

Speak no evil

Is Yale College more than just the sum of its parts?

If an illegal and even brutal incident occurs within a relatively closed minority community, how should the campus react?

Against the Current

by Neomi Rao

No one really seems to know, and few people seem to care.

When Julian Austin charged Kappa Alpha Psi fraternity with brutal hazing practices and had the dislocated hips to show for it, the Yale Executive Committee hid behind the *Undergraduate Regulations*. Because hazing was not explicitly against university policy, the Executive Committee dismissed the case over the summer. Although a new rule against hazing has since been added, it cannot apply retroactively to Austin's case.

Legal issues aside, no one on this campus really wants to talk about what happened. Students seem hesitant to comment because the hazing occurred within a closed, minority fraternity. Racial politics make almost any opinion dangerous.

Others students are not even aware of what happened. The story first came out in a May issue of *Say It Loud*, the newsletter of the Black Students Alliance at Yale, when most students were busy studying for exams. A subsequent *Daily News* article went mostly unnoticed.

One might argue that this issue isn't open for campus debate, that the black community should handle the incident internally. Maybe the Kappas have the right to do with their pledges as they wish. After all, students voluntarily pledge a fraternity,

An alleged student beating, and no public cry for justice. Why?

and they usually know what they're getting into. If the pressure of the pledge process becomes overwhelming, a person can always leave. Maybe the Kappas do not have to justify their practices to an unsympathetic Yale community.

But I'm not willing to buy that. If members of Kappa Alpha Psi did beat and severely injure Austin, who then published his story, Kappa should be held publicly accountable for their actions. While students can define certain conventions within their ethnic communities, the community should not have a sphere of legal autonomy from Yale College.

Why should Austin's case be considered

only as a hazing incident, and therefore not covered under the Undergraduate Regulations? The *Regulations* clearly state that "assault...of any member of the community" can be subject to disciplinary action. Do Austin's dislocated hips not fall under the category of assault? Is he not a member of the community?

The media has allowed the incident to slide, conveniently saying that the Executive Committee investigation revealed nothing. The glib reporting seems filled with holes—questions that won't be asked, and some that probably weren't answered.

But this explanation should not be enough. Students should be asking for more facts, in the same way they demanded an explanation from David Bialski when he

Kappa should own up to its activities.

was publicly accused of rape. In this case, the accused faced a smear campaign which included posters, banners and hyperbolic editorials. In response to student outrage, the Executive Committee was more than happy to sit as judge, jury and executioner—expelling Bialski. In 1994, is the rape of a white woman still worse than the beating of a black man?

There's no moral band wagoning here, no public cry for justice. Why?

Because no one wants to define the relationship of a minority community to Yale at large. Austin stepped out of a community and shocked the campus with stories of illegal and brutal behavior. For better or worse, the issue has entered the "mainstream" consciousness, and we can't just sweep it under the rug.

Of course, such discussions will prove volatile, both for relations between the black community and the University and within the black community itself. Members of Kappa feel betrayed by *Say It Loud* for publishing his account of the hazing, which they still refute. Others feel that the issue does not concern the campus mainstream. Austin has not taken any formal legal action, nor did he press the issue with the Executive Committee, since he feared that diplomas of Kappa brothers might be revoked. Loyalty to a small community often conflicts with accountability to a larger society.

Maybe more information will surface. Although Dean of Student Affairs Betty Trachtenberg said the case is closed, as students of the Yale community we should press for more facts and be willing to talk about the incident. A diverse campus can stay together only through open discourse in which we try to define and understand the often tenuous relationship between the parts and the whole.