

"It's sick, but it's true."

In general, all colleges face some form of racial unbalance and tension. Usually the smaller the college, the larger the issue of racial relations is if there are minorities on campus. Unfortunately, Washington and Lee happens to be one of the colleges which has problems in race relations, particularly among blacks and whites.

The majority of these difficulties in racial harmony entail the social aspects of the campus, however, there are many that pertain to the academics and extra-curricular activities. Many blacks feel that relations with whites in these three areas are the most aggravating.

William Rhinehart, a junior politics major, has felt much of this aggravation since his freshman year and continues to face the problem. He came to Washington and Lee looking for a good, small liberal arts college. He found that, and more. "It was like coming from open minds to closed ones," he said. "I found that a lot of whites had problems dealing with black people." With the help of friends and moving out of the dorms, Rhinehart learned to adapt and to confront what he calls "racism." "People make you feel inferior sometimes because of your color and you feel you have to prove yourself" he said, and felt this is one reason why black freshmen don't do too well in the first semester. "Some whites think that all blacks are the same... they think they all act the same like they do on TV." He points out that black students are more diverse geographically than whites here.

Senior Bryan Johnson felt that his freshman years changed his perception of the college. Coming from a predominantly white neighborhood and prep school, Johnson says he looked at people as individuals before coming here. Yet, when he consistently saw and heard himself referred to as a certain race and became a "black" student, not a student, "I started treating them the same way," he said. Consequently, he felt that he had to prove himself as a student and as a black man.

Both students' undesired need to prove themselves still occurs in the form of stereotypes of blacks by whites. Many agree that one of the basic reasons they exist on campus is because many white have never dealt with blacks as equals, and generalizations like stereotypes help some to compensate or understand. Senior head dormitory counselor Bob Tomaso expressed, "I think there is a good number of whites here who never had to deal with blacks or when they did they [blacks] were in an inferior position like a maid or butler." He explains his un-

derstanding of blacks in that his best friend, when he was quite younger, was black. Psychologist James Worth commented that the lack of awareness on whites' part causes an awkwardness around blacks. In turn, this leads to an inadvertent discrimination. This inadvertent discrimination increases the lack of communication among both races for various reasons.

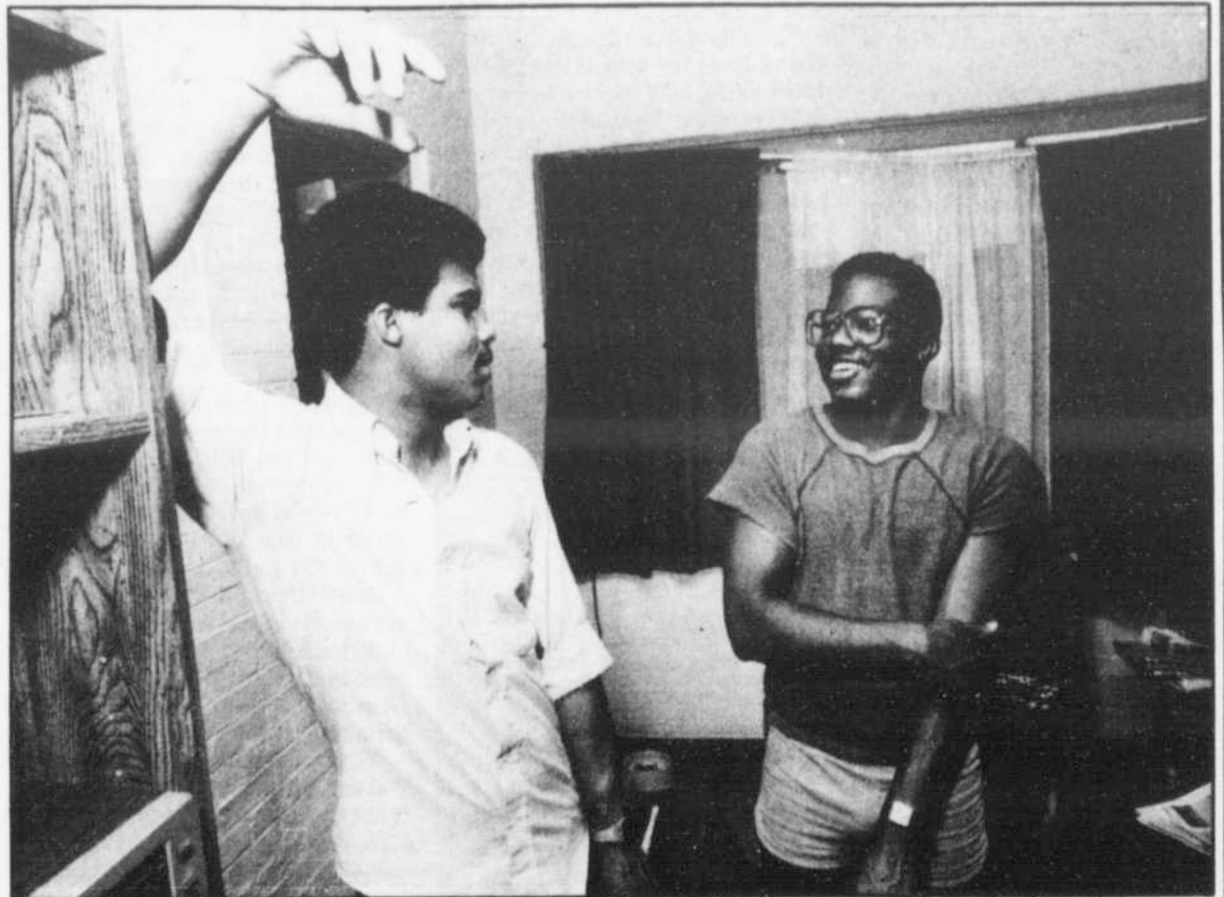
Beyond stereotypes and lack of exposure to blacks as equals, some attitudes of the student body and campus organizations fail to help in race relations. Several of those interviewed agreed that student apathy or indifference inhibits black and white relations. As senior Wesley Payne stated, "A lot of people look at it [race relations, black problems] and say 'It's not my problem, why should I rock the boat?'" Sociology professor Ken White explained, "It's hard for many to understand blacks and their problems here because it's not critical to their own existence, and no matter how much sympathy is generated, there is no vested interest." Sophomore Glen Lemmon explained the apathy as follows: "Unfortunately, there is a faceless white majority. . . they come to school, probably join a fraternity, they go to classes, select a major, they don't join any clubs, the fraternity is the only tie they have, and that isn't very strong to them, other than when they're drunk on Friday and Saturday night. The only thing they're looking for is a good GPA, a diploma and a recommendation for the [graduate] school or job of their choice. It's sick, but it's true." Associate Dean Pam Simpson commented, "The problem with a lot of white students is that they're treating everyone equal, and yet, in fact, they are ignoring black students and they [white students] think if you're ignoring them, you're not hurting them." She stated further that white students are unaware of how black students perceive themselves being ignored. That is, they also see their concerns and problems being ignored, too. Journalism professor Robert deMaria felt there is more pressure to excel and less idealism today than when he was going to school. "There seems to be more cynicism, but I can't blame the parents because they're from my generation, and I really can't blame the students. . . but I think the problem needs to be solved at home."

In regards to organizations, Johnson said that difficulties in race relations occur because most groups are devoid of blacks, which makes it harder for them to view black opinions. This generates a process of inadvertent discrimination which makes an organization seem rac-

ist to blacks. In turn, they don't join the group and its perception of blacks stays low or at zero. As a result, the entire process starts over because once again the organization has no experience with black students and seems racist to them. Many view this as the key reason why some blacks can't or don't join fraternities. Black students soon develop a hatred or indifference to fraternities or clubs. "It's like hitting your head against a brick wall. . . most blacks don't want to have to face discrimination just to be apart of something... the price for getting involved is some form of harassment." A hatred or animosity also develops in the form best described as "if they don't want to associate with our kind, why should we bother with them." Lemmon felt that this is detrimental to both races because it only maintains a gap of communication. Often the black student feels indifferent to other blacks, who should act a certain way to him as a sign of his race. That is, if a black associates and adapts the same habits of whites, he is labeled an "uncle tom" or some other derogatory remark. Lemmon felt that his negative attitude arises when blacks refuse to assimilate, which is stressed at W&L. "Blacks want to maintain their identity and attend the university, but the emphasis on assimilation causes problems for them," he said.

The Student Association for Black Unity (SABU) has its share of problems, too. Designed as a support group and social gathering for black students, SABU faces problems of communication with the W&L community, social atmosphere and what Financial Aid/Minority Affairs Director John DeCourcy calls "...too many generals and not enough soldiers." Members admit their faults in leadership and organization, but according to Rhinehart, "When we want to try something that requires a group effort, we usually put aside our personal problems." SABU has constantly been accused of acting as a separatist group, "Because we don't intermingle in the mainstream of campus life; we only deal with the academic sphere," quoted Payne who insists he's heard the argument at least a hundred times. He argued many blacks participate in intramural sports, hold open house at SABU, invite whites to parties, and their location compared to fraternities is much closer to the university.

There are other problems in race relations which concern the faculty and administration. One of the largest problems is the difficulty in minority recruiting. Everyone interviewed agreed that there is a definite need to recruit more blacks in order to alleviate some of the racial ten-



Seniors Wesley Payne and Terry McWhorter discuss a few views on race relations.

sion by making blacks feel less like a minority or like they are being ignored. Payne felt that more recruiting is good, but there needs to be some kind of cultural interest for blacks once they get here. The reason for the shortage of blacks is they many choose large ivy-league colleges or other colleges which have a more urban area, according to DeCourcy. A problem with the faculty is some form of inadvertent discrimination, which Simpson said comes from, "...the burden of cultural baggage that everyone has and growing up in a society like ours means that you have certain assumptions about people. They're probably unconscious, nevertheless, we carry them." Several black students interviewed have reported incidents of racism from some faculty members. An obvious problem mentioned was the lack of black faculty members. Many felt black faculty members would make blacks feel more comfortable with the administration and the faculty in general. Simpson explained the problem in acquiring blacks as professors as a general shortage and a high demand for them.

What are some solutions to these pressing issues? Among the various suggestions offered there were several which many agreed and disagreed on for numerous reasons.

One of them was coeducation next year. Some, like Tomaso, feel that coeducation will help the situation. Most believed that it will improve communication and reduce apathy. "It will make it a lot easier socially for blacks because attitudes and people are gonna change," said Tomaso. White believes that co-

education will bring more diversity and more responsiveness and interest in the classroom discussions. "I do realize that many [women] are coming from the same background as the guys, but those that rejected the school because it wasn't coed, and saw that as limiting, will bring a certain social and intellectual life to different aspects of the campus, which will, I hope, help the minority problems," he said. Worth feels that the opportunity of change itself gives blacks a chance to push for changes which will be enhanced by the fact of women on campus who will also be causing changes.

Others, however, didn't know or didn't think the addition of women will help the problem of race relations. Johnson said that the change will only put blacks lower on the "totem pole" and felt it will be harder and easier for black women than for black men. "Guys generally speak to women and the women won't have too much trouble socially, but it will be harder because they're black and leadership positions won't be all that open to them," he said.

An increase in minority recruiting was another popular solution offered basically because it would ease a lot of social tension and give blacks more reasons to participate.

According to deMaria, this would definitely help race relations. "We need more minority students who are willing to risk their reputation and put their heads on the chopping block," he stated. Tomaso agreed in his statement that, "All it takes is one or two guys to turn some heads and give white students a black-role model to respect." Some felt that SABU needs to participate more in campus activities in order to give whites better opinions of blacks' concern. Sophomore Mike Webb commented that, "Times have changed and SABU hasn't and they definitely need to in order to get something done." Several agreed with Webb's statement. "SABU also needs to be a stepping stone for black students to get into organizations," stated DeCourcy.

Other suggestions offered included increased publicity to minorities. Rhinehart advised increasing mailing to minority

students and teachers. Simpson said that the university should and may look into the Colgate Data Base, which can help the university select certain target groups for publicity and increase its potential for acquiring black faculty. "I think if the university brought in a qualified black, which I'm sure they wouldn't have any trouble finding, it would help a great deal, especially a guy who could teach in the C-school [Commerce School]."

A black student-control ad-hoc member (which means a non-voting member that gives advice) was acknowledged by Rhinehart and Tomaso as good way to ease black apprehension towards student organizations like the Executive Committee. Others felt that organizations, SABU, and blacks need to strive to find a common ground and stop being judgemental of the other. "I think it was very hypocritical of The Phi to run that editorial (in May 16th issue) telling everybody else they needed to work on the problems of blacks and whites at W&L when they have done very little to help, if not very little, they have hurt the situation!" stated Tomaso. Webb and Lemmon explained that organizations' structure and content usually changes sometimes and with that more opportunity for minorities may arise, and they need to be taken. They couldn't agree on who suffers the most when a minority is refused admission into a group, but both felt in the end, the school suffers.

Although there were more suggestions offered, the preceding appeared to be the most plausible. It is important to remember, however, that none of these solutions are new, they just haven't been discussed openly for the public. After all, the student body is what makes the university function and should be made aware of its problems. The purpose of this article was to simply discuss and present some issues and solutions to the problem of race relations on the campus. I feel they must be resolved soon before the university loses all of its appeal to minorities. How do I know it's losing its appeal? It lost its appeal to me and yes, I am a minority.

by Anthony Cornelius



Some members of SABU: (from left to right) Mark Sampson, Felton May, Kim Brunson, Walter Hopkins, Ron Wilhelm, Greg Kendricks, Derrick Freeman, Mike Stockley along with female friends, and (in front) Calvin Rankin and "Blue."

(Photos by David Sprunt)

Participants:

- William Rhinehart — a junior from California, Treasurer of SABU;
- Wesley Payne — senior from Baltimore, parliamentarian and house manager of SABU;
- Glen Lemmon — sophomore; concerned student
- Pam Simpson — Associate Dean of College, member of Minority Retention Program;
- Bob Tomaso — member of Executive Committee, head dormitory counselor;
- John DeCourcy — Student Financial Aid Director, Director of Minority Affairs;
- Mike Webb — secretary-elect of the Executive Committee, member of student recruiting committee;
- Bryan Johnson — senior, former vice-president of SABU;
- Robert deMaria — Associate Professor of Journalism;
- Ken White — Associate Professor of Sociology.