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Organization Despite Adversity

The Origins and Development of African American Fraternal Associations

A prominent form of voluntary organization in the United States from the nineteenth century through the mid-twentieth century, fraternal associations are self-selecting brotherhoods and sisterhoods that provide mutual aid to members, enact group rituals, and engage in community service. Synthesizing primary and secondary evidence, this article documents that African Americans historically organized large numbers of translocal fraternal voluntary federations. Some black fraternal associations paralleled white groups, while others were distinctive to African Americans. In regions where blacks lived in significant numbers, African Americans often created more fraternal lodges per capita than whites; and women played a much more prominent role in African American fraternalism than they did in white fraternalism. Rivaling churches as community institutions, many black fraternal federations became active in struggles for equal civil rights.

Americans have long been known for their special proclivity to organize and join voluntary groups. “Associations are created, extended, and worked in the United States more quickly and effectively than in any other country,” observed James Bryce in *The American Commonwealth* (1895: 278–79). The “greater” associations “ramify over the country and have great importance in the development of opinion,” influencing elections and public affairs. Lord Bryce’s comments echoed earlier observations by Alexis de Tocqueville (1969 [1835–40]) and foreshadowed arguments about the centrality of voluntarism

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to U.S. democracy by twentieth-century scholars such as Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba (1963), Arthur Schlesinger Sr. (1944), and Robert D. Putnam (1993, 2000). Americans are a “nation of joiners,” declared Schlesinger (1944: 24) in his celebrated presidential address delivered to the American Historical Association at the height of World War II. Voluntary organization “has provided the people with their greatest school of self government. . . . In mastering the associative way they have mastered the democratic way.”

Yet where do *African* Americans fit in the nation’s civic history? As a once-enslaved people forced into long struggles for citizenship rights in the century after legal emancipation, were African Americans also avid voluntary organizers and joiners, or were they civically marginalized during much of the nation’s past? No one doubts that African Americans have always been devoted churchgoers (Higginbotham 1993; Raboteau 1999). And it is clear that, at least until the 1960s, there were often impenetrable barriers to their full participation in electoral politics and trade union activities. Beyond these well-known facts, however, scholars make sharply divergent claims about the involvement of African Americans in other kinds of voluntary endeavors.

Current scholarly wisdom highlights the long-standing and deeply rooted inequalities that have discouraged full civic participation by African Americans. Some scholars stress the inherent weakness of social capital in impoverished, racially divided rural areas such as Appalachia and the Mississippi Delta (Duncan 2001). Others argue that ethnic and racial divisions are inherent obstacles to social trust and high levels of associational membership (see the review of recent studies by economists in Costa and Kahn 2003). Still other scholars (such as Verba et al. 1995) analyze the ways in which the lower incomes and limited educational attainments of many African Americans have translated into reduced individual participation in non-church-based civic activities.

The best-known contemporary student of civic engagement, Robert D. Putnam, points to ethnically differentiated streams of immigration and legacies from the nation’s bitter history of African slavery as key factors shaping the civic cultures of various U.S. states and regions. In *Bowling Alone*, Putnam (2000: 291–93) assessed levels of “social capital” in the states during the 1990s by using a quantitative index that omits church attendance but combines 14 other (highly intercorrelated) variables to measure community participation, volunteering, social trust, and political participation. The resulting map of “Social Capital in the American States” shows that

the historically whitest parts of the country are also the most civic-minded. Speculating about the causes of what he sees as long-standing disparities, Putnam (*ibid.*: 294) argued that “slavery was, in fact, a social system *designed* to destroy social capital among slaves and between slaves and freemen. After emancipation the dominant classes in the South continued to have a strong interest in inhibiting horizontal social networks. It is not happenstance that the lowest levels of community-based social capital are found where a century of plantation slavery was followed by a century of Jim Crow politics.” According to the full logic of Putnam’s culturalist argument (which builds on Elazar 1966; Rice and Feldman 1997; and Sharkansky 1969), historically black regions of the United States lagged in civic participation, and African Americans migrating to the North may have carried value legacies from slavery and Jim Crow that discouraged participation in new settings.

Slavery, racial domination, and segregation obviously obstructed civic ties between blacks and whites. But the assumption that African Americans have always found it hard to organize among themselves flies in the face of much scholarship to the contrary—indeed, contradicts the standard judgment of earlier generations of scholars. “Despite the fact that they are predominantly lower class,” wrote Gunnar Myrdal (1964 [1944]: 952) in his landmark treatise *An American Dilemma*, “Negroes are more inclined to join associations than are whites; in this respect. . . . Negroes are ‘exaggerated’ Americans.” Myrdal cited evidence about southern as well as northern African American communities from detailed background studies prepared by leading African American scholars such as J. G. St. Clair Drake and Harry Walker. What is more, Myrdal’s claim that African Americans were avid voluntary organizers and joiners echoed earlier findings by pioneering scholars of black civic life, such as Booker T. Washington (1909), W. E. B. Du Bois (1898, 1907, and 1996 [1899]), Howard Odum (1910: chap. 3), and Arthur Raper (1968 [1936]: chaps. 18–19). And Myrdal’s contention was later reconfirmed by a number of early representative social surveys documenting that, especially controlling for income and education, African Americans were *more* likely than whites to join voluntary associations and participate in many kinds of civic activities (cf. Babchuk and Thompson 1962; Olsen 1970; Orum 1966; Verba and Nie 1972: chap. 10).

The earlier scholarly view of the civic achievements of African Americans is well summed up by Robert Austin Warner (1940: 201), who concluded in his remarkable study, *New Haven Negroes: A Social History*, that the “life

of the colored folk of New Haven is undoubtedly more sociable than that of a white New England town of comparable size.” “Since 1790 other racial and cultural groups . . . have risen,” Warner (*ibid.*: xii) observed, “but none has made as great an advance as the Negro achieved from slavery to independence and civil equality. None has started from so great a handicap of cultural disorganization and created an organized society separate from the rest of the community. . . . From being a suppressed racial element at the lowest class level in colonial society, with limited rights, and without pride and the support of a retained foreign culture, they have risen to the position of citizens with their own churches, clubs, and traditions. . . . The social and educational rise has been at least equal to, and the civil rise greater than, any other element.”

A Missing Civic Link

How can the views of Putnam and other current writers be reconciled with scholarly studies of the past suggesting that African Americans were especially prone to voluntary association and civic participation? Part of the answer, we believe, lies in the lost history of African American fraternal associations, which flourished *between* the time of slavery and the late twentieth century. From the mid-1800s on, vast and densely rooted networks of fraternal lodges were built and sustained by African Americans—who seem to have embraced to an extraordinary degree this characteristically U.S. form of popular organization.

Fraternal groups are self-selecting brotherhoods and associated female groups—and sometimes gender-integrated brotherhoods and sisterhoods. Often they are organized as representatively governed federations that include local chapters within state, regional, or national organizations. They provide mutual aid to members and regularly enact moral rituals stressing shared values and identities. Fraternal groups—especially those organized by African Americans—have also performed genuinely “civic” functions in that they participate in parades and other public occasions, support education and community service, maintain halls that are also used by other groups, and from time to time get involved in legislative or policy campaigns.

“The lodge, more than any other merely social organization, is a permanent and ever-increasing force” among blacks, wrote African American social settlement activist Fannie Barrier Williams in 1905 (42). Historically,

U.S. fraternal groups often provided insurance against sickness and death to their members (Hankins 1931), and Progressive Era reformer and student of social benefits Isaac Max Rubinow (1969 [1913]: 283) noted that “outside of the immigrant groups, the negroes represent the only class of population where the habit of mutual insurance through voluntary association has developed to the highest degree in the United States.” Through much of U.S. history, African American fraternal associations bridged classes and locations and offered many opportunities not only for group self-help but also for public assertion and leadership on social and civil rights concerns. As Charles Wesley (1955: 25) has written, “No other organization, except the church, could boast of reaching into the masses of the Negro population and at the same time into the middle class and the intelligentsia with its appeal and its leadership.”

This article aims to redress the dearth of recent systematic scholarship on popularly rooted, cross-class African American fraternal associations.¹ As a prelude to accompanying articles in this issue exploring the ritual and civil rights activities of black fraternal associations, this article assembles scattered evidence about the incidence, characteristics, and development of popularly rooted fraternal federations that transcended particular localities. Although there are many studies describing African American fraternal lodges in particular places and times (e.g., Bethel 1981: 162–67; Bigham 1987: 78–80, 184–85; Chicago Commission on Race Relations 1921: 141–42; Daniels 1969 [1914]: 207–9; Du Bois 1996 [1899]; Ellison 1933: 7–17; Gerber 1976: chap. 6; Jacobs 1988; Lane 1991: chap. 10; Odum 1910: chap. 3; Powdermaker 1939; Raper 1968 [1936]: chap. 19; Salvatore 1996; Trotter 1990: 8; Warner 1940: 201–10; Wright 1985: chap. 5), little comprehensive research on translocal fraternal associations has been done beyond Edward Nelson Palmer’s pioneering 1944 overview of “Negro Secret Societies” and two early studies of black efforts in social insurance that also included discussions of fraternal associations (Browning 1937; Woodson 1929).

In part, systematic research on African American fraternal groups has lagged because data on group histories and memberships are very hard to find. National and local directories giving rich details about white voluntary associations between the 1870s and the 1920s often omitted most African American associations other than churches. Equally pertinent, since the 1960s the study of the history of U.S. fraternal groups has been out of fashion, as scholarly attention has focused either on working-class politics or on

contemporary social movements, including the post-1954 civil rights movement, in which African American churches and recently created vanguard associations such as the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference played such important roles (McAdam 1982; Morris 1984). Viewed as odd relics of the past, fraternal groups of all kinds, including African American fraternal groups, have been ignored by all but a few contemporary scholars, thus ensuring much less attention than there should be to a massive aspect of the nation's civic past.²

In this overview, we will show that

1. African Americans organized large numbers of translocal fraternal federations during the same eras as native-born and immigrant white Americans.
2. Black fraternal federations included groups that were *parallel* to leading white fraternal groups and also groups that were *distinctive* to African Americans.
3. African American fraternal federations did not span as many states as white groups, and local lodges were often smaller and more fragile. Where they were organized, however, African American fraternal groups often created more lodges per capita and involved a higher proportion of adults than white fraternal groups.
4. Women played a much more prominent role in African American fraternalism than they did in white fraternalism.
5. As was the case for white fraternal groups, but with special emphasis on the struggle for equal civil rights in the black case, African American fraternal groups became increasingly active in community service and political affairs during the twentieth century.

The data we deploy here have been pieced together from a wide variety of sources. We have used old official histories as well as scholarly studies to learn about particular African American fraternal organizations, ranging from the Prince Hall Masons (Grimshaw 1969 [1903]) and the Grand United Order of Odd Fellows (Brooks 1902) to the United Brothers of Friendship and Sisters of the Mysterious Ten (Gibson 1897) and the Grand United Order of True Reformers (Burrell and Johnson 1970 [1909]; Fahey 1994; Watkinson 1989). From rich ethnographic and community studies such as Daniels 1969 [1914], Raper 1968 [1936], and Salvatore 1996, we have assembled descriptions of organizational populations in particular states and cities, allowing us to see how many and what kinds of fraternal groups were present. To develop

statistics on memberships and numbers of lodges in major fraternal federations, we have located national and state-level organizational proceedings in various libraries and archives—and purchased more of them by bidding in eBay auctions on the Internet. We have used old U.S. city directories that happen to include local counts of African American as well as white fraternal lodges. Finally, we have mined the fascinating associational listings of the *Negro Year Book* compiled by sociologist Monroe N. Work of the Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute and published periodically between the 1910s and the early 1950s.³ The data sources for this article are thus highly eclectic, yet by combining and triangulating among them we believe we have assembled the best picture to date of the rich history of African American fraternal federations. We hope to find more information in the future and would always appreciate hearing about additional sources and leads we have not yet discovered in our detective efforts.

African American Organizations in the U.S. Fraternal Universe

In “free and democratic America there are more secret societies and a larger aggregate membership among such organizations than in all other civilized countries,” declared Albert C. Stevens (1899: v). Himself a leading Mason as well as a compiler of business data, Stevens authored an extraordinarily valuable compendium, *The Cyclopaedia of Fraternities: A Compilation of Existing Authentic Information and the Results of Original Investigation as to the Origin, Derivation, Founders, Development, Aims, Emblems, Character, and Personnel of More Than Six Hundred Secret Societies in the United States*. Attempting to be comprehensive and drawing on reports from leaders of hundreds of nationally visible U.S. fraternal and veterans’ organizations, Stevens produced a magnificent resource, on which many scholars and all subsequent directories of U.S. fraternal associations (e.g., Preuss 1924; Schmidt 1980) have depended. Around 1900, concluded Stevens (1899: v, xvi), some 350 fraternal groups were in existence, enrolling more than 6 million members—about “40 percent of the present male population of the country . . . twenty-one years of age” or older.

Although there is no way to confirm Stevens’s exact membership estimate—because group data are sparse and unknown numbers of individuals held overlapping group affiliations—much additional research has confirmed

his claims about the prevalence and national prominence of fraternal organizations among all U.S. voluntary groups. *Voluntary groups* are here defined as nonprofit, nongovernmental associations enrolling individuals on a voluntary basis (though individuals may be required to pass group tests to be accepted after they apply to join). In a detailed study of voluntary groups listed between 1840 and 1940 in local directories for 26 cities of various sizes spread across all regions of the United States, political scientists Gerald Gamm and Robert D. Putnam (1999: 526–27, figure 2) found that church congregations and chapters of fraternal groups predominated, with the latter usually more prevalent in per capita terms. In addition, we have collaborated with others to identify 58 very large, nationally prominent voluntary organizations that at some point between 1790 and the present enrolled 1% or more of U.S. men or women or 1% of all adults for groups that admitted both sexes (see Skocpol et al. 1999: appendix 2–A). Between the 1840s and the 1960s, fraternal groups accounted for one-third to more than half of all such very large U.S. associations, with the proportion of fraternal groups peaking at 59% in the 1910s.⁴ Hundreds of smaller translocal and transregional fraternal associations also proliferated, especially between the 1870s and the 1920s (Gist 1940; Preuss 1924; Schmidt 1980; Stevens 1899). Like many other kinds of voluntary associations, U.S. fraternal groups were typically federated organizations that linked local chapters (holding weekly or biweekly meetings) to representatively governed national organizational centers and usually to state-level institutions as well. Most fraternal federations had state-level “grand lodges” and national-level “supreme lodges,” both of which mounted regular conventions to which subordinate chapters sent delegates.

In essence, classic U.S. fraternal associations were generators and sustainers of vast and intricate network linkages, which not only reinforced intimate local bonds but also brought Americans into contact with one another across localities, states, and regions (Skocpol 2003: chaps. 2–3; Skocpol et al. 2000). Fraternal groups were also at the very heart of voluntary membership activities for many Americans. As late as 1960, Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba (1963: 302, table 2) found that Americans were especially likely to report memberships in fraternal organizations, this at a time when Almond and Verba did not even use that category to report memberships in Britain, Germany, Italy, or Mexico, the four other nations included in their pioneering cross-national study of civic participation.

African American fraternal organizations more than held their own in the dense forest of fraternal groups that grew up in the nineteenth- and

twentieth-century United States. Table 1 provides as full an overview as we have been able to assemble of the timing and founding locations of dozens of African American fraternal federations, focusing on groups we are reasonably certain were of national, regional, or interstate scope. Purely local mutual aid groups or “benevolent societies” are *not* included here. There is no consistent way to estimate exactly how many purely local or intrastate groups there were in different cities, towns, and regions, so we cannot say for sure what proportion of all African American fellowship groups are omitted from this study.

Many studies of urban and rural localities from the early 1800s through the 1930s suggest that free African Americans always had a strong proclivity to form mutual assistance groups tied to particular churches, neighborhoods, or occupational groups (see, e.g., Du Bois 1907: 92–98; Jacobs 1988; Harris 1979, 1981; Hunter 1997; McMillen 1989: 182; Odum 1910; Perlman 1971; Pollard 1980; Raper 1968 [1936]: chap. 19; Scheiner 1965: chap. 4; Walker 1936; Washington 1909: chap. 6; Woodson 1929: 202–3). Such groups may have formed even among slaves, and they certainly proliferated when African Americans enjoyed the slightest modicum of rights to organize. Pre–Civil War southern cities, for example, exempted mutual aid societies from laws otherwise “forbidding the meetings of free persons of color” (Work 1918: 343). But both before and after the Civil War, locally centered groups were often fragile and short-lived, their biblical names—such as “Daughters of Bethlehem” (Du Bois 1907: 94), “Knights of Canaan” (Levine 1997: 61), “Grand United Order of the Children of Israel” (Ellison 1933: 7), and “Builders of the Walls of Jerusalem” (Raper 1968 [1936]: 379)—flitting through the historical record at a dizzying pace. Local groups rose and fell, and, occasionally, creative organizers managed to scale one of them up into something grander. The existence of local benevolent groups may have conditioned African Americans to join larger fraternal organizations as they emerged and spread—and the ultimately *translocally organized* fraternal federations are the ones we have identified for this study. We have included as many instances as we have been able to find of fraternal federations that we are certain were organized nationally or across two or more states—and our current working list of 62 such groups appears in Table 1.

To prepare Table 1, we started with listings in Stevens 1899 and successor national directories (Preuss 1924; Schmidt 1980). Because white compilers often missed African American groups, we also drew on Clement Richardson’s *The National Cyclopaedia of the Colored Race* (1919) and on Monroe

Table 1 African American fraternal federations

Organization name	Founding date	Location	Data source
Prince Hall Masons	1775	Boston, MA	Grimshaw 1969 [1903]: chap. 8.
Grand United Order of Odd Fellows	1843	New York City	Brooks 1902: chap. 2.
Independent Order of Good Samaritans and Daughters of Samaria	1847	New York City	Hick 1877; Stevens 1899: 402–3.
American Protestant Association (Negro branch)	1849	Pennsylvania	Stevens 1899: 299.
Grand United Order of Galilean Fishermen	1856	Baltimore, MD	Work 1913: 277.
Household of Ruth	1857	[partner to Odd Fellows]	Brooks 1902: 76–77.
United Brothers of Friendship	1861	Louisville, KY	Gibson 1897: 7–9.
Grand United Order of Nazarites	1863	Baltimore, MD	Stevens 1899: 235.
Grand United Order of Tents of J. R. Giddings and Jolliffe Union	1866	Norfolk, VA	Work 1914–15: 371.
Independent Order of Saint Luke	1867	Baltimore, MD	Dabney 1927: 32; Fahey 2001d: 270–71.
Grand United Order of Brothers and Sisters, Sons and Daughters of Moses	1868	Maryland?	Work 1913: 278.
International Order of Twelve of Knights and Daughters of Tabor	1871	Independence, MO	Stevens 1899: 198; Dickson 1924.
National Grand United Order of Brothers and Sisters of Love and Charity in America	c. 1872	Elizabeth City, NC	National Grand United Order of Brothers and Sisters of Love and Charity . . . 1898, 1921.

Independent Order of Immaculates of the United States of America	1872	Nashville, TN	Stevens 1899: 141.
Order of the Eastern Star	1874	Washington, DC [partner to Prince Hall Masons]	Hornsby 2001: 543.
Sisters of the Mysterious Ten	1878	[partner to United Brothers of Friendship]	Gibson 1897: 46–47.
Knights of Pythias of North America, South America, Europe, Asia, Africa, and Australia	1880	Vicksburg, MS	Williams et al. 1917: 16–17.
Grand United Order of True Reformers	1881	Richmond, VA	Burrell and Johnson 1970 [1909]: chap. 4; Watkinson 1989.
General Grand United Order of Brothers and Sisters of Love and Charity of the United States and Great Republic of Liberia	1882	New Orleans, LA	General Grand United Order of Brothers and Sisters of Love and Charity . . . 1903: 2.
Ancient Order of Pilgrims	1882	Houston, TX	Richardson 1919: 338.
Mosaic Templars of America	1883	Little Rock, AR	Bush and Dorman 1924: 134.
Order of Calanthe	1883	[partner to Knights of Pythias]	Williams et al. 1917: 60–61, 724.
Royal Knights of King David	1883	Durham, NC	Pearson 1919: 588.
United Transatlantic Society	1885	Kansas City, MO	Entz 2001: 676.
Order of the Golden Circle	1886	[partner to 32d and 33d degree Masons]	Schmidt 1980: 144–45.

Table 1 (continued)

Organization name	Founding date	Location	Data source
Colored Brotherhood and Sisterhood of Honor	1886	Franklin, KY	Stevens 1899: 131.
Knights of Pythias of the Eastern and Western Hemisphere	1889	Baltimore, MD	Williams et al. 1917: 90–91; Knights of Pythias, E. and W. H. 1903: 3.
Ancient Egyptian Arabic Order of the Nobles of the Mystic Shrine of North America and South America and Its Jurisdiction	1893	Chicago, IL	Schmidt 1980: 311.
St. Joseph's Aid Society	1896		Work 1921–22: 416.
Improved Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks of the World	1898	Cincinnati, OH	Wesley 1955: chap. 2.
Supreme Circle of Benevolence	1898	Albany, GA	<i>Atlanta Independent</i> 1918.
Grand United Order of the Sons and Daughters of Peace	1900	Newport News, VA	Work 1913: 278.
Knights of Gideon	c. 1900	Norfolk, VA	<i>New Journal and Guide</i> (www.njournalg.com).
Grand United Order of Wise Men	1901	Louisiana	Work 1913: 277.
American Woodmen	1901	Denver, CO	Preuss 1924: 449.
Industrial Mutual Relief Association	1901	Brookhaven, MS	Odum 1910: 111.
Daughters of the Improved Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks of the World	1902	Norfolk, VA [partner to Elks]	Mason 1952: 10.

Grand United Order of Moses	1903	Charlotte Court House, VA	Kreusler 1952: chap. 3.
Golden Rule Beneficial and Endowment Association	1904	West Virginia	Trotter 1990: chap. 8; West Virginia History Center 2002.
Grand United Order of the Fishermen of Galilee of the Eastern and Western Hemispheres	1904	New York	Ferguson 1937: 195.
United Order of Good Shepherds	1904	Eufaula, AL	Richardson 1919: 30.
Woodmen of Union	c. 1905	Natchez, MS	Odum 1910: 99–101; Griggs 1926: chap. 3.
Grand United Order of Workmen and Ladies Courts of America	1907	Little Rock, AR	<i>Arkansas Gazette</i> 1907.
United Brothers and Sisters of Benevolence of America	1907	Columbus, GA	Levine 1997: 61; Odum 1910: 101.
Imperial Order of King David	1908	Richmond, VA	Independent Order of St. Luke 1927: 47.
Royal Circle of Friends of the World	1909	Helena, AR	Work 1913: 279.
Knights of Peter Claver	1909	Mobile, AL	Abston 1998: 67–69.
Daughters of Isis	1910	[partner to Shriners]	Schmidt 1980: 85.
Improved Order of Shepherds and Daughters of Bethlehem	1910	Richmond, VA	Independent Order of St. Luke 1927: 30.
Knights of Alpha and Ladies of Omega of the World	1910	Minnesota	Knights of Alpha . . . 1911: 7.
Afro-American Order of Owls	1911	Baltimore, MD	<i>Afro-American Order of Owls v. Talbot</i> . ^a
National Ideal Benefit Society	1912	Virginia	Work 1914–15: 370.

Table 1 (continued)

Organization name	Founding date	Location	Data source
Christian Knights and Heroines of Ethiopia of the East and West Hemispheres	1915	Alabama	Preuss 1924: 89.
Ancient United Order Knights and Daughters of Africa	1915	St. Louis, MO	St. Louis City Directory (first appearance in).
Independent Order of J. R. Giddings and Jollifee Union	1919	Boston, MA	Work 1921–22: 416.
African Blood Brotherhood	1920	New York City	Preuss 1924: 4–7.
Improved Benevolent Order of Reindeer	1922		Work 1925–26: 464.
Knights of Peter Claver, Ladies' Auxiliary	1922	[partner]	Abston 1998: 118.
Benevolent Protective Herd of Buffaloes of the World, and Daughters of the Prairie	c. 1922		Work 1925–26: 464; Ferguson 1937: 198.
Improved Benevolent Protective Order of the Moose of the World	c. 1922		Work 1925–26: 465.
Knights of the Invisible Colored Kingdom	1923	Tennessee	Schmidt 1980: 190.
Afro-American Sons and Daughters	1924	Yazoo City, MS	Mississippi Division of Tourism 2002; Work 1931–32: 525.

Note: Other groups known to be large and transstate but with missing information include the Benevolent Treasury; Knights of Honor of the World; and Knights and Ladies of Honor of the World.

^a123 *Maryland Reports* 465, 91 *Atlantic Reporter* 570 (Maryland Court of Appeals, decided 24 June 1914).

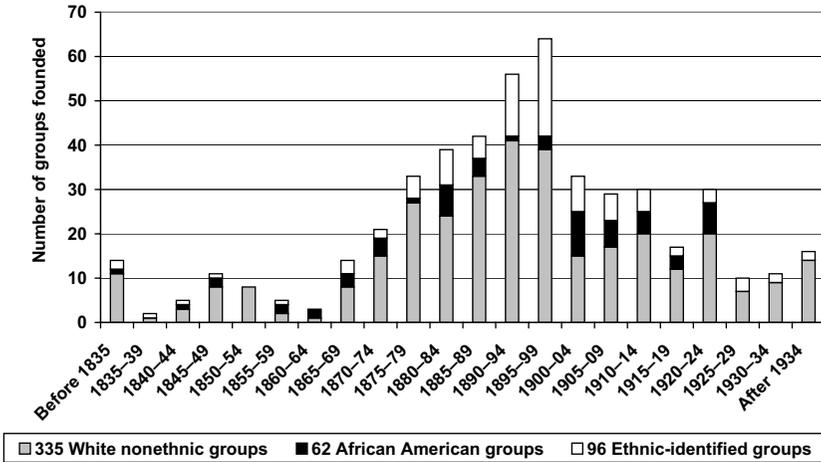


Figure 1 Foundings of white, African American, and ethnic-identified translocal U.S. fraternal federations

Sources: For white and ethnic groups, Schmidt 1980; for African American groups, Table 1.

Work’s listings of “national” fraternal groups in the *Negro Year Book* from the 1913 to the 1952 editions. We added to our master list translocal groups identified in particular social histories, newspaper articles and advertisements, and old reports (sources for each group are included in the table). Table 1 certainly omits some translocal federations (at the end of the table we list a few groups we know to have been translocal but for which we have not discovered founding information). The table may also include a very few groups that did not actually expand much beyond a single state. We have done the best we can, however, and we believe that data on African American fraternal federations summarized in Table 1 are a conservative estimate and roughly comparable to data on native-white and white-ethnic fraternal federations whose founding dates are also graphed in Figure 1 (along with the African American founding dates from Table 1). For the native-white and white-ethnic associations graphed in Figure 1, we relied entirely on Schmidt 1980, because this source includes groups founded in the 1900s as well as the 1800s and lists relatively nationally visible and longer-lived associations, just as our Table 1 does for African American groups. As is true for the African American groups listed in Table 1, some white groups listed in Schmidt 1980 are not included in Figure 1 because founding dates are not available.

As Figure 1 shows, African American fraternal federations began to emerge in the decades before the Civil War—at the same time that white

groups emerged. Foundings of eventually translocally established African American fraternal federations likewise surged right after the Civil War and proliferated again during the 1880s as blacks were facing the end of Reconstruction and the loss of many political rights and at a time when white insurance companies refused to write policies for blacks (McMillen 1989: 182). African American fraternal groups also proliferated in the early twentieth century as Jim Crow restrictions were further tightened. Overall, ethnic-identified white fraternal groups were especially likely to be launched during the 1890s, a juncture of intense conflict between native Protestants and immigrant Catholics, while African American fraternal federations seem especially likely to have been launched during decades when other avenues of civic organization and economic advancement were tightening for blacks.

Given the difficulty of finding complete and reliable data, the exact numbers of African American fraternal foundings graphed in Figure 1 have to be taken as very rough estimates. Nevertheless, there is every reason to believe that African Americans organized at least their proportional share of all translocal U.S. fraternal federations. African American groups amount to more than 12% of all the groups included in Figure 1, whereas African Americans constituted 10–11% of the total U.S. adult population in the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth century.

For many of the fraternal groups listed in Table 1, we know little more than the name and founding location. More information is available about a fair number of groups, however—including about 14 major federations that in all probability were the most important African American fraternal groups that flourished between the Civil War and the mid-twentieth century. African American fraternal groups can be classified into two types: “parallel” groups that directly corresponded to leading white fraternal orders and “distinctive” African American fraternal orders that did not directly resemble any white groups. Before continuing our statistical explorations, it is worth tarrying to learn more about the origins and characteristics of the most prominent groups of each type.

African American Fraternal Paralleling White Orders

Fraternalism was quintessentially American, and the aspirations of blacks to organize and join parallel fraternal federations exemplified their desire

to participate fully in this vital aspect of U.S. civic life.⁵ Prior to the 1970s, only a handful of major U.S. white associations were willing to accept African Americans as members, enrolling them either in racially integrated local chapters or in separate units within the same federation. These exceptions included temperance associations (like the Independent Order of Good Templars), national military veterans' organizations (such as the Grand Army of the Republic, the Veterans of Foreign Wars, and the American Legion), Pennsylvania-centered anti-immigrant orders (such as the American Protestant Association and the Patriotic Order Sons of America), and a few British-headquartered fraternal associations (such as the Ancient Order of Foresters and the Benevolent Order of Buffaloes).⁶ But the vast majority of U.S. white-led groups—above all, major white male fraternal groups, such as the Masons, the Odd Fellows, the Knights of Pythias, and the Elks—had explicit racial exclusion clauses in their constitutions or regularly practiced racial exclusion.⁷ Aware that fraternalism was supposed to espouse values of patriotism and universal brotherhood and sisterhood under God, African Americans invariably protested the hypocrisy of racist exclusion by white fraternal orders. Protests proved to be of little avail, however, forcing African Americans to organize parallel orders of their own, the most prominent of which are listed in Table 2.⁸

Prince Hall Masons

The Prince Hall Masons were the first African American fraternal order, founded at the birth of the nation by a remarkable West Indian immigrant who became a clergyman serving a prosperous church in Cambridge, Massachusetts. In 1775, Prince Hall approached a British military lodge of Masons in Boston and asked to be apprenticed to the craft. He was accepted and became a Master Mason, soon joined by 14 other black men admitted to the same lodge.⁹ After the outbreak of the revolutionary struggles, Prince Hall fought for the American colonies and addressed the Massachusetts Committee on Public Safety, advocating freedom for slaves. This petition rebuked, he and others protested, drawing on techniques used in the colonial struggles against Britain. Hall and his associates were also refused when they requested a Masonic charter from the Grand Lodge of Massachusetts. But in 1782, Prince Hall petitioned the Grand Lodge of England for a charter, which was delivered in 1787, launching what eventually evolved into a vast order.

Table 2 Parallel African American and white fraternal groups and their female partners

White groups	African American groups
MASONS (Boston, 1733)	PRINCE HALL MASONS (Boston, 1775)
Eastern Star (1868)	Eastern Star (1874)
INDEPENDENT ORDER OF ODD FELLOWS (Baltimore, MD, 1819)	GRAND UNITED ORDER OF ODD FELLOWS (New York, 1843)
Daughters of Rebekah (1851)	Household of Ruth (1857)
KNIGHTS OF PYTHIAS (Washington, DC, 1864)	KNIGHTS OF PYTHIAS OF NORTH AMERICA, SOUTH AMERICA, EUROPE, ASIA, AFRICA, AND AUSTRALIA (Vicksburg, MS, 1880)
Pythian Sisters (1889)	Order of Calanthe (1883)
ANCIENT ARABIC ORDER OF THE NOBLES OF THE MYSTIC SHRINE (New York City, 1872)	ANCIENT EGYPTIAN ARABIC ORDER OF THE NOBLES OF THE MYSTIC SHRINE OF NORTH AMERICA AND SOUTH AMERICA AND ITS JURISDICTION (Chicago, 1893)
No major women's group	Daughters of Isis (1910)
KNIGHTS OF COLUMBUS (New Haven, CT, 1882)	KNIGHTS OF PETER CLAVER (Mobile, AL, 1909)
Daughters of Isabella (1897)	Ladies' Auxiliary (1922)
BENEVOLENT AND PROTECTIVE ORDER OF ELKS (New York City, 1867)	IMPROVED BENEVOLENT AND PROTECTIVE ORDER OF ELKS OF THE WORLD (Cincinnati, 1898)
No major women's group	Daughters of the I.B.P.O. Elks of the World (1902)
MODERN WOODMEN OF AMERICA (Lyons, IA, 1883)	AMERICAN WOODMEN (Denver, 1901)
Royal Neighbors of America (1895)	Genders integrated from inception
Average lag in founding partner group (Masons excluded)	
21 years	8.3 years

Note: Male group names are in all caps; female group names, initial caps only.

The Prince Hall Masons broke their tie to England in 1827 and established a Grand Lodge of the United States of North America in 1847 (Stevens 1899: 73).¹⁰

Until the 1820s, Prince Hall Masonry was centered in New England and Pennsylvania, but thereafter it spread southeast and into the Midwest and West (Grimshaw 1969 [1903]; Muraskin 1975: 36–38). By 1865, there were more than 2,700 Prince Hall Masons meeting under the jurisdiction of 23 grand lodges in 22 states plus Canada and the District of Columbia (Grimshaw 1969 [1903]: 304). By the early 1900s, there were more than 66,000 Master Prince Hall Masons and another 51,000 apprentices meeting in 2,575 lodges spread across 44 states and stretching into the West Indies and Liberia (*ibid.*: 304–5). In a map of prominent U.S. fraternal groups in the 1890s, Stevens (1899: 119) listed “Negro Masons” as among the four largest groups of either race in South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida. And this was just the beginning, because Prince Hall Masonry “saw its greatest numerical growth after, not before, the turn of the twentieth century. From 1900 to 1930 the fraternity’s membership exploded”—at least in a series of state-level jurisdictions, the only level at which statistics are available (Muraskin 1975: 29; see also Mihelich 1995, 1997, 1998). After declines in the 1930s, membership revived, reached new heights in the mid-1950s, and remained persistently large into the 1970s (Schmidt 1980: 278). Although its twentieth-century growth was impressive and men of many occupational backgrounds were accepted, black Masonry always remained the most socially selective of the major African American orders and has never become as large in per capita terms as its white counterpart (see Table 4 for sources). Following the lead of virtually all black fraternal orders, the black Masons in many states offered social insurance benefits; but this function was never central to Prince Hall Masonry, which has stressed black heritage and the assertion of civic leadership (Muraskin 1975).

Grand United Order of Odd Fellows

The Grand United Order of Odd Fellows was the second parallel order to spread translocally, growing in time into the very largest African American fraternal order.¹¹ Again, African Americans used a tie to England to do an end run around their racially exclusionary white countrymen. In the early 1840s, members of an African American literary club in New York City applied to

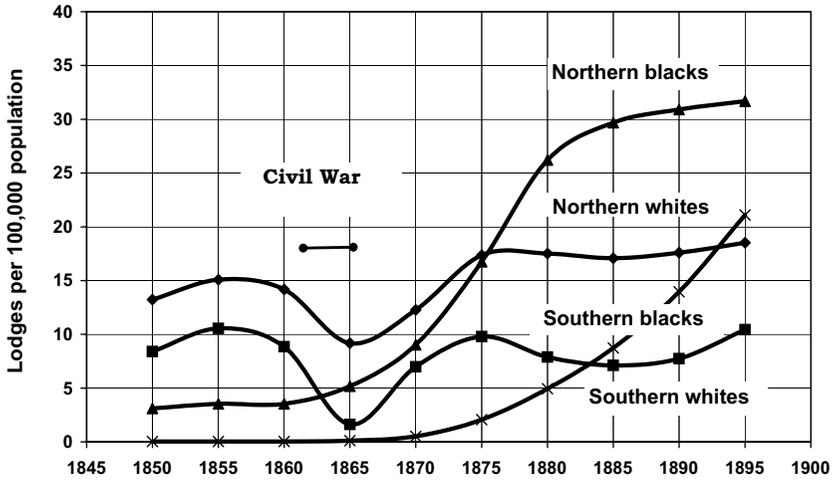


Figure 2 Numbers of white and black Odd Fellows lodges in the North and South before, during, and after the Civil War

Sources: Estimates of African American lodge foundings and mortality data from data in Brooks 1902; Odd Fellow data from International Order of Odd Fellows (IOOF) annual reports.

affiliate with the white Independent Order of Odd Fellows (an offshoot of the English Manchester Unity Odd Fellows). Though scorned by the U.S. white Odd Fellows, they soon found another route to Odd Fellows affiliation with the assistance of Peter Ogden, “steward of the ship *Patrick Henry* sailing between New York and Liverpool, England” (Brooks 1902: 13). Ogden had been initiated into a Liverpool lodge of an older branch of English Odd Fellows, the Grand United Order, and he persuaded his frustrated American brethren to apply for a charter from his order, arguing that “to be connected with England and the Grand United Order was to obtain Odd Fellowship in its pristine purity” (ibid.). When a handful of U.S. white lodges affiliated with that branch objected, the Grand United Order stood by the African Americans, backing Ogden as their agent for expansion in the New World.

Before the outbreak of the Civil War, the Grand United Order of Odd Fellows spread lodges into all major eastern seaboard cities and across Pennsylvania (ibid.: chaps. 4–19). As Figure 2 shows, after Union victory and the emancipation of the slaves, Odd Fellows lodges sprouted even more rapidly in per capita terms among blacks than among whites, and this African American organizational proliferation happened in the heavily rural South as well as in the more urban North. By the time the black Odd Fellows staged an extrava-

gant biennial national convention in Philadelphia in 1886, they had already become the largest African American order, with 52,814 members meeting in more than 1,000 lodges spread across 29 states, the District of Columbia, and Wyoming Territory, and also located in Canada, Central America, the Bahamas, Bermuda, and the West Indies (Lane 1991: 282; Grand United Order of Odd Fellows 1886). As of the 1890s, Stevens (1899: 119) ranked “Negro Odd Fellows” as among the four largest fraternal groups in the District of Columbia, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Florida, Mississippi, and Louisiana.

The black Odd Fellows provided social insurance benefits; built social-welfare institutions as well as halls that served as meeting places for many black groups; engaged in impressive parades and ritual displays; and attracted the leading men as well as more humble members in countless African American communities (see characteristic descriptions in Lane 1991: 281–85; Salvatore 1996; and Wright 1985: 132–33). In the 1910s, the Grand United Order attained extraordinary membership heights, at least temporarily enrolling more than 300,000 members or more than 11% of all black men (see Table 4 for sources). Steady erosion followed in the late 1920s and 1930s, however, and the black Odd Fellows did not recover fully after the Great Depression and World War II. Still, the Grand United Order of Odd Fellows in America survives with substantial membership to this day (Fahey 2001a: 253), and the order has always celebrated and retained its tie to the British mother order (Lane 1991: 282–83).

The Knights of Pythias

Among U.S. whites, the third-largest fraternal group of the late nineteenth century was the Knights of Pythias, launched in 1864. Within a few years of the white founding, African Americans asked to participate in this order, whose ritual featured the classical story of the sacrificial friendship of Damon and Pythias (Fahey 2001b; Jones 1919; Morgan 1913; Williams et al. 1917: 9–18). But in 1870 white Pythians officially refused to extend brotherhood across racial lines. After years of further petitions, a handful of black men who could “pass” racially gained admittance to a white lodge and appropriated its secrets “on the grounds that since the exclusion of colored men violated the purpose of the order, which was to extend friendship, charity, and benevolence among men, Divine Providence had made it possible for

Negroes to acquire the ritual” (Frazier 1957b: 374). The leader of this group was Dr. Thomas W. Stringer, a black Mason, African Methodist Episcopal minister, and Reconstruction-era Mississippi state senator. Stringer and associates formed the first black Pythian lodge and a supreme council in Vicksburg, Mississippi, in 1880, launching their own federation with a structure and practices similar to those of the white Knights of Pythias yet with a bolder name: the Knights of Pythias of North America, South America, Europe, Asia, and Africa (later, “. . . Asia, Africa, and Australia”).

The colored Knights of Pythias suffered a schism in the early 1900s, but not long afterward the main order grew very large, with enrollment reaching a peak of almost 200,000 in the 1920s, more than 6% of African American men (see Table 4). Like the black Odd Fellows, the black Knights of Pythias offered social insurance benefits and established meeting halls and welfare institutions in many places, including a sanitarium in Arkansas (Fahey 2001b: 168; Jones 1919). Perhaps to a greater degree than any other black order, the colored Knights of Pythias featured a “Uniform Rank” marching order that offered thousands of members, at least in the North, the chance to parade in smart, military-style formations. Along with other orders, the colored Knights of Pythias suffered during the Great Depression; it failed to recover much afterward and barely persists today (Fahey 2001b: 169).

The Elks

Another large and prominent parallel fraternal order is the African American Elks, whose story is dramatic indeed (Dickerson 1981: pt. 2; Frazier 1957b; Shrock 2001; Wesley 1955). Following the usual pattern, the white Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks spurned potential black members. But African Americans eventually launched their own “improved” order from Cincinnati, Ohio, in 1898, after Arthur J. Riggs, a former slave, black Pythian organizer, and Pullman porter “who was active in public affairs among Negro citizens,” managed to procure a copy of the white Elks ritual (Wesley 1955: 39). White Elks had failed to legally protect their ritual, so blacks were able to obtain a copyright from the Library of Congress—a move that proved important in subsequent legal disputes. Because of his role in launching the black Elks, Riggs was threatened with lynching and had to give up his job as a Pullman porter (a much-coveted elite job at the time). Riggs eventually withdrew from public activities, but his associates, led by B. F. Hunter of Covington,

Kentucky, persisted in building the new African American order, named the Improved Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks of the World (IBPOE of W). And black Pullman porters “who were Elks assisted the spread of the organization to twelve lodges in eight states—Virginia, Ohio, Kentucky, Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Washington, D.C., Maryland, and Pennsylvania—by 1899” (Dickerson 1981: 205).

The black Elks struggled and experienced schisms in the early twentieth century, but after the splits were resolved, the new order became popular, given its secularism, tolerance toward moderate use of alcohol, and emphasis on educational programs, community service, and agitation for black civil rights. As the African American population urbanized and streamed northward, other fraternal orders waned or stalled, yet the black Elks continued to attract elite professionals and masses of working-class men (*ibid.*: chap. 13; Frazier 1957b: 92–94). The order offered insurance benefits to eligible members and also enrolled “social” members not included in the insurance program. With but temporary setbacks during the Great Depression, the IBPOE of W grew steadily across the twentieth century, reaching a percentage high point of more than 6% of black men in the mid-1970s as about 450,000 members met in more than 700 lodges (see Table 4 for sources). Recently, growth has not kept up with population increase, yet the IBPOE of W’s Web site still claims a half-million members in the United States and abroad.

Shriners, American Woodmen, and the Knights of Peter Claver

Three smaller parallel fraternal federations can be introduced more briefly. In the white Masonic world, Shriners became a popular fun and service order recruited from the ranks of high-degree Masons. At the Chicago World’s Fair in 1893, African American Prince Hall Masons met in Apollo Hall on State Street to launch their own Shrine order, called the Ancient Egyptian Arabic Order of the Nobles of the Mystic Shrine of North America, South America, and Its Jurisdiction (Walkes 1993). By 1895, there were already 23 urban temples spread across major cities in all regions. In 1919, Chicago’s Oasis Temple was the largest black Shrine lodge, boasting 345 members (Richardson 1919: 147); and by 1922 the black Shriners claimed 2,000 members overall (Work 1921–22: 414). Over the past century, as white Shriners have paraded to support their well-known burn institutes and other charitable causes, black

Shriners have supported hospitals and medical research on diseases affecting African Americans while also contributing to the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and the National Negro College Fund. Yet while the white Ancient Arabic Shriners became a massively large organization enrolling millions of men, the black Ancient Egyptian Shriners grew only into the tens of thousands (AEAONMS, Inc. 2002), including members serving overseas in the U.S. military.¹² For reasons that are unclear, only a tiny fraction of Prince Hall Masons have chosen to join the black Shriners (Walkes 1993: 339).

Another parallel order that managed to gain substantial national visibility was the American Woodmen (Preuss 1924: 449). This was an unusual black fraternal federation in that it was launched in the West—in Denver, Colorado, in 1901—and then spread into the East, Midwest, and South. In important respects, this insurance-providing fraternal order resembled a major white fraternal order, the Modern Woodmen of America (MWA), which spread out of Iowa in the 1880s. Like the MWA, the American Woodmen prided themselves on a truly modern, actuarially rigorous program of social insurance. But whereas the MWA followed the usual pattern of major white orders by admitting only men (while white women joined the affiliated Royal Neighbors of America), the American Woodmen admitted both men and women. The aims of this African American order are nicely captured in its mottoes “Brotherhood of Man” and “Protection of the Home.”¹³ By 1923, the American Woodmen were operating in 25 U.S. states plus the District of Columbia (American Woodmen 1923); and in 1948 the order still had active chapters in at least 19 states (American Woodmen 1948: 17–23).¹⁴ As for individual membership, it is not clear that the American Woodmen ever grew much beyond the 100,000 members it claimed from the mid-1920s to the early 1930s (Work 1925–26: 464, 1931–32: 524). This was a substantial enrollment, amounting to about 1.5% of the African American adult population at the time.

Finally, although most African American fraternal orders were led and populated by Methodists and Baptists (the Protestant denominations to which the vast majority of blacks belonged), one order did emerge especially for black Catholics. In the late nineteenth century, the Catholic Church moved to enjoin its American adherents from joining Protestant-dominated fraternal groups such as the Masons. To offer an alternative venue for would-be fraternalists, Irish and Italian Catholics built the Knights of Columbus

(Kauffman 1982). As a church-linked fraternity, the Knights of Columbus never officially banned black Catholics; in practice, however, they usually were excluded from local assemblies because such groups were linked to particular parishes and any five members could refuse to vote in an applicant (*ibid.*: 396–97, 400–1, 404).

De facto racial exclusion naturally had a discouraging impact on black involvement in Catholicism. Consequently, in 1909 in Mobile, Alabama, a parallel black order, the Knights of Peter Claver, was launched by three laymen and four priests of the Josephite order, one of whom, Father John Henry Dorsey, was an African American cleric engaged in missionary work along the Gulf Coast (Abston 1998: chap. 3). From there, “The Knights spread quickly through the American South” (Daynes 2001: 297). Within a year, branches had proliferated beyond Mobile to Norfolk and Richmond, Virginia, to Nashville, Tennessee, and “to several small towns in Mississippi.” By 1946, when the Knights of Peter Claver held its second national convention outside the South, in Chicago, “they had become a national organization” (*ibid.*). Like the Knights of Columbus, the Knights of Peter Claver provided social insurance and built community spirit among church people. The order’s steady growth also resembles the upward trajectory of the Knights of Columbus during the twentieth century — although, since black Catholics are a minority of a minority, male membership rose only into the tens of thousands. In its early decades, the Knights of Peter Claver avoided challenging the racial practices of the Catholic Church. But the order started advocating on behalf of black priests in 1939 and became assertive in the civil rights movement during and after the 1960s (Abston 1998: chaps. 5–6; Daynes: 2001: 297).

Distinctive African American Fraternal Federations

African Americans also organized distinctive fraternal federations that did not parallel any white group. As far as we can tell at this point, the most important of these groups are listed in Table 3.¹⁵ As the names listed suggest, distinctive orders often had biblical names, which signified their focus on religiously inspired ritual performances. Like the American Woodmen (discussed above) the distinctive orders recruited men and women together. And like the parallel orders, these peculiarly African American groups also used regular membership dues to fund funeral benefits and perhaps sickness pay-

Table 3 Major distinctive African American fraternal federations

Independent Order of Good Samaritans and Daughters of Samaria (New York, 1847; started as an interracial order and later became African American)
Grand United Order of Galilean Fishermen (Baltimore, MD, 1856)
United Brothers of Friendship and Sisters of the Mysterious Ten (Louisville, KY, 1861)
Independent Order of St. Luke (Baltimore, MD, 1867)
International Order of Twelve of Knights and Daughters of Tabor (Independence, MO, 1871)
Grand United Order of True Reformers (Richmond, VA, 1881)
Mosaic Templars of America (Little Rock, AR, 1883)

ments. The distinctive orders seem to have been even more likely than the major parallel fraternal orders to pool member resources to create cooperative businesses and sustain orphanages, hospitals, or old people's homes.

These orders usually started as local groups within particular cities, then spread within a home state, and finally expanded across state boundaries to become transregional endeavors within the crowded universe of contending African American fraternal federations. Whereas the oldest parallel fraternal orders, the Masons and the Odd Fellows, were launched from major northern cities and later spread into the South and Midwest, most of the ultimately large distinctive orders were incubated initially within particular southern or borderland cities and states and only later spread north.

Independent Order of Good Samaritans and Daughters of Samaria

Strictly speaking, the first group listed in Table 3, the Independent Order of Good Samaritans and Daughters of Samaria, could be considered as much a parallel as a distinctive order and actually fits neither category perfectly. This fascinating fraternal group was founded in New York City in 1847 as a gender-integrated beneficiary and temperance order aiming to "carry forward the work of temperance reform in such a manner that all may receive and enjoy its healing influences" and to "secure sympathy and relief for the unfortunate and distressed families of those who pledge themselves to abstain from all intoxicating drinks" (Turner 1881: 25–26). Displayed on all membership ribbon badges, the biblical story of the Good Samaritan stopping to aid the stranger collapsed along the road formed the centerpiece of the order's ritual ceremonies. As the self-proclaimed "first fraternal society recognizing

humanity in man, no matter what his color” (Hick 1877: 734), the Samaritans were always racially integrated, although originally whites dominated and blacks met in separate local and state lodges (*ibid.*: 736–37; Palmer 1944: 209). Over time, blacks became the majority and moved into national leadership, and from the late 1870s whites withdrew (Palmer 1944: 209; Turner 1881).

Although long-term membership statistics are missing, the Good Samaritans may have become one of the very largest African American associations, with an especially strong presence in the rural South well into the twentieth century.¹⁶ This federation also had a considerable presence in cities across the country. For the period around 1900, we have found evidence of lodges affiliated with the Independent Order of Good Samaritans in Cleveland, Cincinnati, and Xenia, Ohio; in Atlantic City, New Jersey; and in Rome, Georgia (see Table 5 for sources for each city).

Grand United Order of Galilean Fishermen

Another distinctive order founded prior to the Civil War was the Grand United Order of Galilean Fishermen, launched from Baltimore, Maryland, in 1856 as a ritual and beneficial group open to both men and women.¹⁷ This distinctive African American order used symbols borrowed from Scottish Rite Masonry—as displayed on the Galilean ribbon badge portrayed in Figure 3, a badge worn to a state-level meeting by a member of the King David Wing Number 9 of Norfolk, Virginia. By 1897, the Galilean Fishermen claimed to have some 56,000 members meeting in lodges “scattered from New England to the Gulf” (Stevens 1899: 235). We have no clues about the size and distribution of national membership after that, but Joe W. Trotter (1990: 201) does report the existence of 190 members of the Galilean Fishermen in the state of West Virginia in 1921–22. This was a venerable, old-line African American order, but apparently it never became one of the largest black fraternals.

United Brothers of Friendship and Sisters of the Mysterious Ten

A series of African American fraternal federations destined to become quite prominent emerged during and after the Civil War, as it became possible for blacks to build organizational bridges between northern cities and urban and



Figure 3 Ribbon badge from the Grand United Order of Galilean Fisherman
Source: Personal collection of Theda Skocpol.

rural populations in the border states and former-slave South. The first creation of the war era was the United Brothers of Friendship and Sisters of the Mysterious Ten (UBF), which grew from an originally male-only local beneficial society launched by a youthful group of free men and slaves in Louisville, Kentucky, in 1861. “Coeval with the ‘Rebellion’ of the Southern States against the Government of the United States,” the original society grew until its “progress was interrupted by a call to arms,” since “from this society a large number responded by enlisting in the United States Army” (Gibson 1897: 7–9). “The regular order of business was conducted by those officers who remained . . . and correspondence was kept up with the *soldier boys*.” After the war ended, “many renewed their membership, but things had

changed; the organization began with slave and free members, now all were free men. After consultation it was found necessary to inaugurate a new system of management,” and W. H. Gibson Sr., who taught some of the young men at a Methodist Episcopal day and night school, became secretary and developed plans for expansion (*ibid.*).

During the 1870s, the UBF spread from Kentucky into neighboring states, and—long after women had started to participate informally—the Sisters of the Mysterious Ten was formally instituted as part of the order in 1878 (*ibid.*: chaps. 1–6; Wright 1985: 133). In the 1890s, there were reportedly some 100,000 members in 19 states and 2 territories (Stevens 1899: 288–89), and by then the United Brothers of Friendship and Sisters of the Mysterious Ten had become perhaps the largest and most extensive of the distinctive African American orders.

During the early 1900s, this order had clusters of lodges in many cities, including Chicago (Chicago Commission on Race Relations 1921: 141); Cleveland and Cincinnati; Birmingham, Alabama; Nashville; Evansville, Indiana; and Covington, Kentucky (sources for cities other than Chicago are in Table 5). Lodges also existed for a time in Nebraska cities (Nebraska Work Projects Administration 1940: 32). Of course, the UBF had a special presence in its hometown, Louisville, Kentucky: “With money flowing in from lodges all over the nation, the United Brothers built a \$20,000 hall in Louisville for its golden jubilee anniversary in 1911” (Wright 1985: 133). During that same year, the state of “Texas stood out as a stronghold that produced many national officeholders” (Fahey 2001c: 666). Apart from one published claim of 250,000 members in 1906 (*Cleveland Journal* 1906: 1), long-term UBF membership trends are unclear. Historian David Fahey (2001c: 666) concludes that the organization was probably “a casualty of the Great Depression and World War II. No lodges exist today.”¹⁸

Independent Order of St. Luke and the Grand United Order of True Reformers

Borderland cities, such as Baltimore and Louisville, Kentucky, were fertile grounds for launching new African American orders after the Civil War because freedmen and women streamed into those cities seeking access to education and new economic opportunities (for a good discussion, see Wright 1985: 43–45). Richmond was a magnet, too, and the state of Virginia in gen-

eral was a launching site for African American fraternal insurance orders that later gained prominence even beyond the state's boundaries. As historian Carter Woodson (1929: 206) put it, "Just as Virginia proved to be the mother of presidents and the mother of States, it also became the alma mater of . . . secret societies among Negroes." Two important examples are the Independent Order of St. Luke and the Grand United Order of True Reformers.

To be sure, the Independent Order of St. Luke (IOSL) first appeared in Baltimore in 1867 as a women's beneficial society connected to the Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church. Soon men also were admitted, and Virginia lodges broke away to form what grew into the multistate Independent Order. Before long the order came under the dynamic leadership of a former school teacher, Maggie Lena Walker, who arranged for each local council to sponsor juvenile groups—a move that further empowered women in the order—and spread many lodges across Virginia and West Virginia. In 1899, Walker became the national leader, the "right worthy grand secretary, a post that she retained until her death in 1934" (Fahey 2001d: 270).

Maggie Lena Walker was an amazingly energetic institution builder who created businesses tied to the Independent Order of St. Luke, including a newspaper, a department store, and the St. Luke Penny Savings Bank (Beito 2000: 39–42; Brown 1989; Dabney 1927; Richardson 1919: 386–87). She championed women's employment and ensured that "women made up at least half of the senior St. Luke officials, something that no other society that admitted men could match" (Fahey 2001d: 270). Walker was also active in civil rights struggles and served on the board of the NAACP from 1923 until her death in 1934 (Beito 2000: 41). When Walker took the helm at the Independent Order of St. Luke in 1899, the order had just 57 lodges and 1,080 members (Fahey 2001d: 270), but it grew rapidly thereafter, claiming some 40,000 members by 1915 (Work 1914–15: 271) and probably peaking at more than 100,000 members in the mid-1920s (Fahey 2001d: 271) before declining with the coming of the Great Depression. The IOSL was always centered around Richmond, yet in the 1920s it had a major presence in West Virginia (Trotter 1990: 201–2, 207–8), and affiliated lodges also existed in Boston around 1910 (Daniels 1969 [1914]: 208). After Walker's death in 1934, the order dwindled, finally disbanding in the late 1980s (Fahey 2001d: 271).

Even more prominent, though for a shorter time, was the Grand United Order of True Reformers (GUOTR), another insurance-oriented fraternal group open to both men and women. Growing out of the remnants of a nearly defunct black affiliate of a white temperance order, the GUOTR was

founded in Richmond in 1881 by the Reverend William Washington Browne, a former slave and Union soldier who became a teacher, temperance organizer, Colored Methodist minister, and then African Methodist Episcopal minister (Beito 2000: 36–39; Fahey 1994; Burrell and Johnson 1970 [1909]: chaps. 1–5; Watkinson 1989).

This range of occupations and experiences was not unusual for leaders of new black fraternal federations in the post–Civil War era, yet Browne was an unusually entrepreneurial leader who favored black self-help and believed the “secret society is the colored man’s most effective mode of organization” (quoted in Palmer 1944: 210). The GUOTR was the first African American society to “provide life insurance benefits above the costs of a funeral” (Beito 2000: 37) and to “reach something like the insurance basis” that “enabled other secret societies to learn by observation (Woodson 1929: 209, 211). The GUOTR stressed thrift and entrepreneurialism along the lines of the philosophy of Booker T. Washington. Like the Independent Order of St. Luke, the GUOTR established a bank, a newspaper, and other business enterprises in Richmond and “then ventured into the field of charity, organizing an Old Folks Home in 1898” (Frazier 1957b: 373). The True Reformers Bank “increased its prestige during the panic of 1893 by paying all claims presented to it when other banks in the city had to refuse” (Woodson 1929: 210).

Under Browne’s leadership, the GUOTR eventually spread local lodges, called “fountains,” across the Upper South and to various northern cities—including Boston, Cleveland, Cincinnati, and Atlantic City (see Table 5 for sources). About half of the members were from outside Virginia by the time Browne died in 1897 (Fahey 2001e: 254), after which the order continued to prosper for a time under new leaders (Burrell and Johnson 1970 [1909]: chaps. 18–19). During the early twentieth century, fountains spread to some 20 states (Beito 2000: 37), and membership may have surged as high as 100,000 before the True Reformers Bank failed in 1910. Thereafter, many members “quit out of doubt over the safety of their insurance policies,” leaving a shrunken organization vulnerable to demise during the Great Depression (Fahey 2001e: 254).

International Order of Twelve of Knights and Daughters of Tabor

Leaving aside the Virginia-born orders, we now consider the origins and development of black fraternal orders founded further to the west, including

one whose founding preceded the GUOTR. One of the proudest and most distinctive of all African American orders, the International Order of Twelve of Knights and Daughters of Tabor came into continuous existence in 1871 in Independence, Missouri, through the labors of Moses Dickson, a former barber, Union soldier, and later prominent clergyman in the African Methodist Episcopal Church (Dickson 1924: 7–34; Frazier 1957b: 371–72; Richardson 1919: 587–88; Stevens 1899: 198).

While traveling in the South prior to the Civil War, Dickson attempted to organize a secretive group, the Knights of Liberty, to fight against slavery, and the postwar fraternal benevolent order established in 1871 was named “to perpetuate the memory of the TWELVE that organized the Knights of Liberty” (Richardson 1919: 588). The new order was open to both men and women, who came together in higher-level groups and governance while meeting at the local level in male “temples” and female “tabernacles.” Sick benefits and death benefits and endowments were provided to adult members (Stevens 1899: 198), and the order ultimately established important social-welfare institutions, including a well-known hospital founded in 1942 in Mound Bayou, Mississippi, one of a dozen or so African American fraternal hospitals established in the South by 1950 (Beito 2000: 182–88). The International Order of Twelve also promoted racial pride, espoused nondenominational “evangelical” Protestant religion, and admonished members to “use every honorable method to advance the cause of education,” to “acquire real estate,” and to “avoid intemperance; cultivate true manhood; eschew immoral and degraded people. . . . Live an exemplary life, and you will die respected. Knights and Daughters of Tabor, it is in your power to make the International Order of Twelve a real and lasting benefit to mankind” (Dickson 1924: 8).

According to slightly different accounts, by the turn of the twentieth century, the International Order of Twelve had grown either to “‘100,000 members’ in thirty States, England, Africa, and the West Indies” (Stevens 1899: 198) or to “nearly 200,000 Sir Knights and Daughters in the eighteen Grand Jurisdictions from Maine to California and from the Great Lakes to the Gulf of Mexico” (Frazier 1957b: 372). Beyond this, overall membership numbers and trends are unclear, but we do know that in the period 1900–1910 there were clusters of Taborian temples and tabernacles in Cincinnati and Xenia, Ohio; Memphis, Tennessee; and Little Rock, Arkansas (for sources, see Table 5). In the early decades of the twentieth century, Taborian lodges we

can presently document also existed in Greene and Macon counties, Georgia (Raper 1968 [1936]: 374); in rural Virginia (Ellison 1933: 7); and in the states of Illinois and Nebraska (International Order of Twelve 1912; Nebraska Work Projects Administration 1940: 32). Although these indications are more suggestive than complete, the International Order of Twelve may have had its strongest presence in the South and lower Midwest.

Mosaic Templars of America

The final distinctive order we will discuss was the Mosaic Templars of America, launched from Little Rock in 1883. This was originally a local benevolent society to protect the widows of men living in Little Rock, but it soon expanded into the rest of Arkansas and surrounding states and “added auxiliary branches for women, a savings and loan association, and a training program for members interested in owning and operating small businesses” (Giggie 2001: 346). As the group’s name suggests, “the Mosaic Templars were designed . . . as a medium of giving protection and leadership to members of its race as did Moses to the Children of Israel” during their exodus from Egypt (Bush and Dorman 1924: 153). Born into slavery and educated in common schools right after the Civil War, co-founders J. E. Bush and Chester W. Keatts were both prominent Republicans who attained important patronage positions in Arkansas, Bush rising to the rank of U.S. Land Office receiver under President William McKinley and Keatts progressing to become U.S. deputy marshal for the Eastern District of Arkansas. Both men were also active in other black fraternal groups, and Bush befriended Booker T. Washington and along with him became a charter member of the National Negro Business Men’s League (*ibid.*: chap. 1; Giggie 2001; Richardson 1919: 103–5).

The “Mosaics” (as they were known) grew gradually in the initial decades, so that in 1908 (when Keatts died) they had a respectable but not huge membership of about 25,000 men and women meeting in lodges under the jurisdiction of state organizations in Arkansas, Alabama, Georgia, Missouri, Texas, Louisiana, Oklahoma, Mississippi, Tennessee, and Kentucky (Bush and Dorman 1924: 28, 161). Subsequent years brought extensive and rapid growth, especially during and right after World War I, in which the Mosaics played a proudly active role (*ibid.*: chap. 5). “From comparative insignificance we have now forged to the front and have attracted nationwide atten-

GRAND UNITED ORDER OF ODD FELLOWS IN AMERICA
 JURISDICTION OF GEORGIA
The Largest and Most Successful Negro Order in the World

¶ If you want to become a member of the greatest Negro Secret Order in the world, send your application to the nearest subordinate lodge. The Order in the State has doubled its membership within the last twenty-four months. In August, 1908, we had 12,000 members; in August, 1909, 20,000 members, and in June, 1910, we have 26,000 Hearty Odd Fellows carrying \$7,800,000.00 in fraternal insurance. We carry more insurance than every other Negro Order in the State combined. We have 750 subordinate branches in the State. If there is no lodge near you, send for a Deputy and put up one. The Order stands for good citizenship and the protection of your family when you are dead.

Join the Order and enjoy the respect and confidence of your neighbors.

B. S. Ingram, D. G. M., **Wm. Driskell, D. G. T.,** **R. H. Cobb, D. D. G. M.,**
E. A. Fields, D. G. D., **B. J. Davis, D. G. S.,** **Dr. C. I. Cain, D. G. M. E.,**
Henry Lincoln Johnson, District Grand Attorney

Figure 4 Advertisement on page 7 of the 25 June 1910 *Atlanta Independent* urging blacks to join Odd Fellows lodges in Georgia

tion,” declared a Mosaic Templar report in 1917 (quoted in Richardson 1919: 105). Growth may have been especially hearty in the state of Alabama, which during the 1910s went from 900 members meeting in 45 lodges to some 15,000 members meeting in 600 lodges (Richardson 1919: 53). By 1923, the Mosais were fully organized in two dozen states as well as the District of Columbia (Bush and Dorman 1924: 161–62), and they also claimed a presence in seven other states plus South Africa, Central America, and the Canal Zone (Richardson 1919: 53). The total national membership exceeded 100,000 in the early 1920s (Bush and Dorman 1924: 179–80). Membership may have continued to rise through that decade and may have been even larger than the numbers just reported if purely “social” members are counted as well as those eligible for insurance benefits (see the numbers reported in Work 1914–15: 371, 1918–19: 459, 1921–22: 417, 1925–26: 465, 1931–32: 525).

Overall, distinctive African American fraternal orders, even those that ultimately spread across many states, did not for the most part attain the same size or institutional solidity as the largest and most prestigious parallel

Twelve Reasons Why You Should Enlist with the Knights and Daughters of Tabor

1. It is your own and not secondhand.
 2. It was organized in honor of black heroes who fought and fell for our freedom.
 3. Its laws are standard and comprehensive.
 4. Its Ritualism embraces the character of ancient black people and is amazingly rich, beautiful, and significant.
 5. The Order is based on Religion.
 6. It is a unit the world over. There is but one Tabor.
 7. Its mission is to build a worldwide brotherhood and sisterhood.
 8. It preaches the gospel of the better and higher life.
 9. It operates a Taborian Home for the care of old and infirm members.
 10. It provides relief locally for the sick and distressed.
 11. It pays the most liberal policy to beneficiaries of deceased members.
 12. Its mission is: "To help spread and build up the Christian Religion."
-

Figure 5 Advertising fan from Indianola, Mississippi, in the 1930s citing 12 good reasons for joining the Knights and Daughters of Tabor

Source: Powdermaker 1939: 123.

orders (i.e., the Prince Hall Masons, the Grand United Order of Odd Fellows, the colored Knights of Pythias, and the Improved Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks of the World). In appealing for African American members, the largest parallel orders trumpeted their size and solidity—characteristics that also allowed them to set higher membership dues in return for insurance policies that paid out modest yet certain benefits in the case of illness or death (cf. Raper 1968 [1936]: 375–78). As displayed in Figure 4, the appeal of parallel orders is nicely encapsulated in the 1910 advertisement printed in the *Atlanta Independent* by the Grand United Order of Odd Fellows, proclaiming itself part of “The Largest and Most Successful Negro Order in the World.”

Yet distinctive African American fraternal orders had their own message of racial pride. “We have accepted the badge of distinction, and there-

fore are not elbowing our way into any white organization; we claim to be purely Negroes and of Negro origin,” explained the official chronicler of the United Brothers of Friendship and Sisters of the Mysterious Ten (Gibson 1897: iv). Similarly, as shown in Figure 5, an advertising fan distributed in Mississippi in the 1930s listed 12 reasons for people to join the International Order of Twelve of Knights and Daughters of Tabor. “It is your own and not second-hand,” proclaimed the first reason. The second stressed that Tabor “was organized in honor of black heroes who fought and fell for our freedom,” and the fourth reason elaborated further that the order’s “ritualism embraces the character of ancient black people, and is amazingly rich, beautiful, and significant.” Blacks could organize their own ambitious and successful fraternal orders, the message of distinctive groups went, without any direct inspiration from their white counterparts. Some groups, such as Mississippi’s Order of Lone Star Race Pride, Friendship, Love, and Help, even enshrined that message in their very names (Odum 1910: 101; Palmer 1944: 210). And of course, the rich profusion of distinctive fraternal titles appearing in Table 1 conveys the same aura of black organizational creativity—drawing, usually, on biblical ideals for inspiration but occasionally on Africanist themes as well (such as the Ancient United Order Knights and Daughters of Africa or the Royal Order of Menelik and the Princess of Abyssinia).

African Americans as Super Joiners

It is all very well to show that many African American fraternal organizations appeared and flourished in the United States during the same era in which white fraternal groups prospered. This still does not address the more fundamental question of how strongly organized blacks were *compared to* whites. Perhaps African American fraternal federations encompassed many fewer local lodges in relation to the adult population than did white fraternals. Equally possible, blacks may have founded many fraternal federations but joined them less readily than whites joined their federations. This latter hypothesis only stands to reason. After all, African Americans were historically much less economically privileged and secure than whites (Frazier 1957b: chaps. 10–12, 22–23). Urban case studies inevitably show blacks clustered in the ranks of unskilled laborers (cf. Bigham 1987: chap. 4; Salvatore 1996; Wright 1985: chap. 3); and rural ethnographies portray African Americans living in often desperate poverty (e.g., Powdermaker 1939: chaps. 6–7;

Raper 1968 [1936]: chap. 3). African Americans also enjoyed less access to education than their white counterparts (Frazier 1957b: chap. 17; Raper 1968 [1936]: chap. 17) and in rural areas, especially, were often illiterate. However much they may have imitated white fraternal organizations—or built distinct fraternal federations of their own following familiar U.S. organizational patterns—how could African Americans, even after emancipation, possibly have organized as extensively or intensively as whites?

Exact statistics to address the relative extent and depth of fraternal organization among whites and blacks are not easy to come by. Ideally, we would like to know the percentage of all U.S. adults, black and white, who belonged to one, two, three, and more fraternal groups between, say, the 1850s and the 1950s. But such data are not available for whites, let alone for blacks. At the aggregate individual level, educated guesses about white and black joiners are the best we can consider. After examining many studies referring to various social settings, knowledgeable observers have guessed that the proportions of African American adults who belonged to one or more fraternal groups in the decades around 1900 at least equaled and probably exceeded the proportion of white adults who belonged. Observing mainly whites around 1900, Stevens (1899: xvi) guessed that some 40% of adult men were members of fraternal groups. Meanwhile, the “profusion of Negro organizations, as early as 1871, caused the *New York Times* to report that Negroes possessed a ‘readiness to enter into every new society.’ Scarcely was there a Negro who did not belong to a society, the newspaper asserted” (Scheiner 1965: 93). Not all of these memberships were in fraternal groups, of course, and the *Times* probably exaggerated. Nevertheless, after examining dozens of case studies of urban and rural communities, today’s leading historian of black fraternalism, David Fahey (1994: 9), concludes that “at one time or another in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century a majority of black men and women probably joined either a fraternal or mutual benefit society.”

In a situation where available individual-level data are less than ideal, we have developed alternative strategies for making valid comparisons of black and white fraternal organization and membership patterns. For the major parallel fraternal groups—Masons, Odd Fellows, Knights of Pythias, and Elks—we are able to estimate when and at what levels memberships as a percentage of all adult men peaked for blacks and whites. In addition, to get some idea of participation in the full range of fraternal organizations with a local presence in various parts of the United States, we have searched for city

Table 4 Peak memberships of parallel African American and white fraternal groups

Fraternal groups	Peak percentages of adult men enrolled	
	African American	White
Masons	5–7% in 1920s > 6% in mid-1950s	9.8% in 1924 8.7% in 1955
Odd Fellows	11% in mid-1910s	6% in 1921
Knights of Pythias	6% in early 1920s	3% in 1921
Elks	6% in mid-1970s	2.7% in 1975

Sources: Census interpolations for estimates of adult white and nonwhite male population. Data on white groups from fraternal reports. Best estimates for African American groups as follows: Masons: Grimshaw 1969 [1903]: 304–5; Muraskin 1975: 29–30; Odd Fellows: fraternal reports; Fahey 2001a: 252–53; Knights of Pythias: fraternal reports; Fahey 2001b; Elks: Wesley 1955; Schmidt 1980: 108.

directories and ethnographic studies that allow us to calculate the density of local fraternal lodges per 1,000 population for African Americans and, wherever possible, for whites as well. As we are about to see, these data suggest that several parallel African American fraternal groups involved a higher percentage of adults than did their white counterparts; and available data also suggest that in many localities all kinds of African American fraternal lodges were more prolific in relation to population than were white lodges.

The logical place to start is with the major parallel fraternal groups, the peak associations of fraternalism for both white and black America in the late nineteenth century and the early to mid-twentieth century. We do not yet have full runs of membership data for the major parallel black fraternal groups, but we do have fairly complete long-term data for the white groups, and we have enough information to make an educated guess about the absolute membership peaks for black groups in the twentieth century. Table 4 presents this information in the form of peak percentages of black and white adult males enrolled in the Masons, Odd Fellows, Knights of Pythias, and Elks among African Americans and whites and shows approximately when the peak percentages occurred. Almost all of these groups rose to a peak and then fell off, if not steadily (because groups fell and rose with the beginning and end of the Great Depression) then at least in a way that never again reached the same heights. However, we present pairs of percentage peaks for the white and black Masons because they attained two almost equal high points, first in the 1920s and again in the mid-1950s.

Table 4 shows a clear per capita membership advantage for whites com-

pared to blacks in Masonic groups, which for both races were the oldest and arguably most prestigious of all fraternal orders. The Prince Hall Masons peaked at around 6% of African American men in both the 1920s and the mid-1950s—an impressive showing. Yet white Masons achieved considerably higher peaks in both 1924 and 1955.

For the other three major parallel groups, however, the comparative picture is different. At least briefly, African Americans achieved considerably higher per capita peak enrollments. Among blacks and whites alike, the Odd Fellows and the Knights of Pythias attained apogees in the early twentieth century, but the peaks occurred at much higher levels for the African American groups—almost twice as high for black Odd Fellows compared to whites and twice as high for black Knights of Pythias compared to whites. Coming out of the nineteenth century, major African American fraternal groups had enormous momentum, riding the wave of freedom for those formerly enslaved in the South and serving a variety of economic and civic functions for populations that enjoyed few alternative venues for publicly visible organization. The huge U.S. memberships attracted by the Grand United Order of Odd Fellows in America and the Knights of Pythias of North America, South America, Asia, Africa, and Australia easily counterbalanced the somewhat shallower penetration of Masonry among blacks compared to whites.

Along with Masons, Elks may have been the most prestigious fraternalists of the twentieth century among whites and blacks alike—albeit in entirely separate organizations. White and black Elks have included prominent statesmen, businessmen, professionals, and civic figures (Dickerson 1981). The white and black organizations both grew across the twentieth century, although there were downturns in both cases during the Great Depression. Interestingly, as Table 4 shows, the African American Improved Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks of the World probably peaked at more than 5% of men enrolled in the mid-1970s, while the white Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks peaked at 2.7% of men enrolled in 1975. Again, black Elks achieved about twice the membership penetration of their white counterparts.

Of course, comparisons for specific orders such as those in Table 4 could be misleading, because whites may have been much more involved than blacks in fraternal groups other than the largest, longest-lived, and most prominent groups. From Figure 1, we know that African Americans and whites alike organized many other fraternal federations, so we need to find

some way to learn about the relative prevalence of all sorts of fraternal groups across the racial divide. In the absence of individual-level social survey data or complete membership statistics for hundreds of fraternal groups, our best bet for learning about the prevalence of fraternal groups of all kinds lies in U.S. city directories, which, in the era between the 1870s and the 1920s, tended to list huge numbers of locally present membership associations, including church congregations, fraternal lodges, military veterans' posts, and other kinds of groups. In this period, U.S. city directories were prepared by shifting sets of local or regional businesses, which did not necessarily follow exactly the same protocols of data gathering from year to year or place to place. Even so, directory compilers did regularly list both white and African American ("colored") church congregations, and they also listed fraternal chapters, sometimes including African American as well as white lodges.

Keying on the decade point 1910, or close to it, when fraternal lodges were at their per capita peak in U.S. cities (Gamm and Putnam 1999: 527, figure 2), we have searched directories for cities in various parts of the eastern, midwestern, and southern United States, paying special attention to large cities and to cities of various sizes with substantial African American populations and also surveying places for which rich social histories exist. Alas, most directories—especially for cities in the Deep South—simply omit African American fraternal groups. And some list only the major parallel African American fraternals, leaving out distinctive associations (like the Knights of Tabor or the United Brothers of Friendship) that we know from other evidence were surely present. We have not used city directories unless they list both parallel and distinctive African American lodges, and even then we cannot be sure that listings are as complete for blacks as they are for whites living in each city. Even so, some data is better than none, and we can make comparisons between per capita lodge numbers for blacks and whites across a number of southern, border-state, and northern places with the data arrayed in Table 5.

In their study of membership associations listed in directories for 26 small, medium, and large U.S. cities between 1840 and 1940, political scientists Gerald Gamm and Robert D. Putnam calculated average lodge densities per 1,000 population. According to exact data points supplied by Gamm and Putnam (1999: 527, figure 2), the averages for fraternal lodges across all 26 cities were 1.95 per 1,000 population for 1900; 1.96 per 1,000 population for 1910 (the peak density); 1.35 per 1,000 population for 1920; and 0.92 per

Table 5 Density of white and African American fraternal lodges (per 1,000 population)

Fraternal lodges	African American ^a	White ^a	Data source for lodges
Urban locations			
Boston, 1911 (670,585 2.1% African American)	2.03 (+0.07)	1.07 (-0.89)	Daniels 1969 [1914]: 207-9, 462; and city directory for whites ^b
Cleveland, 1910 (560,663 1.5% African American)	3.43 (+1.47)	1.53 (-0.43)	city directory
Cincinnati, 1911 (363,591 5.4% African American)	5.22 (+3.26)	1.11 (-0.85)	city directory
Birmingham, AL, 1910 (132,685 39.4% African American)	0.65 (-1.31)	0.88 (-1.08)	city directory
Memphis, TN, 1910 (131,105 40% African American)	0.99 (-0.97)	1.35 (-0.61)	city directory
Worcester, MA, 1900 (118,421 0.9% African American)	10.87 (+8.92)	1.11 (-0.84)	city directory; Salvatore 1996
Nashville, TN, 1910 (110,364 33% African American)	2.08 (+0.12)	1.69 (-0.27)	city directory
Evansville, IN, 1910 (69,647 9% African American)	3.99 (+2.03)	1.45 (-0.51)	city directory
Jacksonville, FL, 1910 (57,699 50.8% African American)	1.16 (-0.80)	1.09 (-0.87)	city directory
Covington, KY, 1910 (53,270 5.4% African American)	4.48 (+2.52)	1.33 (-0.63)	city directory
Atlantic City, NJ, 1910 (46,150 21.3% African American)	2.24 (+0.28)	1.63 (-0.33)	city directory
Little Rock, AR, 1910 (45,941 31.7% African American)	2.00 (+0.04)	1.82 (-0.14)	city directory

Table 5 (continued)

Fraternal lodge	African American ^a	White ^a	Data source for lodges
Xenia, OH, c. 1900 (8,696 22.9% African American)	5.52 (+3.57)	—	Du Bois 1907: 92
Rome, GA, 1899 (7,245 40.1% African American)	2.12 (+0.17)	4.71 (+2.76)	city directory
Nonurban locations			
Greene County, GA, c. 1930 (12,616 52.5% African American)	5.88	—	Raper 1968 [1936]: 184, 374
Macon County, GA, c. 1930 (16,643 67.3% African American)	4.29	—	Raper 1968 [1936]: 184, 374
West Virginia, 1923 (1,543,352 6.1% African American)	10.87	—	Trotter 1990: 75–76; 201–2

Note: Fraternal lodge counts include military veterans' posts.

^aPlus or minus average for 26 U.S. cities, presented in Gamm and Putnam 1999: 527.

^bDaniels presents basic-level lodge numbers for African Americans in "Greater Boston," and his corresponding population figure has been used to calculate African American density. Higher-level black Odd Fellows and Masons units listed in the city directory were added to Daniels's figures to make counts as comparable as possible to those for white lodges. White density for Boston is based on city lodges and population only.

1,000 population for 1940. (No data are presented for 1930.) Unfortunately, few of the 26 cities Gamm and Putnam studied are included in our Table 5 because most of their directories omitted African American fraternal groups. We can, however, make use of Gamm and Putnam's average lodge densities as *benchmarks* to pinpoint whether the lodge densities we find for African Americans and whites in various locations exceeded (+) or fell below (–) the nearest average density figure calculated by Gamm and Putnam and by how much. In a sense, Gamm and Putnam's figures represent average lodge density mostly for whites across a broad array of large, medium-sized, and small cities in the modernizing United States.

As Table 5 shows, in 11 of the 14 cities for which we have been able to calculate numbers for African Americans, the density of black lodges equals

or exceeds the relevant Gamm and Putnam average lodge densities. White lodge densities, however, fall below the Gamm and Putnam averages in 12 out of 13 cities for which data are presented in our table. Even more telling, in 10 of the 13 cities for which we have been able to calculate directly comparable lodge densities for both blacks and whites, the African American lodge densities are greater than white densities (although there is no correlation, overall, between black and white lodge densities). The three cities with African American lodge densities that are lower than white densities—Birmingham, Memphis, and Rome, Georgia—are all southern places for which listings of African American lodges were least likely to be complete around 1910.

In Table 5, there is no correlation between overall city size and the density of African American lodges, although white lodge density and city size *are* negatively correlated ($r = -0.31$). There is, however, a strong negative correlation ($r = -0.65$) between black lodge density and the percentage of city population that is African American. This could mean that tiny minority urban populations of blacks tended to organize especially intensively. But we should be cautious in reaching this conclusion, because smaller percentages of African Americans were likely to be found in more northerly cities with possibly better reporting of existing lodges. And of course, we do not know *how many* members various lodges enrolled. African American lodges in places with relatively larger black populations may well have had more members (thus reducing the per capita density).

Furthermore, as the nonurban locations included in Table 5 suggest, African American lodge density could be very high in southern counties—including agricultural regions such as Greene and Macon counties, Georgia—where the percentage of African Americans was very high. The density figures for Macon and Greene are not dependent on city directories that may have been biased against listing black organizations; these figures come from Arthur Raper (1968 [1936]), an ethnographer who looked closely at black social life. Raper does not provide exactly comparable data for whites, but his narrative strongly suggests that rural blacks in these Georgia counties around 1930 organized many more churches and lodges per capita than did urban or rural whites. Similarly, sociologist Howard Odum studied African American fraternal groups in Mississippi, and although he presents no comparative numbers for whites and blacks, the levels of fraternal participation he observed for blacks most certainly were not met by whites. “A single

town having not more than five hundred colored inhabitants not infrequently has from fifteen to twenty subordinate lodges, each representing a different order," Odum (1910: 109) observed. "Many negroes belong to from three to five each."

In short, available data as assembled in both Tables 4 and 5 suggest that African Americans were, in fact, as Gunnar Myrdal concluded, "exaggerated Americans" with respect to organizing and joining fraternal lodges. City directories likewise regularly listed more "colored" churches per capita than white churches. Thus, when it came to both of the major types of voluntary membership associations that historically dominated local communities in the United States, African Americans were especially avid participants. This seems to have been just as true in the rural South as it was in the urban North.

A couple of caveats are nevertheless in order. Because of the concentration of black population in the South during the decades when U.S. fraternal groups were proliferating from the 1870s to the 1930s, even the largest African American fraternal federations did not reach as far across the continental United States as did many white fraternal federations. In 1910, for example, at close to the height for both organizations, the white Independent Order of Odd Fellows (IOOF) had state organizations as well as many local lodges in all 50 U.S. states and territories plus the District of Columbia, whereas the African American Grand United Order of Odd Fellows (GUO of OF) had "district grand lodges" in only 39 of these 51 jurisdictions, and its local lodges were relatively sparse in midwestern and western states, where few blacks lived. Southern, border, and eastern states boasted the strongest presence of black Odd Fellows lodges and other black fraternal chapters during an era when white fraternal federations were rapidly spreading into the Midwest and far West.

Furthermore, although black fraternal federations were rooted in especially dense thickets of local lodges — with more lodges per capita than whites in places with even modest concentrations of African American population — they nevertheless had shallower foundations in one important respect. Among African Americans, individual local lodges had fewer members, on average, than white fraternal lodges tended to have. Thus the average size of all white IOOF lodges in 1910 was 88.23 members, whereas the average African American GUO of OF lodge had 35.14 members.¹⁹ We suspect that average lodge sizes for blacks tended to be smaller across many fraternal

federations in virtually all locations. Blacks created more local chapters, but those chapters were in an important sense more fragile than white fraternal lodges. Not only were average black lodge sizes smaller; their members also faced greater economic privation, which meant that in times of economic stress it was harder for black lodges to keep up collections of membership dues. Larger, more established fraternal federations could ride through such periods of economic stress, to be sure, but smaller ones often died during economic hard times—as ethnographic studies reveal. Greene County, Georgia, one of the two counties studied by Arthur Raper, experienced severe economic depression and rapid out-migration during the 1920s and 1930s; and for that county especially, he reports extraordinary rates of lodge closure as well as the disappearance of smaller distinctive African American fraternal groups. “‘Well, you see,’” Raper (1968 [1936]: 379) quotes a white farmer in Greene County observing, “‘when nearly everybody left out of here the Builders of the Walls of Jerusalem quit the job, the United Gospel Aid failed, and Noah’s Ark went down.’”

Women in African American Fraternal Groups

“Fraternalism” connotes brotherhood, and scholars who have studied mainstream white U.S. fraternal associations have tended to take it for granted that they express male identities and masculine supremacy (Carnes 1989; Clawson 1989; Gist 1940). Of course, there were female fraternal auxiliaries, but among whites such auxiliaries usually had satellite status. Typically open only to the close female relatives of male fraternalists, white fraternal auxiliaries often had male as well as female leaders, while the primary white male groups did not admit women or accept them as leaders. We might be tempted to assume that the situation was similar among African Americans. Perhaps African American women were especially active through churches (Collier-Thomas 1998; Higginbotham 1993), while black men asserted leadership and male identities through the massive fraternal groups whose substantial national and local presence we have documented. But this supposition turns out to be mistaken, because, interestingly enough, African American women played an extraordinarily strong role in black fraternal groups as well as in black churches.

In Table 2 we see hints about the gender situation among parallel black and white fraternal groups, where the white pattern of separate yet coordi-

nated bodies usually prevailed: Masons and Eastern Stars, Odd Fellows and either Rebekahs or Households of Ruth, Knights of Pythias and either Pythian Sisters or the Order of Calanthe, and so forth. Leaving aside the Masons, where the original male organizations were formed among blacks and whites prior to the achievement of U.S. national independence, the average span of years between the formation of the primary male order and the official establishment of the female partner organization was much shorter among African Americans (8.3 years) than among whites (21 years). What is more, two out of the seven major white fraternal orders listed in this table—the Shriners and the Elks—never developed any major female partner organizations at all, even as the Daughters of Isis and the Daughters of the Elks each attained a strong organizational presence as partners to the black Shriners and Elks, respectively (Mason 1952; Walkes 1993: chap. 25).²⁰ As historian Charles Dickerson (1981: 455) explains, the “Afro-American Elks shared . . . [white] BPOE views toward women, but most could only practice such beliefs within their own families. . . . they had to accept the Daughters of the IBPOE of W as an official part of the order. Emma Kelly presented the Black Elks with the accomplished fact of women Elks in 1903. . . . Consequently, the order tried to maintain a father/daughter relationship even though the women made it brother/sister and sometimes reversed the relationship to that of a mother/son. . . . the IBPOE of W, unlike the BPOE, had a single official women’s order synchronized in programs, activities and organization with the Black Elks.” To be sure, Daughter Elks were not as numerous in relation to the adult black female population as black male Elks were to the population of adult black men, but they were, nevertheless, a massive and confident organizational presence throughout the United States in the middle decades of the twentieth century (Mason 1952).

In addition to the strong presence of female partner groups within other parallel orders, the final parallel order listed in Table 2—the American Woodmen—was gender-integrated from its inception. In this order, black men and women always met together—with women sometimes in the majority. We can see an instance of this in Figure 6, showing the members of American Woodmen Camp Number 1 of Kansas City, whose seven female and six male members as of 1937 peer out at us from the photograph reproduced here.²¹

The gender-integrated organizational pattern of the American Woodmen was actually typical of most African American groups apart from the major orders paralleling white fraternal. Table 1 shows that men and women



Figure 6 Photograph taken in 1937 of the members of American Woodmen Camp No. 1 in Kansas City, gender-integrated from its inception

Source: Personal collection of Theda Skocpol.

were often recognized together in the very titles of black fraternal groups, which referred to “Knights and Ladies,” “Knights and Daughters,” “Sons and Daughters,” or “Brotherhood and Sisterhood.” What is more, *all* of the leading distinctive black fraternal federations listed in Table 3 were gender-integrated organizations, usually from the organization’s inception. In just one instance from Table 3, that of the United Brothers of Friendship (UBF), did a male group develop for a number of years before the female group was fully recognized; but even in this case women started to meet within a few years of the UBF’s founding, and the Sisters of the Mysterious Ten became a full part of the organization within two decades (Gibson 1897).

Men and women sometimes met in the same local lodges in gender-integrated African American fraternal orders and sometimes in separate yet closely coordinated local chapters. If the latter situation prevailed, men and women nevertheless came together in state and national governance meetings, much more readily than the genders joined together in white conventions and supralocal governance arrangements. Women could be top leaders of gender-integrated fraternal federations, as was Maggie Lena Walker in the Independent Order of St. Luke (Brown 1989; Dabney 1927). And women routinely contributed 40% or more of the state-level officers and committee

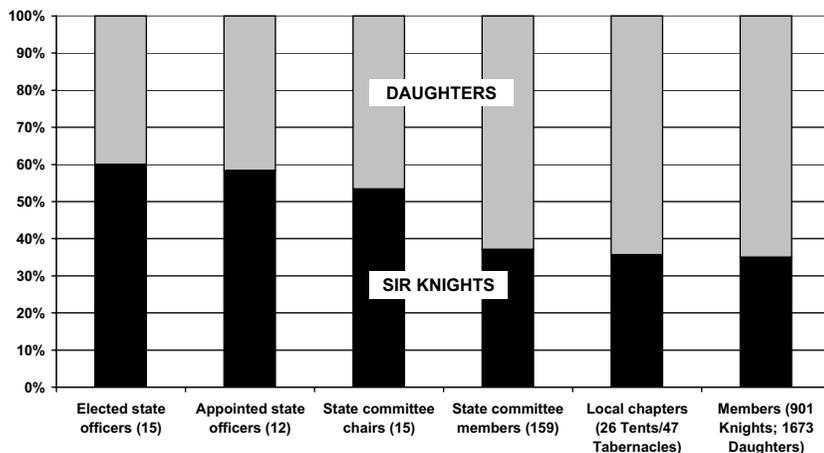


Figure 7 Percentages of male and female participation in the International Order of Twelve of Knights and Daughters of Tabor, Illinois state meeting, 1912

Source: International Order of Twelve 1912.

members, as Figures 7 and 8 suggest using information about a 1912 Illinois convention of the International Order of Twelve and about a 1907 North Carolina convention of the Independent Order of Good Samaritans, respectively. The Samaritans deployed women as “associate officers” working side by side with male officers, while the Illinois Taborians had an even stronger female presence among state officers, committee members, and delegates. Other reports we have found point to similar heavy female involvement in the state proceedings of distinctive African American fraternal orders. And to give another example, according to historian David Fahey (1994: 7), an 1895 article in Richmond’s “leading black newspaper, the *Planet*, sneeringly described the five-hundred-strong assembly” of the Virginia Grand Fountain of the Grand United Order of True Reformers “as comprised ‘overwhelmingly’ of women.”

City directory data further reinforce the picture of female heft in the African American fraternal world. For 13 cities of various sizes, we have analyzed listings of local African American and white fraternal lodges sufficiently detailed to allow separate tallies of male-only lodges, female-only lodges, and mixed-gender lodges. For each of these cities, Table 6 compares the percentages of black and white local lodges that were exclusively for men. Not much stock should be placed in the absolute levels from city to city

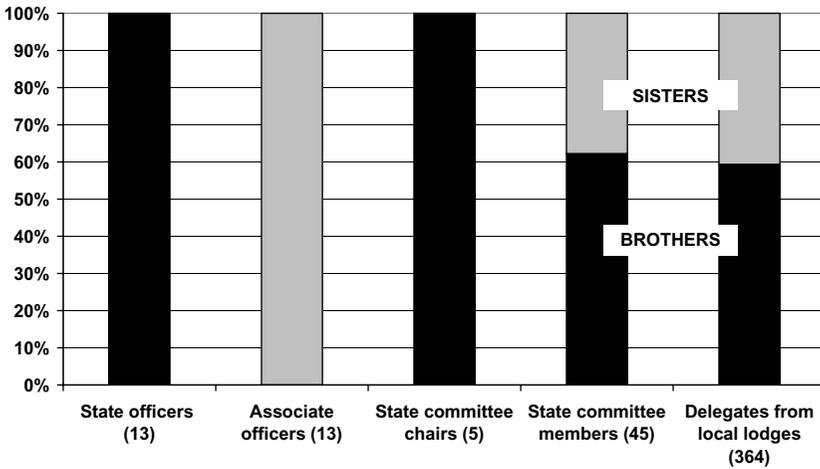


Figure 8 Percentages of male and female participation in the Independent Order of Good Samaritans, North Carolina state meeting, 1907

Source: Independent Order of Good Samaritans 1907.

because some local directories may have been less than thorough at listing the lodges of female partner groups. This might have been especially true for southern cities—or, possibly, white and black women alike were less likely to organize in the South. Imperfect as they are, however, the data in Table 6 do allow within-city comparisons—and, almost always, a higher percentage of white than black lodges were exclusively for males. One of only three cities where the black male percentage was greater than the white male percentage was Jacksonville, Florida, home to a Union military garrison, where there were many lodges for black men not living with their wives. Averaging across all 13 cities, we see nearly an 18-point racial gap in the percentage of lodges for men alone; the medians tell the same story. At the local level, African American women were remarkably well organized within both parallel and distinctive black fraternal groups. Among blacks, female and mixed-gender chapters usually constituted from one-third to 65% of all regularly meeting local lodges, whereas among whites, female and mixed-gender chapters typically were one-tenth to one-third of local fraternal lodges.

Economic realities lay behind the powerful female presence in African American fraternalism. Fraternal federations provided funeral benefits and insurance against sickness and death, including payments to survivors. Funeral benefits were culturally crucial to poor people's sense of dignity, and

Table 6 Male and female lodges among African Americans and whites in selected U.S. cities

Cities	Percentages of lodges for males only	
	African Americans	Whites
Boston, Massachusetts (1911)	57.5	85.8
Cleveland, Ohio	72.4	72.1
Cincinnati, Ohio (1911)	35.3	77.1
Birmingham, Alabama	82.4	91.6
Memphis, Tennessee	84.6	76.4
Worcester, Massachusetts (1900)	58.3	66.2
Nashville, Tennessee	64.5	86.5
Evansville, Indiana	52.0	80.4
Jacksonville, Florida	91.2	90.3
Covington, Kentucky	61.5	85.1
Atlantic City, New Jersey	59.1	67.8
Little Rock, Arkansas	37.9	78.9
Rome, Georgia (1899)	66.7	95.2
Average percentage of male lodges across 13 cities	63.3	81.0
Median percentage	61.5	80.4

Sources: See Table 5 for data sources. As in Table 5, Boston lodge data refer to the city proper for whites and to the metropolitan area for African Americans.

Note: 1910 data unless otherwise indicated.

insurance payments could help sustain families that lost employed wage earners (Odum 1910: 133–34; Powdermaker 1939: 121–23; Rubinow 1969 [1913]). Because African American women could find jobs in domestic service, agriculture, and some professions (such as teaching), they had considerable earning power and a strong role in providing economically for their families. At many times and places, especially in cities, employment opportunities for them could be as great or greater than for African American men. And certainly the necessity to seek employment was greater for black than for white women (Jones 1985). Often impoverished or on the knife-edge of poverty, African American families exploited wide-ranging kin networks and sent as many workers as possible into employment.

Since women's earnings mattered so much, fraternal groups that provided insurance benefits of various kinds wanted to attract female members, even as black families needed their female members to obtain benefits in case

of death, illness, or unemployment. In 1898, “a canvass of a slum district in New York City disclosed that 52 percent of black mothers, but only 15 percent of black fathers, belonged to insurance societies, including fraternal ones” (Fahey 1994: 7, citing Du Bois 1898: 19). And the same situation could prevail in a very different social setting, as revealed by anthropologist Hortense Powdermaker’s 1939 ethnographic study of “Cottonville,” her pseudonym for Indianola, a small county-seat city in the Mississippi Delta. “Most of the local Negroes belong to at least one of the [insurance] societies, and some belong to more than one,” Powdermaker (1939: 122) observed. “More women than men take out insurance, and often a woman takes it for the man, as well as for her children. That men seem to think it is the woman’s job to secure and sustain the policy is in keeping with her superior and steadier earning power and with the matriarchal nature of the Negro family in Cottonville.”

The central involvement of women in black fraternalism—especially through the many distinctive African American orders—was furthered by the already vital role women played in black churches and church-connected associations (Higginbotham 1993). Social connections often transfer from one organizational sphere into others, especially when group ideologies are similar, which certainly was the case for the large number of African American fraternal federations that featured biblical Christian themes in their rituals. In rural areas, as Franklin Frazier (1957b: 217) explains, black mutual aid organizations “grew up in connection with church organizations. They often developed into [fraternal] lodges or were absorbed by the lodges, which with their rituals and a more formal organization, performed a similar function. . . . close by the church in most rural communities one may see . . . one or more lodge halls.” That the symbiosis of fraternalism and religion could work out to support strong female involvement in African American fraternal federations is suggested by the example of the International Order of Twelve of Knights and Daughters of Tabor, which seems to have held special appeal for women. Local Taborian female tabernacles were often more numerous than local male temples (this was the case in a number of the city directories used for Table 5). And female members and leaders could figure prominently in state bodies (as Figure 7 shows). “A drawing card for women,” explains historian David Beito (2000: 182), “was that the Knights and Daughters of Tabor had close ties with the church, the bastion of black female social life.”

The Significance and Modern Evolution of Black Fraternalism

Despite spotty data, we have certainly learned enough to conclude that African Americans made frequent and intensive use of fraternal forms of organization between the Civil War and the mid-twentieth century. Because fraternal organizations as well as churches figured so massively in the historical universe of U.S. voluntary organizations (Gamm and Putnam 1999), we must question any claim that slavery and its aftermath prevented African Americans from elaborating “social capital,” that is, vibrant voluntary associations expressing and reinforcing norms of cooperation and trust. Amid grinding poverty, restricted access to education, and precarious civil rights, African Americans created not just churches but also fraternal federations that anchored local communities and spanned classes and places. What is more, black women played an unusually strong role in African American fraternal federations, sometimes leading national, state, or local groups and regularly organizing and participating in fraternal orders side by side with men.

Not only were African American fraternal federations numerous and organized translocally as well as locally. As we have learned, in many places there were more black lodges than white lodges in relation to population. The evidence about fraternal groups would seem to support those scholars and observers of the past who maintained that African Americans had a special proclivity for association building in many spheres and above all in the realm of churches and fraternal lodges. “No race of men and women feel more strongly than we do the force of that maxim that ‘in union there is strength,’” declared Fannie Barrier Williams (1905: 41). She went on to observe that “next to the Negro church in importance, as affecting the social life of the people, are the secret orders. . . . These affect every phase of their social life and represent the best achievements of the race in the matter of organization. . . . In no other form of organization do the terms of brotherhood and mutual obligations mean so much” (ibid.: 42). Although the sheer multiplicity of black fraternal groups might sometimes have undercut trust and promoted factionalism (cf. Light 1972), at least one well-informed observer, sociologist Howard Odum, concluded otherwise. Not only did fraternal orders recruit members from different religious denominations, explains Odum (1910: 125), “the lodges manifest more of the fraternal spirit

than do the churches toward one another. . . . members are often in good fellowship and standing in several orders”; community leaders simultaneously tout the work of multiple orders; and “local lodges often combine to celebrate a special day, each sitting in a section of the hall or church.”

Although black fraternal lodges were usually smaller (and thus potentially more fragile) than white lodges, the greater density of black fraternal chapters also brought democratic advantages. The United States was a “nation of presidents,” joked an early-twentieth-century writer (Hill 1892: 383–84), because so many membership groups needed to fill a plethora of local, state, and national offices every year. In “elaborately officered” membership groups, Hill explained, even ordinary American men and women enjoyed opportunities to learn and exercise organizational leadership skills. People learned to conduct meetings according to *Robert’s Rules of Order*, to keep honest secretarial and financial records, to select materials for lodge programs, to organize special events, and to run routine committees such as those visiting sick members. This was even more true for African Americans than for whites, because some black orders had more officer posts to fill than white orders and because proportionately more African American fraternalists were laborers, blue-collar workers, or lower-level white-collar employees. Working with such members, local lodges had to fill between one and two dozen elective and appointive offices and committee posts each year, and there were also full complements of leadership posts at district, state, and national levels. Once individuals got on a ladder of local posts, they tended to move up if they performed well, yet new people still had to be recruited each year. And in major orders, such as the Grand United Order of Odd Fellows, past officers of local lodges were given elaborate continuing responsibilities as officers in or delegates to district, state, and national bodies and as members of councils of past masters of local lodges (cf. Brooks 1902).

Because of the sheer proliferation of their “elaborately officered” lodges, therefore, African American fraternalists, men and women alike, gained *extra* opportunities to develop leadership skills during an era of U.S. history when blacks are often presumed to have been relatively unorganized. For example, in his study of the densely organized associational life of African Americans in late-nineteenth-century Worcester, Massachusetts, historian Nick Salvatore (1996: 257) found that, in both the 1870s and the 1880s, “more than 60 percent of the identifiable members” of North Star and Integrity lodges of the Grand United Order of Odd Fellows held leadership or committee posts,

“and in this fashion the Odd Fellows in Worcester encouraged the development of a diverse leadership cohort with sustained organizational experience among many of the city’s adult black males.” Similar broad participation in associational leadership was discovered in an analogous investigation of late-nineteenth-century Philadelphia (Lane 1991: 297–99), suggesting that Salvatore’s findings might extend to larger as well as smaller cities.

The opportunities fraternal orders offered to African Americans for leadership and cooperation were unquestionably highly valued. On the civic and political side, participation in fraternal groups allowed otherwise suppressed African Americans to organize and assemble in public—in the North for parades and public celebrations of “Emancipation Day” and other special holidays (Woodson 1929: 203–4) and in the South for funeral processions even in places where other public assemblages of African Americans were prohibited (Raper 1968 [1936]: 380–81). Election to lodge offices was highly valued among people who, in many places, could not vote or run for public office. “The Negro esteems a prominent official place in his lodge a greater honor than a position of trust in his work,” explained Odum (1910: 98–99). “Managed by members of his own race, the lodge offers the Negro a place wherein to identify his interests with those of his own people.” The sheer social solidarity and extravagant ritualism of the lodges could also be magical, “allowing a people whose lives are spent in menial tasks and servile roles to inhabit a world where for a day they are knights and nobles, kings and courtiers” (Palmer 1944: 210). The “rural Black Belt Negro,” summed up ethnographer Arthur Raper (1968 [1936]: 381), “knowing that his white acquaintances consider him of little consequence, finds the ritual, mysteries, and secrets of the lodge which meets behind locked doors on the second floor a welcome escape. . . . Here he can cast a vote; aye, here he can be sheriff and juror and judge and governor and president!”

Of course there were economic benefits as well. Even beyond the sheer provision of social insurance payments at the death or illness of a worker, fraternal orders offered economic opportunities. In times and places where blacks had few chances to create well-capitalized business enterprises, these orders expressed and fostered entrepreneurial talents, paid wages to black employees, and allowed blacks to use dues payments to amass considerable institutional capital. As of the early 1920s, more than 60 nationally visible “secret and fraternal organizations” had about 2.2 million members and owned \$20 million worth of property, including grand headquarters build-

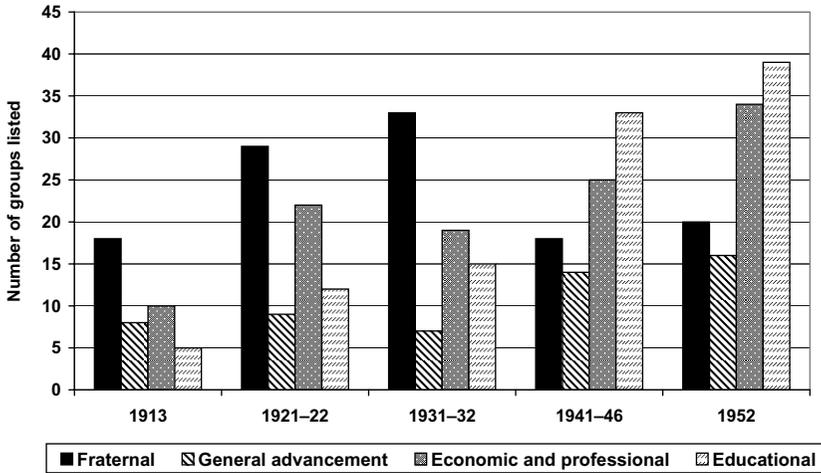


Figure 9 Numbers of national African American associations, by type, listed in the *Negro Year Book* from 1913 to 1952

Sources: Work 1913: 268–79, 1921–22: 410–17, 1931–32: 521–25, 1941–46: 473–75, 1952: 275–77.

ings, banks, and hospitals and social welfare institutions in places ranging from Philadelphia, Indianapolis, and Chicago to Atlanta, New Orleans, and Hot Springs, Arkansas (Work 1921–22: 414; see also the discussion in Beito 2000: chap. 10). What is more, historian Carter G. Woodson (1929: 202) celebrated black fraternal orders as one of the wellsprings of black-owned insurance companies, which he argued became “more prosperous than any other large enterprises among Negroes” (see also Meier 1963: 142–43).

In his remarkable *Negro Year Book*, compiled periodically between the 1910s and the early 1950s, Tuskegee Institute sociologist Monroe Work tallied nationally prominent African American voluntary associations of various sorts. As Figure 9 reveals, as late as the early 1930s, fraternal federations were by Work’s tallies the dominant type of nationally visible black association. Soon, however, U.S. fraternal federations in general faced serious stresses. From the mid-1920s, for-profit insurance companies often crowded (or bought) out fraternal groups specializing in the provision of insurance benefits—and black fraternal orders suffered after both black- and white-run insurance companies started marketing policies to African Americans (Frazier 1957a: 92; McMillen 1989: 183; Palmer 1944: 211; Spear 1967: 108). The Great Depression hammered fraternal groups across the board, and at that point black fraternal groups were probably more vulnerable than surviving

white groups, because black fraternalists had smaller lodges and poorer members. If we had proper statistics, it might be possible to document that distinctive black fraternal federations were less likely than major white groups and smaller ethnic-identified white fraternal federations to survive the Great Depression and recover during and after World War II.

Nevertheless, even after the Great Depression and massive southern out-migration wreaked havoc with the finances of dues-dependent groups, causing many black fraternal federations to falter and fail, many long-standing parallel and distinctive African American fraternal federations continued to be listed by Work. The winnowed ranks of African American fraternal groups remained civically critical even as their economic functions waned—and the Improved Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks of the World actually flourished, leading the way toward greater emphasis on politics and social activism (Dickerson 1981: chap. 14; Frazier 1957a: 92–94; Mason 1952). In the post-World War II era, fraternal groups weighed more prominently in the universe of all nationally visible black organizations than they did in the universe of all nationally visible white organizations (compare Work 1952 to Fox 1952). As late as the mid-1970s, fraternal organizations remained a significant presence among all national black associations (see Yearwood 1978: 433, Table 2).

Twentieth-century U.S. fraternalism tended to shift away from the provision of mutual economic aid and insurance benefits toward greater stress on community service and political involvements. World Wars I and II offered opportunities for community and national service (Skocpol et al. 2001). Some fraternal federations became involved in legislative lobbying as U.S. federal government functions grew. And men could build political careers and assemble electoral followings by using established fraternal networks (for more details and references, see Skocpol 2003: chap. 3). Among whites, the Masons, the Elks, the Loyal Order of Moose, the Fraternal Order of Eagles, and the (Irish-American) Ancient Order of Hibernians all exemplified in various ways shifts toward civic and political involvements.

Until the 1960s, of course, African Americans faced enormous barriers to full participation in U.S. electoral politics. Leading African American fraternal groups nevertheless had long traditions of involvement in public affairs and agitation for black rights.²² Fraternalists defended their right to organize and took advantage of public celebrations to assert racial pride and demand dignified treatment for African Americans. Virtually all black fra-

ternal groups promoted public education and provided scholarship funds to worthy young people. They contributed to and supported the activities of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People; and where blacks could vote, fraternal groups helped politicians attract support. For many years prior to the 1930s, black Elks participated actively in Republican Party politics (Dickerson 1981: 372–82). And to give another kind of example more typical of cities, where the Democrats were strong, the official program of the 1926 national meeting of the Grand United Order of Odd Fellows held in Baltimore included an advertisement placed by a lodge brother running for office, probably in Maryland: “Vote for John L. Myers, Your Friend Democratic Candidate State Senate from the Sixth District” (Grand United Order of Odd Fellows 1926). The advertisement went on to indicate that Myers was a member of the Prince Hall Masons and the Eastern Star as well as the black Odd Fellows.

As civil rights became a national U.S. struggle, African Americans were empowered by their special internationalist traditions. As students of the modern black civil rights struggles have pointed out (cf. McAdam 1982; Layton 2000), when the United States sought to appeal to new nations emerging from colonialism while championing “freedom” versus Nazi and Communist “tyranny,” African Americans took advantage of the new international ideological climate to press their own case for full civil rights at home. A small but significant part of what made it possible for them to do this so effectively was the internationalist legacy of black fraternalism, for African American fraternal groups had always had more of a transnational orientation than most white fraternal groups. White U.S. fraternal groups might reach into English Canada and to pockets of Americans resident abroad; yet leading black groups got their starts through ties to England, and many black groups included organized brothers and sisters not just at the Canadian end points of the pre–Civil War Underground Railroad, but also in the African nation of Liberia as well as in the Bahamas, Bermuda, the West Indies, and Central America. The very names of many parallel and distinctive African American fraternal orders signified internationalism. Thus, when groups such as the Improved Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks *of the World* undertook to champion U.S. black civil rights, they could readily make the case that this cause was part of a universal mission that their organization already embodied both ideologically and through transnational attendance at regular annual meetings. To gain critical leverage against white racism and build as

much black solidarity as possible, African American fraternalists had always been internationalists. They became human rights universalists, as it were, before their time.

In the final analysis, however, African Americans after 1950 were most effectively empowered by the legacies of the local, state, and national association building that went before—that is, by *federated* patterns of organizing whose lineaments we have documented in this article. Especially in the difficult decades between the official end of slavery and the breakthroughs of the modern civil rights movement after 1954, fraternal federations pulled blacks together across the North/South divide.

Because fraternal federations held regular conventions in various major cities around the nation—including in emerging magnets of northward migration, such as Chicago, Cleveland, Detroit, Indianapolis, Milwaukee, and St. Paul—they spread messages of opportunity that helped to encourage and channel migration out of the economically stressed and politically unfree rural South.²³ Federations helped black men and women retain institutionalized ties as they moved from rural to urban areas and from one section of the nation to another. For members in good standing of fraternal federations with broad organizational reach, mutual aid and insurance were available as people traveled and visited back and forth across communities and regions. And of course, federated orders enabled African Americans all over the United States to shift resources as necessary to meet emergency social needs and support a multitude of national and subnational struggles to expand the rights of black citizens.

The modern civil rights movement, it is well to remember, expressed remarkable solidarity among African Americans across lines of class, gender, and residential location, enabling blacks to fashion broad appeals to fellow Americans while taking on the repressive segregationist order, pressing until the overt legal supports of that regime gave way. Scholars have long appreciated the contribution of black religious institutions and organizational networks to the fashioning of the solidarities and capacities that made the modern civil rights movement possible (cf. McAdam 1982; Morris 1984). It is high time also to recognize the similar contributions of popularly rooted African American fraternalism, which “developed leadership and taught the masses to be amenable to this leadership” and created “opportunity for the development and exercise of political abilities which . . . [were] to a large extent excluded from the regular channels of expression” (Work 1918: 350).

Without the organizational and cultural achievements of the parallel and distinctive fraternal federations documented here, black Americans would have been much less well prepared than they were to insist that they, too, have “an integral part of the American society” (Palmer 1944: 212). Without vibrant fraternalism, African Americans would have been much less able—civically, economically, or politically—to take their places as full citizens of the United States of America.

Notes

- 1 This study does *not* include elite fraternities and sororities enrolling only college-educated African Americans. Such groups were also highly developed among blacks but are different from the fraternal groups recruiting men and women across class lines that are discussed here.
- 2 Exceptions to contemporary scholarly neglect of fraternal associations are Beito 2000; Carnes 1989; Clawson 1989; Fahey 1994, 1996, 2001a, 2001b, 2001c, 2001d, 2001e; and Walker 1985. Of these, only the book by Beito, the dissertation by Walker, and the books and articles by Fahey have much to say about African American groups. Fahey has done the most to synthesize previous findings and document a variety of African American fraternal organizations. In addition, recent local social histories that pay close attention to African American fraternal associations include Gerber 1976; Lane 1991; Rachleff 1989 [1984]; Trotter 1990; and above all Nick Salvatore’s (1996) remarkable biographical study *We All Got History: The Memory Books of Amos Webber*, which details Webber’s involvement in the post-Civil War fraternal groups of Worcester, Massachusetts, and offers extensive data and rich insights about the centrality of these groups to African American community life and democratic politics.
- 3 For background information on Monroe Work, see Richardson 1919: 86.
- 4 This measure of fraternal group prevalence does *not* include major U.S. military veterans’ associations or a number of other groups, such as the Grange, the Ku Klux Klan, and the Independent Order of Good Templars, that had strong fraternal features. If they were included, the fraternal proportions would be even higher.
- 5 Kuyk (1983) argues that African American fraternal orders were “derived” from African associations, but in support of this thesis she offers only loose analogies of very general ritual themes and forms of organizational behavior. Given the obvious prominence of parallel orders, such as the Prince Hall Masons, the Grand United Order of Odd Fellows, the colored Knights of Pythias, and the Improved Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks in the African American fraternal world, and given the strong resemblance of African American fraternal institutional forms to those of U.S. fraternal groups in general, we see little basis for Kuyk’s conclusions. What *was* clearly special to many African American groups—especially to the distinctive

orders—was their emphasis on biblical themes and ritual practices similar to those of African American Methodists and Baptists. Further discussion of ritualism appears in another article in this issue.

- 6 David Fahey (1996) tells the remarkable story of attempts at racial integration in the Independent Order of Good Templars, a major nineteenth-century temperance order.

Pennsylvania was a state with long-standing free black communities, and certain nativist orders were so busy opposing Catholics and immigrants that they were willing to include native-born black Protestants. Racial inclusion had to be defended against periodic challenges, however (cf. *Patriotic Order Sons of America 1897*: 27, 35, 61, 73).

English orders nominally practiced racial inclusion, and their American offshoots sometimes maintained the tradition. For example, in New Haven, Connecticut, in 1940, Robert Warner reported the existence of a flourishing Ancient Order of Foresters lodge. “The colored lodge in New Haven was founded by a white Englishman,” he (Warner 1940: 202) wrote, “and colored delegates are recognized at the annual high court.”

- 7 There were a few exceptions to the rule of white exclusiveness in the organizationally decentralized world of white Freemasonry. For an account of a New Jersey Masonic lodge that accepted African Americans and for indications of African American individuals admitted to a small number of other northern Masonic lodges, see Voorhis 1960.
- 8 There may have been other parallel orders, but they were much smaller and less prominent; we have little information about them. The Knights of Honor of the World and the Knights and Ladies of Honor of the World probably paralleled white groups with the same names except for the “of the World” part. The Improved Beneficial Order of Hawks had the same symbol on its ribbon badges as did the white Fraternal Order of Eagles. And the name of the Improved Benevolent and Protective Order of the Moose of the World certainly resembles Loyal Order of Moose, the name of a major white fraternal group.
- 9 As Albert Stevens (1899: 72) commented, “The motive of the members of the [British] army Lodge in initiating, passing, and raising these fifteen negroes may best be conjectured. If it was to secure the cooperation of negroes in the prospective struggle with the colonists, it failed as far as Prince Hall was concerned; for the latter sided with the colonists, shouldered a musket, and remained a useful and prominent citizen until his death in 1807.”
- 10 Prince Hall Masons had a national organizational center for some time, but eventually it lost power and virtually disappeared, leaving African American Masons, like their white counterparts, with sovereign state-level grand lodges. Prince Hall Masons also developed a full complement of higher-level Masonic degree lodges, including both York and Scottish rite lodges.
- 11 At least as far as we can tell. If accurate numbers were available, we might conclude that the Independent Order of Good Samaritans and Daughters of Samaria (dis-

- cussed below) was among the very largest African American associations. But we have not discovered reliable membership numbers or trends for this group.
- 12 When Theda Skocpol spoke by phone to the Imperial Potentate in early July 2002, he had just returned from trips to South Korea, Italy, and Alaska to visit members serving in the military.
 - 13 These mottoes appear on all American Woodmen membership badges. In her personal collection, Theda Skocpol has labeled local lodge badges for American Woodmen in Uriah, Alabama; Forest Home, Alabama; Kansas City, Missouri; Wharton, Texas; Oklahoma City; and Philadelphia.
 - 14 As for other evidence, the organization's arrival in Ohio is discussed in *Cleveland Advocate* 1918; the Kansas City group is portrayed in Figure 6.
 - 15 Aside from missing information, we have had to deal with the problem of groups with very similar names. For example, originally we thought that the Brothers and Sisters of Love and Charity might be a single, major distinctive fraternal group. But after a close reading of group documents, we decided that there were two separate federations, both of which became translocal in due course. As Table 1 indicates, the General Grand United Order of Brothers and Sisters of Love and Charity of the United States of America and Great Republic of Liberia was founded in New Orleans in 1882. Another group predated it, the National Grand United Order of Brothers and Sisters of Love and Charity in America, which we estimate to have been founded in 1872, when the first local lodge appeared in Elizabeth City, North Carolina. To make matters even more confusing, Theda Skocpol has in her personal collection a Washington, D.C., ribbon badge for the "G. G. A. O. of B. & S. of Love & Charity," which probably means the General Grand Ancient Order of Brothers and Sisters of Love and Charity. This might be part of one of the other two Love and Charity orders but probably is a separate group or a spin-off splinter group. We do not have enough information to list this third group in Table 1. In general, we have many snippets of information or ribbon badges for local or splinter groups whose characteristics are little known.
 - 16 According to Stevens 1899: 402–4, the Good Samaritan organization at that point "claims to have initiated 400,000 members" into "lodges found in nearly all States of the Union and in England." It is hard to know what to make of this figure, and we have no other post-1870s data. According to a 1938 report prepared by an interracial council in Georgia (Jones 1938: 18), an organization called the "Improved Order of Samaritans" had "500 adult lodges with 22,000 members and 300 juvenile lodges with 5,000 children." This might have been the same order as the Independent Order of Good Samaritans and Daughters of Samaria, or it might have been a schismatic breakaway group. For additional indications of "Samaritans" in rural Georgia, see Raper 1968 [1936]: 374; for similar indications about rural Virginia, see Ellison 1933: 8–10. In her personal collection, Theda Skocpol has Good Samaritan ribbon badges from Burlington, North Carolina; Johnson City, Tennessee; Winsboro, Louisiana; and the "Juvenile Council" of the state of Virginia.
 - 17 Some authors place the founding location for the Galilean Fishermen in Washing-

- ton, D.C., but we believe the preponderance of evidence suggests Baltimore. Also, Monroe Work (e.g., 1921–22: 416) listed the founding date as 1865, but we believe this is a typo that unfortunately has misled subsequent authors. In an earlier edition of the *Negro Year Book* (1913: 277) the founding information is listed correctly.
- 18 George Wright (1985: 133) reported that the UBF claimed 200,000 members by the 1890s, but his source is not clear, and this information conflicts with the usually reliable Albert Stevens (1899: 288). Monroe Work (1921–22: 416) reported 100,000 members at that point, but this may be a typo (the same line is repeated twice and clearly refers to the next entry, for the St. Joseph Aid Society).
- 19 These averages are calculated directly from the groups' annual reports for 1910.
- 20 Informally, white Lady Shriners have assembled at conventions, and wives of white Elks formed Emblem Clubs starting in 1926, building on experiences of working together during World War I. Other informal groups for women relatives of white male Elks also emerged. But no female group became an officially recognized national auxiliary to the white Elks, and none ever attained a large membership (Dickerson 1981: 455).
- 21 Women are prominent also among the many names and pictures appearing in *American Woodmen* 1948.
- 22 The article in this issue by Ariane Liazos and Marshall Ganz documents much of this activity, especially by the Prince Hall Masons and Shriners, the black Odd Fellows and Knights of Pythias, and the black Elks.
- 23 As James Grossman (1989: 92) explained, "Chicago attracted . . . visitors to fraternal conventions and religious conferences, usually attended by people chosen to represent their communities. . . . Fraternal societies and churches, vital institutions in the black South, played a connective role in the migration, first by drawing visitors north to see Chicago and then by providing migrants with links to institutions."

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