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## Review — *Fraternity*, by Diane Brady

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FRATERNITY by Diane Brady. Pp. x + 256. Spiegel and Grau, Random House Publishing Group, New York, New York. 2012. \$25.00. ISBN-13: 978-0-385-52474-2 (paper)

On a cool fall day in 1968, only months after the assassinations of both Martin Luther King Jr. and Robert F. Kennedy, a group of 20 young men arrived on the campus of Holy Cross College, a Jesuit institution. They were mostly freshmen, several were athletes but not all. But they had two rather important things in common: they were all recruited by Fr. John Brook and they were all African American. They were also Roman Catholic or had graduated from Roman Catholic high schools, understandably since Holy Cross was a Roman Catholic College. What might have seemed an insignificant and even ordinary event, the arrival of new students on a college campus at the beginning of the school year, instead signaled a dramatic shift in the lives of these young men and the lives of those associated with them. It was also the beginning of a new orientation in academia as young black men, and later women, began to be sought out and recruited to many elite colleges and universities in the United States. And as with this inaugural group, the majority were recruited as academic scholars rather than athletic scholars.

Of the 20 recruited, not all graduated for various reasons but 12 did and were successful in many fields, especially law. Fraternity follows 5 of those young black men whose sojourn at Holy Cross not only changed their lives but also impacted on the future of the United States in ways no one could even have imagined at the time. They were Stanley Grayson, Eddie

Jenkins, Edward P. Jones, Clarence Thomas, and Theodore V. Wells, Jr. They became (not in any order) literary stars, high profile attorneys, NFL players, and a Supreme Court Justice.

Fr. Brooks was a visionary. He saw the effort to bring black students to Holy Cross, an all-male school, a mission made urgent by the premature and violent death of Martin Luther King, Jr. Prior to that death, Brooks had spent months arguing with his colleagues about the necessity to increase their recruitment efforts for black men. At the time of King's death, there were 8 black students there but Brooks wanted more. He saw the importance of bringing in a critical number all at the same time rather than scattering a few in every year and recognized the need of these newcomers to have a community of men like themselves to whom they could turn in what would be a vast, somewhat disconcerting, and occasionally hostile sea of whites. Those opposed gave the usual reasons: Brook was moving too fast; admitting blacks would lower the tone and the status of the school; they would not be able to keep up, etc. But Brooks persevered. Finally getting approval, he spent the spring and summer madly dashing to schools in Philadelphia and elsewhere in search of likely candidates to whom full scholarships would be offered as he understood that most would not be able to afford the tuition, room and board, fees, and other costs involved in matriculating at an elite institution of higher learning.

Brady does an excellent job of penetrating the lives of these young men and the joys and the pains of their lives at Holy Cross and thereafter. They gave her access to their deepest thoughts and she has presented them well giving us

some understanding of what it was like to break through barriers that had stood for so long for blacks, male and female, in their efforts to attain higher education.

These men matriculated right as the Black Power Movement began to supplant the non-violent Civil Rights Movement. Most were eager participants, having been radicalized first simply by the fact that they were black and male in a society that negated their humanity, their intelligence, their very worth but also by the Civil Rights Movement and the death of King. They took over the Student Center at one point demanding a black floor in the dorms, “soul food”, and “halal” food for those, influenced by the Nation of Islam, who had become Muslims.

The book is a rich source for black Catholic history, especially as Holy Cross was the college which the Healey Brothers, Catholic sons of a slave and a Georgia plantation owner, had attended, while all kept the secret of their blackness to themselves. Now, young black men, proud of their blackness, were changing Holy Cross’ history and by so doing changing the story of the Catholic Church in the United States. It is especially insightful in showing the transition of Clarence Thomas, now a conservative Supreme Court Justice, who left and later returned to the Church but began as a seminarian before transferring to Holy Cross, from a somewhat radicalized young black male to a conservative one unlike most of his classmates at that time or after.

Fr. Brooks “mentored, challenged, counseled, scolded, coached and befriended” these young men who still come together regularly to share stories and reminisce about those

challenging but also inspiring years. His actions helped to inspire later generations, helping them to see what was possible, and in so doing he clearly changed the course of history.

As Brady notes in her introduction:

[This] is the story of five... men who met during a transformative period in U. S. History, men who were eager to embrace new opportunities being offered even as they voiced anger at what was still being denied. They were an unfamiliar force at an all-male college that, like many other schools in the late 1960's, was struggling to hold on to its traditions while trying to adapt to new realities. And they were influenced by a Boston-born Jesuit who, besides changing their lives, was himself forever changed by this first group of black recruits to come to Holy Cross (5)

This is a fascinating and insightful read.

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