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Race, Class, and Girlhood  
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Artist Statement for *1840*

On June 16, 1840 Catherine Brewer became the first woman in America to receive a bachelor's degree. She graduated from Wesleyan College in Georgia, and was the fruit of decades of labor from the First Wave Feminist Movement. Twenty-seven years later, the first sorority, Pi Beta Phi, was established. Since the late 1970s, women enrolled in American colleges have outnumbered men, and the trend has been growing ever since. In 2017, the imagery representing women in college is a far cry from the elite, intelligent, independent stereotypes that were attached to educated women in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

For a year and a half, I have been investigating sorority recruitment videos and their impact on prejudices against girls and women who chose to go to college and join a sorority. A sorority recruitment video is a commercial-like film that the group publishes with the intention of getting girls to want to join that particular sorority. The results are similar to music videos, "chick flicks", and vacation commercials. Almost all the videos, and there are hundreds, are three-minute montages of young women having the time of their lives set to upbeat and catchy pop music. Almost all the women are skinny, white, and blonde. This is easy to discern, because for about forty percent of the video, they are in bikinis.

With my video, *1840*, I want to point out the homogeneity of the popular imagery that is used to represent young women who go to college. I believe sorority girls can be intelligent, autonomous, talented, and motivated people. But I also believe the videos they publish, which are usually made by a professional videographer or a boy at the college who is a Media major,

perpetuate negative stereotypes about these women. These stereotypes were in part established by *Legally Blonde*, *The House Bunny*, *Sydney White*, and fraternities across the country that treat their female counterparts like objects. Recruitment videos play into that vapid, depthless, materialistic narrative and make the college experience for women seem like one giant party full of white people.

I chose the format of a video because I wanted to work directly with found footage from the recruitment videos. In editing together the imagery that is the same across the collaged film, I hope to show how limited these women's' experiences seem when the same tropes are used over and over again. If we based our knowledge of women in college solely off of these videos, we would never know that the girls seriously studied or applied themselves to their chosen field. The medium exists in the moving image; it allows for clearer representations of dancing and jumping into swimming pools.

I imagine that if a little girl of color were to watch these videos, she would feel excluded from the American college experience, unwelcome even. According to the videos, no latinx girls go to college, and only the skinny black girls are allowed in sororities. Representation is important, and as of right now, the popular imagery representing women in college falls short for a majority of the country.

Link to video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XDfavVoUaiQ>