageant," *Gateway* April 14, 1971; p. 1.

⁶¹ *Tomahawk: Winter 1970-1971* p. 16

⁶² John Malone, "Chi O's Investigated" *Gateway* April 21, 1971; p. 3.

testified to the Senate. As the *Gateway* reported, “Both acknowledge there is open discrimination within Chi Omega.” Brayman said the issue “built up over the years” and eventually she could “rationalize the situation no further.” The discrimination also included religious faith. She “explained the National set a quota system and specifies a certain percentage of Catholics and Protestants are to be included in the membership of each chapter. She also mentioned the percentage for Catholics is low” for Omaha’s sizable Catholic population. Brayman “knew I couldn’t do a damn thing to change the sorority from the inside. I feel that I’m trying to help them.” Gould concurred, opining that “I think they discriminate in more ways than color or national origin ... I know they discriminate on religious grounds.” Bluntly summing up the issue with mutual acceptability, Gould acknowledged that the term “means that a Chi Omega pledge should be accepted uniformly throughout the country. This means she would have to be white.” The possible objections of alumnae factored into their recruiting decisions. Unlike Hanna or Brayman, Gould had not actually resigned from Chi Omega, on account of having graduated that winter, and, in her estimation, “it doesn’t seem to make any difference if I quit or not.”⁶³ Her sisters were not so indifferent about her membership status: a group of Chi Omegas visited the family home to demand the return of her sorority pin. Met at the door by her mother and father, Anne and Don Gould, they left without the pin.⁶⁴

The Senate released its preliminary findings on May 20th, affirming that the national Chi Omega advisor, Linda MacIntosh, had led the Zeta Delta chapter at UNO to conclude that it “Would lose its national charter should a black person be initiated and activated” because it “Would not be in agreement with the Chi Omega principle of mutual acceptability.” She then won “a favorable vote of support of .. the principle of mutual acceptability,” which, the committee concluded, “does not comply clearly and without qualifications with the University of Nebraska Board of Regents policy that Student Organizations membership criteria be not based on race, creed or color.” The committee recommended President Zadina relay the findings to the National Secretary of Chi Omega, invite her to, in writing, declare that MacIntosh’s interpretation of the membership requirements were “clearly incorrect, clarify whether the meaning of mutually acceptability implies racial exclusion, and affirm that the Zeta Delta chapter’s standing would “not be affected in any manner as a result of strict adherence” to the Regents’ policy on non-discrimination. President Naylor complemented the report with a corresponding letter to the President Emeritus of the Chi Omega Governing Council, asking for a prompt reply to the Senate.⁶⁵

Over the summer the harmony between Naylor and the Senate foundered on how to handle the Governing Council’s obfuscations and non-answers. An initial response to Taylor from the national president, Mary Love Collins, reiterated that Chi Omega was “a fraternal order of harmonious friends” united in “mutually acceptable standards” of “congeniality” and “courteous relations.” Such a group would “contribute to desirable standards on campus.” She insinuated that the students criticizing the group must not be members of such

⁶³ “Naylor Waylays Senate Decision” *Gateway* June 18, 1971; p. 1, 7.

⁶⁴ Interview with Anne Gould, May 11, 2020.

⁶⁵ “First Findings Are Released in Chi Omega Investigation” *Gateway* May 21, 1971; p 1.

societies and unaware of National Panhellenic Conference values.”⁶⁶ The letter effectively split the Senate and the *Gateway* staff from Naylor. The newspaper’s summary of the letter determined that it “failed to define the term [mutual acceptability], and likewise failed to set aside the committee’s suspicion of discrimination.” Gould thought “the Senate is giving Chi Omega a fair deal” with the opportunity to challenge the May 20th findings and “explained Mrs. Collins’ inadequate response as a reflection of her attitude “that the sorority is above answering any questions. They feel they join the university for the university’s benefit.””⁶⁷ In response to Collins’ letter, on June 10th the Senate voted 12-5 to remove official recognition of the sorority, effectively denying it access to university facilities until the local chapter “supply clear evidence” that Collins’ statement “was clearly incorrect.”⁶⁸ In effect, the Senate challenged the Chi Omega - Zeta Deltas to prove the president of their national organization was in error.

Naylor agreed with the Senate’s assessment of the inadequacy of Collins reply, but was not ready to suspend the sorority. The next day, he wrote again to Collins, beseeching her to try again at producing an adequate response to the Senate’s requests. Claiming the national office must not yet be “Aware of the importance of the letter” he had sent, he wished to give “every chance to respond.”⁶⁹ Where the Senate had decided to suspend recognition of the sorority, however, Naylor informed Collins that Chi Omega “will not be recommended as a recognized campus organization for the 1971-72 school year at the University of Nebraska at Omaha until” it rejected MacIntosh’s statement, defined mutual acceptability so as not to be a form of racial excusion, and assured that the local chapter’s charter would not be affected by compliance with the Board of Regents’ anti-discrimination policy.⁷⁰ As the *Gateway* interpreted it, this meant that Chi Omega had “a September deadline before reprisals would be taken concerning recognition on campus.” Gould opined that “President Naylor is bending over backwards for them.”⁷¹ Much of the student criticism focused on the contrast and seeming hypocrisy between the administration’s handling of BLAC and that of Chi Omega. The *Gateway* charged that “an evenhanded administrative policy is not to be found” in comparing the two incidents, noting in particular that Naylor gave BLAC ten minutes to clear out, while to Chi Omega he wrote letters offering second chances. Across the University of Nebraska system, the Vice-Chancellor had “urged hard-line stands on student violations of university regulations” in response to the BLAC sit-in, but, the newspaper noted, “you will not find 54 felony charges” when predominantly white University of Nebraska-Lincoln students occupied the ROTC building. The editorial found “little credence” in the Regents “token item” of a nondiscrimination policy.⁷²

⁶⁶ Mary Love Collins, “Chi Omega’s Response” *Gateway* June 11, 1971; 3.

⁶⁷ “Naylor Waylays Senate Decision” *Gateway* June 18, 1971; p. 7.

⁶⁸ “12-5 Senate Majority Says Bounce Sorority” *Gateway* June 18, 1971; p.1.

⁶⁹ “Naylor Waylays Senate Decision” *Gateway* June 18, 1971, p. 1.

⁷⁰ Kirk Naylor, “Naylor’s Response to Chi O Response,” *Gateway* June 18, 1971, p. 8.

⁷¹ Naylor Waylays Senate Decision” *Gateway* June 18, 1971, p. 1.

⁷² “Administrative Action Shows No Equity” *Gateway* June 25, 1971, p. 2.

The fallout with the Student Senate was swift. Graduate senator Fred Adams moved for a vote of censure of Naylor. Zadina expressed his perplexity at just what Naylor's letter actually meant: was Chi Omega no longer recognized? Would it not be recognized if the semester started without a response? Was it still recognized pending the wait for the next letter from the national board? Herb Winsor, the Senator for the College of Arts and Sciences suggested asking for Naylor's resignation since he "seems to be extremely tolerant of racism," a charge echoed by Senator Thomas Williams.⁷³ Even the Dean of Student Personnel, Donald Pflasterer, who had weathered the controversies over BLAC with Naylor now declared "I don't fully agree with the President." Senior representative Dan Powers, the Senator who first requested the investigation, in turn accused Pflasterer of "sitting on the letter" he had received from Gould." By a 10-7 vote with three abstentions, the Senate censured President Naylor. Rebutting the censure, Naylor cautioned that kicking the sorority off campus would, for now, be "precipitous" and ribbed the Senate for "express(ing) their displeasure with my not doing exactly what they suggested."⁷⁴

After awaiting a reply from Chi Omega National President Winnie Bowker, which offered no less dissembling about the meaning of "mutual acceptability" than what Collins' had offered, Zadina's final report to the Senate tersely recommended the university "cease recognizing the Zeta Delta Chapter of Chi Omega" as a campus organization." Naylor, recognizing the difficulty of his position and importance of the issue, decided to bring the report to the Chancellor for consideration by the Board of Regents for a final decision.⁷⁵

Four-hundred fifty miles away in Scottsbluff, Nebraska, the Regents at their August 7th-8th meeting allowed the sorority to remain a recognized campus organization. The Regent who had the most to say on the matter was Dr. Robert Prokop. Regents were elected state officials and Dr. Prokop—possessing both an MD and PhD, both from Nebraska-Lincoln—had campaigned on the claim that professors worked only eighteen-hour weeks, a sum he arrived at by presuming that faculty dedicated two hours each week to work on each course outside of classroom hours, and nothing else.⁷⁶ In an evaluation of Chi Omega seemingly as comprehensive as his evaluation of faculty workloads, Prokop declared that the "investigation "proved" to him there were several "colored" members in the sorority." Surely this could not have been meant as a reference to the all-white Zeta Delta chapter, but even if Prokop meant to refer to the entire national organization, then, as the *Gateway* asked, "why did the national chapter refuse to deny discrimination on the basis of race?" The regent placed the responsibility on Black students to rush all-white sororities. Of the last three rush weeks at Lincoln and at Omaha, Prokop noted "there have been no colored people come through rush ... They have to take a step forward if they want to get into the system, too—it's not a one-way street."⁷⁷ Prokop's position seems to have been informed

⁷³ "Senate Censures Naylor" *Gateway* July 2, 1971, p. 1; Thomas Williams, "Gate Crasher" *Gateway* July 7, 1971, p. 2.

⁷⁴ "Senate Censures Naylor" *Gateway* July 2, 1971, p. 1.

⁷⁵ "Final Decision on Sorority Status Up to Regents" *Gateway* July 30, 1971 p. 1.

⁷⁶ John Malone, "Regent Interview," *Gateway* October 13, 1971. Pgs. 6-7.

⁷⁷ John Malone, "Regent Interview," *Gateway* October 13, 1971. P. 7.

by his concern for public perception; he warned that it would not be politically wise “to allow students to come up with a solution to a university problem, particularly with public sentiment toward students the way it is.” He also noted the embarrassment that would come to UNO if it had to admit that Chi Omega had discriminatory admissions policies for all that time.⁷⁸ Helping Prokop’s case, the Regents received a letter from Mary Jochim in her capacity as President of the UNO Chi Omega chapter, cosigned by the President of the sorority’s local alumnae association. Sent after the Senate’s final report of July 22nd, it is the first unequivocal statement from the Chi Omega that “our membership criteria is not based on race, creed, or color” and affirmed their commitment to the Regents’ antidiscrimination policy. National President Bowker offered a conditional assurance that the Zeta Delta chapter would find no trouble with the national office while complying with the Regents’ policy, so long as the Regents were “within reason.”⁷⁹

The confrontation between the Senate and the administration had not yet run its course, however. Prokop’s comments, especially his insistence that Chi Omega had minority student members, his seemingly dismissive attitude toward Zadina in particular and the Senate’s standing to investigate and resolve the matter, won him no new friends in student government. Zadina had requested documentation for his claim about minority members of Chi Omega, which went unanswered.⁸⁰ His remarks also landed in the middle of additional wrangling about editorial control of the *Gateway*, as Prokop supported the creation of new standards of ethics for student newspapers, and would underline offending passages from the *Gateway* in red and circulate them with the Regents to underscore his concern about protecting the system from libel suits.⁸¹ Fred Adams, the graduate school Senator who had sponsored the resolution to censure Naylor, now moved to “censure vehemently the Regents’ inaction on the Chi Omega decisions on the grounds that it promotes and legalizes racism and/or the myth of racism on the UNO campus and the NU system.”⁸² A twenty-six year-old former football player, the bearded, long-haired Adams had been repatriated to the United States from Mexico for smoking marijuana in 1967. “I think the city is racist,” he remarked a month later in response to he, his wife and a Black friend being pulled over by the police, in which the police then only frisked his friend. “The offense was driving with long hair in Omaha.”⁸³ While the resolution to suspend Chi Omega had passed 10-7-3 and to censure Naylor 12-5, Adams’ disgust with the Regents represented a near consensus; the motion passed 15-2, with one of the Senators who had voted in favor of Chi Omega in June saying “I’ll be damned” before letting the Regents ignore the Senate.⁸⁴

The affair concluded in part because UNO’s students and faculty moved on to wrangle with other hot-button cultural issues, and in part by electoral backlash in the next elections for

⁷⁸ “Regents Chi Omega Decision Not Shocking” *Gateway* August 13, 1971 p. 2.

⁷⁹ Stan Carter, “Chi Omega Gains Reprieve” *Gateway* August 13, 1971 p. 3.

⁸⁰ “Senate Censures Urge Close Look” *Gateway* September 22, 1971, p. 4.

⁸¹ “Regents Consider Press Guidelines” *Gateway* September 17, 1971, p. 3.

⁸² “Senate Censures Board of Regents” *Gateway* September 22, 1971, p. 1.

⁸³ Stan Carter, “Student Senator Adams: Big Fred’s Travels Began in Bluffs” *Gateway* October 20, 1971 p. 3

⁸⁴ “Senate Censures Board of Regents” *Gateway* September 22, 1971, p. 1.

student government. In addition to the antidiscrimination controversies, that Fall term saw UNO retire its “Indians” nickname, following the earlier retirement of Ouampi, its racist caricature of a mascot. “Maverick” became the new school nickname and mascot, beating out the UNO Unicorns and Roadrunners in a student vote.⁸⁵ Mavericks or Unicorns would have been a moot point, had faculty in the College of Arts and Sciences had their way of it. At a meeting of seventeen department chairmen, the group, with only three opposed, passed a resolution to end “all intercollegiate athletic programs ... effective next fall,” on account of the worrisome “budgetary conditions of the university.”⁸⁶ Issues between bootstrappers and traditional students also percolated, as demonstrated in the fall semester campaigns for Senate. With eighteen of thirty seats up for election, a coalition of four bootstrapper candidates all won on platforms either critical of the Senate’s handling of Chi Omega, or noncommittal with a preference to focus instead on issues specific to bootstrappers. A total of eight seats went to students who either were athletes or sisters in Chi Omega.⁸⁷

Conclusion

The controversies over BLAC’s sit-in and Chi Omega’s recruiting standards help us see one of the elements most distinctive to the Chi Omega controversy: the lack of Black student voices. Minority voices are conspicuously absent throughout the affair. Gould’s letter rescinding her previous affirmation of Chi Omega’s compliance with the antidiscrimination policy, the vote to affirm MacIntosh’s interpretation of “Mutual Acceptability,” the subsequent Senate investigations and testimonies, none of them indicate that the event ever was about any specific minority student who wanted to rush Chi Omega or any other sorority. And why would a minority student want to do so? After emerging as a prominent voice for North Omaha’s African American community during a series of conflicts over police violence in 1966 and serving as a key figure in calming the situation during the 1968 unrest, in 1971 Ernie Chambers began serving his first of eventually forty-six years in the Nebraska Unicameral. On the Regents’ decision, Chambers dismissed it as “no more than I expected.” “There is not much time to be concerned about crashing the gate of white fraternities and sororities,” Chambers observed, “with so many serious problems that black students face on campus.” With one of his characteristically insightful barbs, the barber-turned-politician suggested the regents “look at some of the practices in the businesses they operate” if they really wanted to find issues of concern to his clients and constituents.⁸⁸

Together, the BLAC sit-in and the efforts to investigate and potentially remove segregated student groups affirm and deepen our historical understanding of racial politics and student activist in Midwestern campuses in two periods of great social upheaval in

⁸⁵ Geri Teteak, “Student Election Results,” *Gateway* October 13, 1971 p. 1.

⁸⁶ Steve Priesman, “A & S Drops Bombshell, ‘Get Rid of Athletics’” *Gateway* September 22, 1971, p. 1.

⁸⁷ Geri Teteak, “8 Seats to Chi O’s, Athletes” *Gateway* October 13, 1971 p. 3.

⁸⁸ “Chambers: ‘Decision Typical’” *Gateway* August 13, 1971, p 3.

America: the late-1960s through the early-1970s, and today. The UNO administration's begrudging moves to follow through on BLAC's demands for Afrocentric courses and for equal, safe, Black-friendly accommodations on campus events, and similar reluctance to pursue white students' charges of discrimination in white campus groups echoes many of the themes found in current scholarly examinations of race in higher education. Micere Keels notes that diversity initiatives have not greatly changed an academic culture geared toward white, mid-upper class students, and that professions that education is now a colorblind equalizer does not mean that colleges are "post-oppression."⁸⁹ Reminiscent of the struggles to get a record player or the presumption that it is a Black student's responsibility to rush a White sorority, not the White sorority's responsibility to recruit Black students, highlights the continuing problem of acts of microaggression limiting the engagement of students of color in a campus's extracurricular life.⁹⁰ Greek life in particular remains a hostile space, where, Gabriel Velez observes "Minority students not only see Greek organizations as racially-ethnically marked spaces, but also experience them as spaces from which they are actively excluded."⁹¹ The Regents' antidiscrimination policy and the review of campus groups' constitutions had made diversity an end-goal. But, Keels argues, "when diversity is an end goal, the burden of creating counter-spaces and social support falls upon students, resulting in little to no actual institutional change."⁹²

This critique helps make visible the reasons why the efforts of students to challenge extracurricular discrimination and segregation at the University of Nebraska at Omaha found such limited success. Some White students, including, crucially, the staff at the *Gateway* and a majority on the Senate, as well as a sorority and a Panhellenic president, opposed discrimination where it was found on the paper of student-group constitutions, heard in private meetings with sorority representatives, or documented in letters to the Dean of Students. But looking more broadly, White students had not shown up to the BLAC sit-in. They had not then been arrested at the sit-in. They did not invite Black voices into the debates over the sororities' "mutual acceptability" standards, and, unsurprisingly, they could not sustain continued political support or cultural enthusiasm among White students for their efforts in anti-racism.

Writing in the summer of 2020, it is hard for these two authors, at least, not to think of the ways that these issues still reverberate. As National Guard troops used our campus as a staging-ground before heading into Philadelphia to support police efforts to suppress Black Lives Matter protestors, our own student newspaper, *The Quad*, condemned the administration's passivity in the face of racial injustice. It observed that "It's true that, legally, West Chester University's administration had no recourse to refuse housing National Guard troops. But ... [University President] Dr. Fiorentino had the opportunity to throw the full weight of his position behind that [student] activism before National Guard

⁸⁹ Micere Keels, *Campus Counterspaces: Black and Latinx Students' Search for Community at Historically White Universities* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2019): 5, 16.

⁹⁰ Micere Keels with Ja'Dell Davis, *Campus Counterspaces*, 55.

⁹¹ Micere Keels with Gabriel Velez, *Campus Counterspaces*, 99.

⁹² Micere Keels, *Campus Counterspaces*, 153.

troops were ever housed on our campus. He did not.”⁹³ Fiorentino, speaking at a minority student-organized Black Lives Matter rally in response to police officer Derek Chauvin’s killing of George Floyd, acknowledged a history of WCU administrations’ promises to do better at building a campus climate of solidarity that then lacked follow-through, promising this time would be different. Will it be? Noting the waning White concern about racism just months after the killing of George Floyd—Whites indicating racism was a “big problem” fell from 45% to 33% from June to August, 2020—Renée Graham quipped that “For more than 400 years, Black people have been fighting against the white supremacy and systemic racism that killed George Floyd. For a lot of white people this year, their own efforts lasted less than a season.”⁹⁴ The same might be said of the efforts at UNO. Absent any appetite from Pflasterer, Naylor, or the Regents to support minority students on campus, efforts in pursuit of equity and a better student experience for minority students on campus would remain the lonely province of those students, themselves.

⁹³ Ali Kochik and Kyle Gombosi, “#BlackLivesMatter: West Chester University, the National Guard, and Institutional Power in the Face of a Movement,” *The Quad*, June 16, 2020. Available at <https://wcuquad.com/6016844/op-ed/blacklivesmatter-west-chester-university-the-national-guard-and-institutional-power-in-the-face-of-a-movement/> Accessed September 4, 2020.

⁹⁴ Renée Graham, “Support for Black Lives Matter is Dropping—among White Americans” *Boston Globe*, September 1, 2020, <https://www.bostonglobe.com/2020/09/01/opinion/support-black-lives-matter-is-dropping-among-white-americans/> accessed September 3, 2020