

'Roots' and rotation

Dear sir:

... I do not know exactly what "the SABU complaints against the university" are, but that a certain degree of racism exists on campus seems unquestionable. As a freshman last fall, I watched SABU protest from my dorm window and my fellow freshmen make such comments as "get the white sheets." Comments of the same nature—but not quite the same tone—have been heard more recently. All of this seems a bit ironical in view of the public reaction to the publication of and television presentation of Alex Haley's book, *Roots*. Both serve to give the nation's white population a better understanding of the black experience in America, though the book succeeds in this better than the television production.

Each night "Roots" was presented on television, the TV room in the student center was a bit more crowded. The book and the television production may leave an impact on members of the W&L community, as it will on people across the nation, but it seems that the impact at W&L could have been greater. More than once I have wondered how members of the black community felt as they watched or read *Roots*, and I was a bit surprised that no one—either black or white—tried to organize some informal discussions about *Roots*. In view of the recent problems here, such discussion could have proved beneficial. Organized by a qualified person (a faculty member, for example, or a group such as SABU), the discussion could have brought the experience of *Roots* from a cultural or social level to a personal one, and could have eventually come around to a discussion of the standing of blacks at W&L. Such discussions could provide a better understanding between the black and white communities, and could be quite beneficial for SABU in particular. Working through the student body in such a way could lead to a stronger voice and perhaps quicker changes, and certainly more lasting changes.

... The proposal to create a separate body to deal with honor violations is an interesting one

and has great merit, but there are two things about it that are disturbing. One is the matter of secrecy and the other concerns the way in which the proposed system is set up.

A few people I have talked to seem to feel that the honor system at W&L is at the hands of fraternities. How widespread this feeling is I am not certain, but at times this seems to have merit. I have heard of one case in the past where a student was found guilty in a trial before the E.C. and requested a public trial. Attempts were made to dissuade him from asking for a public trial and certain E.C. tactics hampered his attempts to formulate his defense. Yet he was acquitted in the public trial but found the atmosphere such that he could not complete his education at W&L. Thus it seems essential that one address the problem of keeping power out of the hands of a few powerful groups in order to protect minority rights as one proposes a new system. Also it brings into question the merits of the secrecy surrounding honor trials.

I do not think the "rotating membership" proposal in the last *Ring-tum Phi* is a good one. It does not address the questions raised above, and it seems to open the system to more problems of the type present in the Raynard Scott case. Where students serve just once, personal prejudices are likely to come to the forefront more often. Such a system would have less responsibility than the present one.

A better suggestion may be—using the analogy to the U.S.—treating each fraternity and the independents as separate states and allowing each fraternity and the independents representation on the court proportional to their size in the student body, with a two-thirds vote needed to convict. The representative would be elected by their constituents, with the understanding that any honor trial of a court member be a public trial. This, too, has its problems. But the idea of separating the E.C. from honor trials is a good one, and I hope that it is pursued further.

Sincerely,
Ken Rose