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ruby bargon

Issue II, December 1994.....

Welcome to the second issue of Ruby Bayou.

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It is an open forum for campus-wide expression, be it poetry, artwork, satire, fiction, commentary, fact, etc. The views presented do not necessarily reflect those of the editors, the sponsoring organization, or the Student Association. Responses and submissions should be directed to C.U. Box 85 or vaxed to WACSG. Submissions will not be returned, and minor editorial liberties may be taken.

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MEDUSA

My hair
lovely, even without
gel
mousse
styling spritzer
diffuser
conditioner
hot oil
my beauty.

I have
no
face
my HAIR outshined me
a mutiny of the scalp.

Poseidon came,
dripping briny footprints
His hair was unruly
and full of kelp.
He took me in his arms and
crushed my with his salty ego.

I lay on your floor, Athena
you righteous bitch
I lay there
my shoulders gritting against the marble floor
my head banging into your altar,

Virgin goddess
I screamed to you, begged you, pleaded-
you averted your HighandMightyFace from me,
the virgin whore.
Punished me for My deed.

(Perhaps standing in a temple in a miniskirt meant I wanted it)

My lovely hair
A permed nest of poisonous snakes
they hiss
And resist combing.

-Kathryn Drury

In Defense of Sororities

Sororities. The word seems to have controversy absorbed into the core of its very meaning. There are people who will defend them to the death, and those who feel personally offended by their existence. With such raw emotion on both sides, it seems unlikely that understanding will ever grow between them. But it is precisely this lack of understanding which exacerbates the problem by feeding misconceptions and rumors.

As a sorority member, I feel a kind of duty to try to help make some kind of understanding possible. I care deeply for and about my sorority, and Greek life in general. It is not something that is now or has ever been perfect. However, it is something that has helped me become the kind of person I've always wanted to be, but was too insecure to really try to become.

When I finished pledging, I felt a sense of empowerment that affected everything about my life. I spoke up more, listened better, and became involved around campus. I cared more about my studies, and I had closer relationships with other people. I began to question, first small things, and now larger issues. I began holding offices, to try being a leader. I challenged myself in ways I never dared to before. And I began to succeed.

I came to see that I was someone who was capable of doing things, of being right. I began to see that there were aspects of myself that were not like other people. I am an individual in spite of the fact that I have shirts that sometimes match other people's. My letters do

not take away my individuality; they allow an otherwise repressed person to be her real self, knowing that she has the love and support of thirty other women on this campus. Are they equally close to me? Of course not, my sisters are all individuals just as much as I am. Relationships with people are always on a case by case basis.

The relationships between sisters in a sorority create a kind of structure. Some of this structure is organizational, but some of it is something else; it's a sense of family. Coming from a home where my parents were continually breaking up and getting back together, family was not a concept I really understood until I pledged. My sisters are truly that - sisters. There is something we all share that creates an environment where we, as women, are actually encouraged to try new things, even if sometimes we fail. And failing is okay because there are always people who understand and who will encourage you again to keep going. I think this is the kind of environment that embodies the best of human nature.

As a woman, and especially as a feminist, I find it exceptional that this family is run by and for women. Legacies run from woman to woman, goals exist for the betterment of members, and ideals are things we choose for ourselves, not things defined or dictated by someone else.

What is it that we share that makes this environment possible? Why can I feel this way about my sisters and not about all my friends? Commitment. During pledging, we make, and renew each semester, a

In Defense of Sororities

continued

commitment to each other and to the environment we have created, our sorority.

I don't want to defend all of the pledging practices of Geneseo's Greek organizations in this article. That is not my intention. I'm not sure that I would ever defend them all, but I don't know enough about them to try, even though I am a member of the Inter-Greek Council executive board. All of the organizations are different. They do different things. Distinctions are necessary.

What I learned during pledging was about as far from useless information as possible. I learned how to have the strength to be myself, how to give and when to take. I learned how to compromise, and how it feels to be really right and really wrong. I think the knowledge I received during pledging is so incredibly valuable that if it could

be transposed to curriculum, it would make an amazing class.

Some people may feel that the presence of sororities is frustrating or annoying. There will be people who feel that way about most organizations. That doesn't mean that they don't make good and valuable contributions to student life. And it also doesn't give these critics the right to make judgments of whole masses of people based on such limited information as a pledge greeting. Whether the critic like it or not, people will always get grouped together in one way or another. It is always important to keep in mind that people are individuals, even those who wear Greek letters.

by Carolyn Mosca

education

straight

white

male magicians

pull faces

and tricks to control

my illumination

today i'm learning to speak

my first language

walking with my eyes closed

hands at my side not forward

moving

through the groove

my open eyes have learned to

ignore

i knew how to walk

to speak

all along

We kept rubbing against each
other,
scraping and editing,
sawing off bits from our surfaces
to force a match,
to achieve the perfect fit

Looking at the scraps and dust
on the floor
and the larger pieces of
ourselves in the trash,
our means seem depraved
and our ends unnatural
sacrificing parts of ourselves
smoothing
to create this beautiful
(acceptable) pair

do you really believe
that our surfaces
must fit

flush?

poetry by Jennifer Murphy

Yet Another Lesson In Diversity

Again, I see the need to address the issue of diversity, as one of my peers has given us a wonderful example of a typical Eurocentric based, biased argument against celebration and acceptance of difference. My fellow patriot chose the Quebec vs. English Canadian example as his weapon of choice against the "Minority Empowerment" movement. He failed to realize however, that his choice is yet another example of the oppression that plagues minorities in America. Let me explain.

The Quebec'ers (French Canadians) have been trying for years to work through the predominately English Canadian Parliament to address their needs and concerns. The response they received is typical; "The issues you bring up are valid, however we as Parliament must act on behalf of the whole population of Canada." (This quote is taken from a debate I watched on this issue on cable's CSpan.)

As of late, they have become so disgusted with the oppressive, unsympathetic, and xenophobic treatment they have received at the hands of the English majority that they feel it is necessary to separate themselves from the rest of their country. This was done in order to illustrate their serious intentions to preserve their culture. This is very unfortunate, but one must not overlook the responsibilities of the majority here. I am sure many readers can see for themselves the similarities in the treatment the French Canadians receive in their country, and the treatment minorities receive here. "Forget about your French culture you Quebec'ers, just be Canadian!"

Minorities in America are continuously asked to submerge their culture in lieu of the dominate one, at the risk of looking "unpatriotic". Well...I would argue that for those of us here in America, we would be unpatriotic if we DIDN'T voice our concerns about the structure and operation of our society. To simply sweep away the fact that people come from diverse backgrounds that are complicated - backgrounds that take time and effort to understand - in order to "pseudo-unify" under an "American" ideal is illogical.

It is illogical in the fact that we have yet to redefine what "American" means. How can anyone ask people who have been historically oppressed by a culture to identify themselves with and

wholeheartedly embrace the said culture? You see, this is the very point which confuses many conservative theorists. Achieving racial harmony is impossible under a traditional "American" ideology. It is up to all of us, as citizens of the United States, to redefine the term "American". Define it in a manner that supports and empowers ALL of the people, not just the white male population.

My effort in this article is not to single out any individuals in an attempt to persecute. Rather, it is to share an ideology and vision that I have, which is beneficial only if you are open-minded enough to hear it. I want to challenge every reader of this paper! I challenge you to think critically about what you have read here, discuss it with your friends, bring it up in class. Whatever you do...think about this issue; it will not go away!

In closing, I want to say to those of you who see WAC, BSU, MSC and other minority groups as fragmentary elements dividing our country, join us! Join these groups, they are open to all students! In doing so, you will find that the aim of these groups is not to form a SEPARATE country, but a BETTER one! A country where all people feel empowered, where institutional racism no longer hinders people's life opportunities. A country that truly supports the democratic ideology we all treasure, so that we can more accurately define what it means to be...AMERICAN.

by William Taylor

* * * * *

Noteworthy quotes from Dorothy Sayer's address to
a Women's Society, 1938, entitled "Are Women Human?"

"As a human being, I dislike comfort and dislike draughts. If the trousers do not attract you, so much the worse; for the moment I do not want to attract you. I want to enjoy myself as a human being, and why not?"

"In fact, there is perhaps only one human being in a thousand who is passionately interested in his job for the job's sake. The difference is that if that one person in a thousand is a man, we say, simply, that he is passionately keen on his job; if she is a woman, we say she is a freak."

"The only decent reason for tackling any job is that it is *your* job,
and *you* want to do it."

Tree

I am a tree in your yard
I'm secure
I majest
I drop silent veiny-leaves to your ground
when color bangs subside
My reaches feel so good
Soil
You told me you appreciated it
The way we're wrought
Fearlessly-tempered balladry

Lunch

I ate at the Commons
I sat at an open window with a breeze
I got turkey on wheat
pears
and lemon water
The woman with green eyes from
drawing class
was there too
We said hi by the lemon water fountain
I sat by myself and,
hoping the woman with green eyes was
watching me,
I ate my pears like I thought
Sean Connery would

poetry by Seth Rostan

Jettisoned

And then I went,
spent.
I heard indecision's fix
sounded like
hammers clamoring in my dryer
Then haze -
speech sponged up by foggy snow
The maze;
no end so near as alternatives.
The simple picking of doors -
strong motions

Party

They were all out there,
standing erect like trees
and engaged
I thought maybe they swayed
back away from me
but if they did
they leaned foward, too
An oscillating semblence to us
A party of reflections

From the Editor's Space

The past two issues have included observations on the effects of the Greek system in Geneseo. This issue is controversial; like Carolyn's article says, people on all sides of the situation have fairly strong opinions, yet these stances are rarely expressed in a larger forum, or printed in any widespread campus publications. With good reason, people are wary of criticizing someone to their face.

But Greek life is an obvious force on this campus, and we think it should be discussed. Any criticisms lodged against Greek life are usually retorted by the idea that non-Greeks simply do not have enough knowledge about the inner workings of the system to adequately criticize it. I find some truth to this.

Okay, so if all we (including myself in the category of non-Greeks, or independents if you prefer) are able to base our opinions on is what we see, then these opinions are based on what Greeks show us. Almost all of our observations are based on what Greek organizations choose to show in public. So who has the power here? The power lies with the Greek organizations and how they run themselves. And what is the greatest display of Greek life (often the only display) that non-Greeks on this campus see? Pledging. We see you pledging. And what does it look like? Organized and voluntary subjugation. You've seen the hats and the paddles and the greetings. It doesn't even look foolish. It looks stupid. And appearances are often deceiving, I agree. But these "appearances" are all Greeks give us to see. Greek organizations may respond by proclaiming, we're free to do whatever we want in public, just like everyone else. True, but then don't complain about the repercussions and misunderstandings caused by the fact that pledging activities become representative of Greek life. It seems as though there are other components to life within a Greek organization. This is why the two articles we've published are important. And just for the record, one may also argue that nothing - no matter how beneficial, pleasurable, enriching or fun an experience it may provide behind closed doors, is worth publicly (or privately) degrading oneself.

My biggest problem with the Greek life I witness concerns sororities specifically. Simply put, they tend to subjugate their pledges in public more than fraternities do. In the privacy of their houses, fraternities may completely humiliate their pledges. I've heard some bizarre stories, but I can't say for sure. I'll never have the "chance" to pledge a frat. However, they do keep them fairly clean in public, and handshakes don't seem to lower one's self too much. (Although the appearance of paddles allows the mind's imagination to wonder).

Certain sororities, for the most part, make their pledges look extremely subservient. Having spoken with sorority members, I've heard stories that various pledging activities, while they may look bad, are necessary for the cause of bonding and the lessons it teaches. Another example of, Do the ends justify the means? I have to ask, how worthwhile are the ends, and how truly obnoxious are the means? I do not need to pledge or see behind the scenes to know that one unavoidable component of pledging certain sororities on this campus involves women making other women conform to their "rules" of order. Or wear garters in public. Or carry Barbie dolls around. Or wear sailor caps for five weeks. Or not be allowed to walk alone on campus. Need I continue? It doesn't matter if, in private, sororities attempt to empower

each of their members to be individuals. (Although it doesn't seem likely that, by day, women who run nervously around campus, looking to give obligatory sister greetings are, by night, liberated to follow their own impulses.) Many sororities' pledging practices makes women look dumb. A large collective group of women perform what appears like a dance of ridicule for five weeks, and it is choreographed by other women. Sororities - this just doesn't look good.

A reasonable response is, if I don't like what I see, I don't have to join a sorority. Yes, I have the power to choose. However, Greek organizations flaunt their pledging practices in our faces and on the campus that **all students share**. They do this every day for four to six weeks. You can't give a kid horrid tasting cough syrup and tell her not to cringe nor complain.

-Jodi Perelman

Again, Ruby Bayou welcomes submissions and letters to the editors.

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