

Minorities seen as extraneous to Rush

By JOHN WINTERS
Staff Reporter

Imagine yourself as Kent Dorfman in "Animal House," being introduced by the house jock to Abdul, Mohammed and the other misfits struggling through Rush. If you're a black at Washington and Lee and went through Rush, you may know the feeling well.

Norman Sigler, a freshman from Alabama, was one of only three blacks to go through Rush this year. He didn't seem to be bothered by the almost totally white freshman class because he was the first black to graduate from his high school. When asked why he decided to go through Rush, Sigler said he "just wanted a chance to meet people and hopefully get a bid in a fraternity."

Often he said he got the impression that fraternity members were just trying to be nice. "Some houses were fairly shocked by my walking in, while others came right up and talked to me," he said.

David Perdue, president of the Interfraternity Council, said the group encourages everyone to go through Rush. When questioned about blacks and fraternities, Perdue responded that "we handle that whole question with a laissez-faire approach." He said he hoped fraternities would look at every freshman going through with an open mind and trying not to be biased. "We are not in a position to tell a fraternity whether they have to let in minorities or not," he added. "It's a question that is up to the individual house."

As the only black member of a fraternity at W&L, sophomore Everett Hamilton of Sigma Nu can look at Rush as a member, as a minority and as a past freshman. Hamilton agreed with Sigler that he was treated cordially by the fraternities but said he also got the impression the fraternities for the most part didn't know what to do with him. He added that "as a minority student there are certain realities you must face. Some fraternities just won't let blacks in."

When black students in a "Southern school" start trying to get into lily white fraternities, visions of Black Panther movements, sit-ins and race riots of the 60s come to the minds of the more conservative elements of the school. Yet both Hamilton and Sigler said they had no intention of trying to make any "statement" or cause trouble. Their purpose, they said, was to have a good time and meet people.

John L. White, dean of minority affairs, agrees that Rush is an important part of "the W&L experience."

"One of the biggest misconceptions among students is that we tell black students not to go through Rush," he said. "Actually, we want all of them to experience it." He also added the Student Association for Black Unity was not designed to compete with the fraternities. Hamilton, as a case in point, is a member of both.

In talking with various Rush chairmen and presidents of the fraternities,

Minorities

□ Continued from Page 1

no clear policy on blacks emerged. Responses to this question ranged from "Are you kidding me?" to "If the guy is a solid individual, there should be no problem."

Various members of SABU interviewed at Lee House II, or the Minority Cultural Center, all said they felt an underlying degree of tension. Eroll Skyers said he didn't think he needed to

have to feel uncomfortable to join a fraternity and decided not to go through Rush. Others echoed his sentiments.

Calvin Rankin added that "everything the fraternity had to offer could also be found within SABU or at Lee House."

The common consensus was that it was easier to just go and see friends at the various houses than to have to subject oneself to a feeling of inferiority due to skin color.

The University and the IFC recognized a W&L chapter of

Alpha Phi Alpha, a national black fraternity, in February 1974, according to Dan N. Murphy, associate dean of students for fraternity affairs. Although 11 students were initiated into the chapter when its charter was granted, the chapter only lasted about two years because it could not meet a minimum membership requirement established by the national fraternity.

Murphy added that the administration "encouraged Rush for any black student who feels comfortable with the Rush process."

All the minorities interviewed as well as Dean White said they felt a black fraternity was not the answer. The problem is that there just aren't enough blacks to sustain a chapter. Everyone would have to be accepted, destroying the whole idea of choice within a fraternity. Yet, all of them encouraged black freshmen to go through Rush, even if they did have to put up with the Abduls and Moham-meds of the world.

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