

Fraternity banned, students expelled from University of Oklahoma after racist video appears online

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The University of Oklahoma chapter of the Sigma Alpha Epsilon (SAE) fraternity was disbanded this weekend after a video emerged online showing members chanting racially-charged sing-along songs at what was apparently a fraternity function.

The video was posted online by the campus activist group Unheard and features SAE members referring to African Americans as “n__ers” and making allusions to lynchings.

The fraternity was evicted from campus grounds on Monday, with University President David Boren calling for an investigation into the club’s membership and the “ringleaders” of the incident. Boren threatened to expel anyone found to have participated in the chant.

“We vow that we will be an example to the entire country of how to deal with this issue,” Boren declared. “There must be zero tolerance for racism everywhere in our nation.”

Speaking of the decision to ban the fraternity, White House press secretary Josh Earnest called the university’s response “an appropriate step.”

On Tuesday, Boren announced that two students had been expelled, citing their “leadership role in leading a racist and exclusionary chant which has created a hostile educational environment for others.”

After revoking the local chapter’s charter at the University of Oklahoma and suspending its members, SAE published a statement on its national web site apologizing “for the unacceptable and racist behavior of the individuals in the video,” and declaring that “we are disgusted that any member would act in such a way.”

Hip hop artist Waka Flocka Flame denounced the fraternity and said he had canceled plans to perform at

the university. Students assembled outside the fraternity house to protest the video in the days after its release.

The fraternity, which has historical ties to the antebellum South, has been involved in a rash of incidents of a reactionary character. Founded in 1856 at the University of Alabama, SAE boasts on its web site that of the group’s 400 original members, “369 went to war for the Confederate States and seven for the Union Army.”

Today, with more than 200,000 living alumni and 15,000 active members, the fraternity has had at least 130 chapters written up for incidents that violate “health and safety” standards at campuses since 2010, according to the fraternity’s web site. A number of deaths that occurred at SAE chapters from 2006 to 2013 prompted *Bloomberg News* to call the organization the “deadliest frat” in America.

In 2006, a student at the University of Memphis quit the fraternity after alleging that he had been harassed for dating an African American woman. At Washington University in St. Louis, fraternity members were seen singing racist chants to black students. Valdosta State University’s chapter was denounced for flying a Confederate flag in its yard.

The fraternity includes among its alumni prominent figures in both the Democratic and Republican parties as well as sports, education and business figures. Current and formerly serving US politicians belonging to the fraternity include the former Democratic chairman of the Senate Finance Committee and current US ambassador to China Max Baucus, former Republican senator from South Carolina and current president of the right-wing Heritage Foundation think tank Jim DeMint, and former Republican governor of

New Mexico and Libertarian Party presidential candidate Gary Johnson.

Business figures include Ross Perot, Jr., head of Perot Systems and son of the former presidential candidate, and billionaire financier T. Boone Pickens.

The leaked video clearly had a racist content and should be taken as a warning of a certain growth of right-wing forces on college campuses, encouraged by US militarism and the build-up of the police powers of the state. At the same time, Oklahoma University President Boren appeared to be driven in his response by the implications of the scandal for the university's standing and by the potential for a loss of financial support from alumni and patrons.

Boren, the former Democratic governor of Oklahoma and long-time US senator, including an extended tenure as chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee, rushed to expel the two SAE members without allowing them any opportunity to defend themselves. His summary actions set a chilling precedent that may violate constitutionally-protected free speech rights and could be used to suppress political opposition on the left.



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