

Disappointment Shown

To the Editor of **The Ring-tum Phi**:

This week the Student Association for Black Unity of W&L is presenting its first annual Black Culture Week. This series of events has been advertised through the **Ring-tum Phi**, WLUR, the school calendar, posters, flyers, and many, many other sources.

The point of this letter is this: the white students of W&L are, in my opinion, taking a negative attitude to Black Culture Week. For the last few days I have heard or heard of student statements such as "what are these **savages** doing putting up this Black s . . . **A**" or "why are these Blacks having a Black Culture Week that doesn't relate to me." It has been stated over and over again that the 'week' serves to help the Black students to maintain their racial identity (which W&L doesn't do much for) and to serve as a means of **educating the white students and community of W&L as to what Blacks and Black culture is all about**. It is one way of answering the proverbial white statement 'I can't understand Blacks. What do they want?'

O.K. We have the week. Do the students respond? No! Monday night, Prof. Colon spoke at Lee Chapel to an audience made up of W&L faculty and administrators, people from Lexington, some girls from some school, and **VERY FEW W&L STUDENTS**. For a student body that can pack Lee Chapel to hear some poems, listen to political talk, and hear a good amateur play piano—even when they are broadcasted on WLUR—this is stupid. It is ridiculous. Contact was during

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the U.S. tried to ignore China which contains one out of every four people in the world.)

My hope is that the words I express now become false before Black Culture Week is over. In fact, I challenge the White students of W&L to make a fool out of me in regards to this letter. I don't like to be made a fool of; however I have an ill feeling that I won't be fooled.

Poor, sick, sad students.

Robert L. Ford '74

"Letting Go"

BY LEX McMILLAN

I read Bob Ford's letter in this paper last week with a great mixture of emotions. He raised some very important questions concerning the racial situation at Washington and Lee which I feel should be carefully scrutinized. However, there are no easy answers to the questions. The solution of the racial tension which is so undeniably present here will not be easily found. There is no easy solution; no one action by one group will end the misunderstanding and ill-feelings which exist between the Blacks and Whites at W&L.

Though Mr. Ford's letter was primarily concerned with the unenthusiastic response by the majority of students to the First Annual Black Culture Week, in a larger sense his letter was a revealing reflection of the racial situation at Washington and Lee.

He touches on a variety of responses to the 'week' which reflect the variety of responses to the Blacks at W&L. His first example is of a racist response. It is a waste of time to try and enlighten this sort of individual. The malevolence and hate which consumes the racist will be his own reward. As he sows, so shall he reap.

It is undeniable that there are racists at W&L. I don't know if we have more than our fair share but it is possible that a perverted understanding of our heritage and traditions serves to attract racists. This is conjecture based on rather unscientific methodology. The point is that we do have racists and there is very little you can do with a firmly convinced racist. They resist enlightenment with considerable tenacity. (Hate is a very powerful force.)

Thus I will not concern myself with this minority (hopefully) of students. Rather I will address myself to the students whose opinions fall somewhere between racism and color-blindness. That is, the majority of students; the mildly antagonistic, the indifferent and the bleeding-hearts. Undoubtedly this is an over simplification, but it represents a spectrum of racial attitudes, which is the most realistic way to view the situation.

Thus, just as I had ambivalent feelings about Mr. Ford's letter, I would say that most of W&L's White students' racial opinions are characterized by ambivalence. In some cases the ambivalence turns into indifference. Most White students have no real antagonism for the Black students, just as most have no real dedication to racial harmony and understanding. Thus you get indifference. I would say that the indifference is an outgrowth of ambivalence and the ambivalence a result of uncertainty as to what Blacks want.

Now obviously the way to discover what Blacks want is to participate in such activities as were offered by the Black Culture Week. So why the poor response to this "week"? I would say that in a sense it was too late. Not irretrievably late but late enough to receive an indifferent response. But why indifference?

The Black Movement is old enough to have acquired a rather substantial history. In the course of this history the 'movement' has gone through several stages. At some

point in the struggle Whites began to see the very real and justifiable complaints of American Blacks. Thus, the Whites of America (not all of them by any means) began to gravitate toward the Blacks. Communication and understanding were hailed as means to solve the racial problem. Integration began with the idea of equality in terms of social, economic and political rights and opportunities.

The Whites who embraced integration eventually confronted a very real shock and that is the apparent desire of some Blacks to maintain a cultural separatism. Thus many Whites have experienced a certain rejection which is hard to cope with. They figured they'd just be human to Blacks; treat them like you'd treat anyone else. Then the shocking realization comes that you can't treat them like anyone else. It is a sort of culture shock. Mr. Ford's use of the concepts of "Racial identity" and "Black Culture" underline this separatism which has caused a progression in once concerned Whites from ambivalence to indifference.

It seems that many whites have come to feel that whatever it is that the Blacks want is utterly alien to American culture. In other words, the feeling has arisen that Blacks want to maintain a cultural separateness to avoid becoming part of
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Letters T

The Motivation of Honor

To the Editor of the **Ring-tum Phi**:

Mr. Small's column in the March first edition of this paper proposed that the key to salvaging Washington and Lee's Honor System is a greater willingness on the part of students to police other students. Although such action would reduce the amount of "lying, stealing and cheating" I question whether such a system could correctly be termed an "honor system". As Immanuel Kant wrote in the 18th century, "Can he be called virtuous, can he be called honest, who would like to yield to his favorite vices if only he were not frightened by future punishment?"

Robert P. Beakley '72L

Advertisement Criticized

To the Editor, of the **Ring-tum Phi**:

I find the juxtaposition simply too much this week. Article about the Honor System in the front page lead position. Candidates for student offices "out-Honor-Systeming" each other all over page two. The city courts, meanwhile, called in to handle the cases of students caught stealing because the Honor System won't, or can't.

And what do we see, again, in the **Ring-tum Phi**? Each Wednesday since at least February 2, the **Ring-tum Phi** has printed an advertisement offering (at only \$6) a "scholarship information service." Among the services to which a paid-up member is entitled: "Reference service. Drafts term papers, essays, book reports, theses, etc." Five times that ad has appeared, without apparent objection by the **Ring-**

Solution for Racial Situation Suggested

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the hodge-podge of American society. Ostensibly they fear being dominated by the White culture. This is a reasonable fear but it is unlikely that a minority as large and as self-aware as American Blacks could be eclipsed by the so-called dominant White culture.

I would rather not plunge into the argument surrounding the above issue. The point is that as long as many Whites at W&L encounter hostility from Blacks it is unlikely that any interest in "what Blacks want" will arise. If White students feel threatened and see separatism in the activity of the Blacks, it is unlikely that any barriers will be broken down and any understanding achieved.

Now the obvious response to this is that the Blacks do not feel hostile nor remain separate by choice but rather as a reaction to hostility and separatism on the part of the Whites. And thus we get to a chicken and

egg question as far as the W&L community is concerned, with good reason to believe that the Whites instigated the cycle.

Thus, it becomes imperative for the cycle to be broken because it is endless. How to break out? The answer is not new and it is the point of this column. Obviously human charity is the only solution. This will take courageous action. It will require White students to offer themselves while fearing rejection and Black students to accept while fearing insincerity and ulterior motives. In other words, a concerted effort at mutual trust. This can not possibly be easy, but it is imperative.

This is an urgent call for understanding. The Blacks at W&L must know that all White students don't resent them, don't hate them, and don't desire to see them suppressed. Most are indifferent and though better than hate, it will not do. What is required is not a commitment to social crusading. Racial harmony will not be the result of reaching out for organization but of personal action.

It has been a long battle. It might never end. There are no winners. Surely we are weary. Cannot we now put down the hateful swords and simply begin to live together?

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