

Jay Reed interviewing Gai Allen clip 2

Topic: Greek Life

[Gai Allen describing step shows.]

Gai Allen: Back then—and they step differently now—but all of the fraternities and sororities; it's not dancing. Back then it was sort of singing and you sort of rhythmically—and I'm including all the sororities and fraternities—but there's sort of a rhythmic movement and you may chant or sing a song about your fraternity or sorority and each sorority and fraternity they may do it a little differently. For example, there's a fraternity, Omega Psi Phi, they step and I don't if you've seen the Zulus from West Africa—I mean from South Africa, the way they move? The movement is similar to that movement. There's a fraternity, Kappa Alpha Psi, they use canes and so they sort of with their feet and the movement of the canes and the tapping of the canes, there's a rhythm to it.

Back then, the sororities did not move in a way that was similar to the men, we pretty much sang and we sang songs about Alpha Kappa Alpha. But some of our movements, you know, were clapping with the feet and the hands, and clapping rhythmically. But the women in our sorority at that time, some of us came out of the African American Church and many of us could sing. Once my brother came by one of our rehearsals he'd say "Man, you all sound like a gospel choir!" because the harmonies were so tight. And even now when we get together and we sing some of the songs that we used to sing, we got together a few years ago—it was for the fortieth anniversary of the chapter—and we sang for the sorority sisters who are currently, who were on the campus at that time a few years back, and they were somewhat amazed that we could sing that way and just get together and sing and rehearse, without having rehearsed, and just have that type of harmony. But a lot of us grew up singing so we can still do that. And we just harmonized, just like you would hear in a choir because we can just do it, just by ear.