

The Lafayette February 27, 1981

DU Party Draws Angry Response From Many In College Community

by Richard Burke

A number of individuals and campus organizations have responded angrily to a party advertised as "Back to the Womb Night" at Delta Upsilon last Friday night. President David W. Ellis has expressed his outrage at the event and Herman C. Kissiah, dean of students, has announced that an investigation into the matter will take place.

The party included stairway walls decorated with pink tissue paper, which was illuminated by red lightbulbs, a mattress shaped to resemble a giant tampon, inflated condoms above the bar, a sign behind the bar reading "ALW - Association of Lafayette Wombs," and one person with a hanger around his neck dressed to resemble an aborted fetus.

Groups expressing their outrage and concern at the event include the Executive Committee of the Association of Lafayette Women, the Professional Women of Lafayette, and the Panhellenic Council, an organization of Lafayette sororities.

Ellis commented, "Based on the limited information that I have available to me, I must conclude that the event exhibited both vulgar and degrading behavior. It shows a lack of understanding of responsibility and sensitivity in human relationships. This type of action is totally antithetical to the mission of an institution of higher learning which must include the preservation of the dignity of human beings."

Kissiah said, "Dean MacEwan is conducting an investigation into the actions of Delta Upsilon this past weekend. As of Wednesday, February 25, most of what we have heard has been from secondary sources. The investigation is designed to find out what did occur at the party. A decision on whether or not to present the case to the Committee on Student Conduct will be made after the initial investigation."

Bob Roth, '81, president of Delta Upsilon, said, "We didn't seriously

consider the implications of the party, and we were taken by surprise at the reaction to it. But I can understand the women's point of view. From the extent of the reaction to the party, I think they made their feelings well known."

Roth noted that although he believes a lot of women did leave the party when they realized its theme, "the party was very crowded, with both men and women enjoying themselves into the early hours of the morning." He also said that the idea for the party did not originate among the brotherhood but was taken from another school.

"We are a fraternity that enjoys having fun," Roth said. "No harm is ever meant by one of our parties."

Chris Neff, '82, and Melissa Galbraith, '82, co-presidents of the Association of Lafayette Women, commented that the ALW was particularly offended by the sign behind the bar. Neff said, "This is not an isolated incident. Our anger and

concern is not aimed specifically at DU but at a general atmosphere on campus which leads to the abuse of women. We don't think that respect is too much to ask for."

"This is not a battle of men versus women," Galbraith said. "It is a matter of making people more sensitive to the needs of others. If DU had been in touch with the way the average person thinks, they would have realized the implications of the party. They wouldn't have had a theme party demeaning an ethnic or minority group, but they apparently felt that it was all right to have a party offensive to many women. It is almost still a new concept at Lafayette that we're here."

Neff agreed, and added, "If anything, we hope that this party and the reaction to it will lead to better communication among all people on campus."

Asked to explain why a large number
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Delta Upsilon fraternity was the scene of "Back to the Womb Night" which has generated a campus-wide response.
(Photo courtesy of Melange)

DU PARTY DRAWS ANGRY RESPONSE

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of women stayed at the party, Neff said, "The ALW doesn't represent all women on campus. Apparently, some women weren't bothered by the theme of the party. But many did not attend because of the theme, and many women who went, left immediately. Also, many women have gotten so used to abuse on campus that they have become immune to it. We're trying to do something about it."

Una Chadhuri, instructor in English, and a member of the Professional Women of Lafayette, said, "This is not a women's issue. What is involved is respect for people in general. No one is implying that DU was offering the party as an insult. The party's implications may have been completely unconscious to the men. But if this is the case, the matter is even more disturbing, because it shows a lack of awareness and an insensitivity to the feelings of a large number of people."

"This is not an isolated incident. Women students say that they are often subjected to

uncomfortable situations where they feel disrespect. This incident is a good opportunity to look at prevailing ideas and presumptions. After all, discussion of ideas is what is supposed to take place on college campuses."

James P. Lusardi, associate professor of English, commented, "The theme of the party, along with its expression, is insulting not only to women but to human kind. The theme involves a callous disregard for some serious social and political issues, a disregard which can't be explained away by saying it was all done in the spirit of fun. The matter suggests the impoverished moral awareness of a certain portion of the student body and reflects no credit on the college."

Speaking for the Panhellenic Council, Pauline Buckingham, '82, said, "We don't want to condemn DU, but the idea of the party. This kind of discrimination has to stop. Women are fed up, and this

party was the last straw. It has come to the point where women on campus have to say (no) to these derogatory incidents." Buckingham and others also noted that Delta Upsilon can have successful parties without turning to such themes.

Stacy Schlau, assistant professor of languages, and a member of the Professional Women of Lafayette, said, "I was horrified, and I hope that punitive action is taken against the fraternity. Although the event is part and parcel of structures already existing on campus, the fact remains that the incident occurred at DU. They shouldn't be put off the hook because the issue has wider implications. Parties like this one do constitute sexual harassment of women and create an offensive educational environment."

Schlau added that she felt a general pattern of abusiveness toward women emanates from fraternities. "Women are seen as sex objects," she said, "and there is a real lack of communication between men and women students at social

events." Schlau commented on the risk involved for women who oppose the powerful fraternity system on Lafayette's small campus. She added, however, "If women had not protested this party, many students would have continued not to realize why the theme was offensive. I hope this party and the reaction to it will be a learning experience for women as well as men."

Amy Levine, '81, chairperson of the student affairs committee of student government, said, "Variations of this kind of behavior — which is demeaning and insulting to others — are not new to Lafayette. They demonstrate the ignorance and insensitivity of some students on campus toward the concerns and welfare of other human beings. I'm hopeful that this most recent example of abuse toward women will awaken many members of the Lafayette community in terms of their respect for the feelings and basic rights of others. No declaration by the Lafayette administration or punishment to the parties involved can correct our inadequacies in this respect. All people must view all other people with whom they come in contact at Lafayette as equals in order for co-education to be meaningful."

The Real Issue

To the Editor:

Amidst the objections to Delta Upsilon fraternity's "Back to the Womb" party this past weekend, I believe it is imperative that the main objective of these protests remains in the forefront. The issue here is not D.U.'s right to choose its mode of social expression, but rather it is a matter of respect. Saturday night's event was simply another blatant display of a campuswide lack of sensitivity and regard for women as human beings. We do not seek retribution, which would serve only to further hostility, but rather we seek respect as peers and future co-workers. I am disappointed in our fellow students who do not think we deserve it. I think we do.

Respectfully,
Melissa A. Galbraith

Letters To The Editor

D.U. Regrets Any Offense; Can't Apologize

To the Editor:

Once again, we the brothers of Delta Upsilon find ourselves the center of dispute. Although it is a position we enjoy and usually engineer, the issue currently debated is one we feel should be approached seriously. Specifically, we are addressing the concern recently expressed by the Association of Lafayette Women and various sororities over the theme and content of a particular party held last weekend at our house. It seems that the theme of the party, "Back to the Womb," was found "offensive" and "tasteless" by a representative population of Lafayette women. So offensive, in fact, that these women have

apparently decided to utilize this specific incident as a focal point for a larger, more complex issue: that of the emotional and often physical embarrassment and humiliation suffered by the Lafayette women at the hands of the Lafayette men. This issue, which certainly is not confined to D.U., is one that we feel is ripe for open discussion and campus-wide concern. For this reason, we are not defending or excusing ourselves from the "tastelessness" of the party that offended some. Rather we are focusing on this as an example of a serious problem that must be confronted.

However, on our behalf, there

is a point we would like to make clear. The character of the social tradition of D.U. has been, is now, and ever shall be in a spirit of spontaneous, light-hearted, and often eccentric hedonism. We feel this attitude is necessary to offset the anxiety often generated by Lafayette's academic life. It was in this spirit that the party was conceived and planned (all in a span of two hours); not with the intent of aiming a degrading missile toward the ego of Lafayette women. Most of those who attended, accepted the party in its original, humorous intent and simply laughed. However, as Lafayette men, we sometimes fail to foresee that we may be contributing to the more wide-spread problem of feminine abuse.

Public Apology Demanded

To the Editor:

We are writing to express our outrage at the extremely offensive and sexist social event held by Delta Upsilon Fraternity last weekend. The event in question was a "Back To The Womb Party," featuring such items as a giant tampon, at least one person dressed as a bloody fetus with a coat hanger stuck in him and a sign reading "ALW: Association of Lafayette Wombs."

Besides being in the poorest taste such an event is a flagrant violation of the principles on which coeducation is based: equality and respect. It is especially disturbing that such a grotesque insult to women should occur just as Lafayette is celebrating its tenth anniversary of coeducation. We are particularly concerned with this because it is by no means an isolated example of insensitivity

and disrespect towards women at Lafayette.

We urge all those in the community — faculty and students, men and women — who are as concerned as we are to join us in protesting this sort of behavior. We demand that D.U. publicly apologize to the community, and pledge itself not to repeat such behavior in the future.

Kappa Kappa Gamma, Phi Beta Epsilon, Pi Beta Phi, Kappa Tau Omega, Social Sisters of Kappa Sigma, Executive Committee of The Association of Lafayette Women, Professional Women of Lafayette, Hillel Society, Gary R. Miller, Chaplain, JodiLee Mesirov, '81, Mindy Lieberman, '81, Jeff Samuels, '81, Paula Consolini, '81, Amy Levine, '81, Debbie Vari, '81, George Winter, '83, Neil Beresin, '81, Lisa Harfst, '81, John Michel, '81.

During the past few days informal discussions have occurred between members of D.U. and a number of the offended parties. During these discussions the arguments of those offended were found to have some validity. Yet these discussions also reveal that the offended parties fail to recognize that D.U. devotes enormous expense and time to provide social entertainment for all and that there was no malice intended on this occasion. The problem of feminine abuse clearly does not center around D.U. vs. women's groups; it concerns the whole campus. To use D.U. as a focal point, a scapegoat, would be ineffectual and unacceptable to us. We do regret having offended some, but we cannot apologize for a novel party that kept a capacity crowd laughing and dancing far into the night.

The Brothers of Delta Upsilon