

Book Review: *American Fraternity Man*
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As sorority women, neither Mary nor I are experts on fraternity men. As a future and former consultant respectively, our first reaction to this book was, "Thank *goodness* we aren't fraternity men!" Our worlds and experiences are so different; we weren't sure our perspectives would do this review justice. But for all the differences - the social expectation, the dirty houses full of boys, the constant competition - there are plenty of similarities. Our chapters are families, and our organizations want our members to reach their full potential. So with this knowledge in mind, we learned about the world of fraternity consulting together; and for a few minutes, it sounded kind of fun.

American Fraternity Man, written by Nathan Holic, is a glimpse into the fraternity and sorority world in its truest form. It is the story of Charles Washington, a graduating senior, outgoing chapter president of Nu Kappa Epsilon fraternity, and picture perfect big man on campus. With a perfect girlfriend, not-so-supportive parents, and four years of successful fraternity life behind him, Charles accepts a dream position with his fraternity's national headquarters, solidifying his identity as the model fraternity man.

The book begins with Charles' last semester as an undergraduate at Edison University in the Gulf Coast of Florida. This beginning allows the reader to really know and understand who the main character is before he begins his journey on the road. He is seen demonstrating his strong leadership skills and his desire to leave a lasting legacy in the chapter. After stumbling through a mostly successful senior send-off ceremony, his last responsibility to the chapter, he is left feeling like a failure in his father's eyes. Charles is determined to make things right and be the man he was meant to be. He knows that becoming an Educational Consultant for his fraternity will give him that opportunity, and he begins his first real job feeling both nervous and hopeful.

The reader is given a passenger seat view from Charles' Explorer as he journeys cross country and experiences life on the road. Holic's ability to bring his character to life and bring the reader inside his head is incredible, which allows you to understand what he's feeling, thinking, and experiencing at every turn. His first few chapter visits, Charles tries to do everything the right way. Armed with a personal goal sheet, manuals, and policies, he maintains his professionalism, gives perfect scripted answers, and is quickly labeled a "fun nazi." A conversation with a young alumnus, however, leads him to take a more laid back, relatable approach. Though it seems to yield some positive results, he quickly finds his goals slipping away, his communication with loved ones inconsistent, and his professionalism questionable. Charles suddenly cannot remember who he is supposed to be or what the "right" approach looks like. The line between undergraduate fraternity man and Educational Consultant becomes blurry, and the lines defining Charles Washington are unrecognizable. We follow Charles as he navigates this confusing journey, still hoping to "change the culture" and become a successful man in his father's eyes.

American Fraternity Man catches and maintains the reader's interest instantly. Nathan Holic uses a creative voice to create the character of Charles Washington. He is honest in his first impressions and reactions. He is genuine in his never-ending, ever-changing thought process. He is funny. He is real. It is not only the main character, though, whose authenticity keeps you hooked. Holic's depiction of fraternity and sorority life, while not a full picture, is very genuine. The struggles our students face, the communication styles that are most effective, the general culture and attitude of 'millennial' students - Holic shows you all of this through

the eyes of Washington and his interactions with a handful of college campuses, students, and professionals around the country.

The most realistic struggle the book presents about fraternity/sorority membership is the number of players involved in this complex system, and how to satisfy all of their varying agendas from the national organization to alumni, to fraternity/sorority advisors to the actual members. Charles experiences this himself on a last minute outing with alumni who are more interested in upcoming rush tactics than NKE's newest national program. Charles finally breaks down about his struggles to the campus-based professional at Bowling Green State University, where he outlines this tug-of-war between stakeholders our undergraduate members feel:

I'm telling him that I thought everything would be textbook-pretty, but it took me too long to realize that no matter the "mission," everyone's got an agenda. And too often they clash. The students have a reason for joining a fraternity... But then here comes the National Fraternity, and we say: No, there's only one thing you can be, and that's what we want fraternity to be... and then you throw in the alumni, and now there's another 80 years' worth of ideas of what they want the fraternity chapters to be. "And then, shit," I say, "then there's you" (Holic, 339.)

Whether the motivations are financial, publicity-driven, based on objectives, new policies or programs, or simply someone's opinion on best practices, fraternal organizations have layers of well-intentioned parties interested in their actions before they can even begin to think about basic chapter operations. This challenge is real for the students, and especially so for the professionals working with them. This novel reminds us how many ways our students are being pulled and how important it is for us to be intentional in our approach with them.

This book is a worthwhile read for anyone who works with fraternity and sorority members, no matter one's capacity. Incoming consultants will be given a preview into the world they are about to experience. They will see the ups, downs, less-than-ideal sleeping accommodations, and hectic schedules of consultant life. Former consultants will read the book with a "thank-God-it-is-not-me" appreciation for the experience they hold so close to their hearts while simultaneously wishing to do it all over again. Fraternity and sorority advisors will experience no surprises, only an affirmation that their jobs are challenging and rewarding, and a little bit different all across the country. Headquarters staff will be reminded of what is happening on the ground and of the juggling act our undergraduate students are doing. And all of us will feel reenergized to make a difference in the system we care so much about.

This book is hard to put down because it is entertaining and it is real. Readers will grow to love the characters, and find themselves pulling for Charles' success by the end. It is a reminder of the complexities of this system, but most importantly a reminder that, at the core, relationships and influence are the most important and most effective tools we have when developing students. *American Fraternity Man* is everything you love and hate about fraternity life. It is a great story for anyone who knows what it is like to be miserable, challenged, and still love their job.

Reference

Holic, N. (2013). *American fraternity man*. Beating Windward Press LLC.