The Supposed Universal Hospitality of Lodges

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The implication of a number of the articles is that all blue or subordinate lodges giving the first three degrees have the welcome sign out for other members. That simply isn't true.

In the 1950s and 1960s, by way of example, St Andrew's Lodge in Boston had a cultivated reputation of being only visited by invitation and of keeping others outside for examination all during the meeting. All members wore evening dress and anyone joining was expected to go through the chairs. More recently, this Brahmin Yankee approach has been ironically followed by ethnic lodges: as various minorities made their way into Masonry and came to dominate one or another lodge, the entire line of officers would become Greek or Italian or whatever and the food and other incidentals would take on such a definitely ethnic cast that for all practical purposes outsiders would feel unwanted.

The exclusion of blacks has already been discussed, but there have always been blacks who "passed" and joined but who would have been dropped had their antecedents but known -- or blacks like those in the one New Jersey regular lodge that has always been made up of blacks who simply could not visit regular lodges in most other jurisdictions.

These ethnic and religious exclusions follow into the so-called higher degrees. The Scottish Rite has been the one way that Jews could approach Shrine membership since if they started in the York Rite by taking the Royal Arch and Council degrees they would be blocked by exclusion from the Commandery.

Another exclusion is caused as the lodges get older and older members and become jealous of sharing their endowment income with new members. Some lodges have enough investment income to provide free meals and other benefits to existing members, and in some cases this has led to a lack of enthusiasm about new people.

An objective sociological picture is of a very complicated social hierarchy where origins determine opportunities for office (i.e. the reluctance to have too many Greeks or Jews in the line of a grand lodge and proceeding towards the grand mastership) and where many lodges are much more ethnic than outsiders could dream. This is now complicated by the rather late (after all, this is 1992) realisation
that tax privileges may be taken away because of the exclusion of blacks and women. Just how honest the rush to admit blacks is, and how much it is caused by advice that onerous taxes are the alternative, will be the subject of scholarly research in times to come.

The biggest conundrum is how unity is going to be achieved if a baker’s dozen of grand lodges in the South continue to refuse admission to blacks and to Prince Hall members who are welcome in other grand lodges. This split will extend through the collateral bodies such as High Twelve, Grotto, Tall Cedars. et al -- and is already appearing.

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