

Black Women Topic Of Emphasis Month

by John Wells

Black Emphasis Month at Washington and Lee University is focusing this year on a topic unique for a mostly white, all-male college: "Black Women in the Eighties."

W&L's Student Association for Black Unity (SABU) is presenting a month-long series of events emphasizing the outlooks and accomplishments of black women in American society. Three of the five scheduled presentations have already occurred, featuring black women professionals in the fields of law, religion, education and the arts.

The speakers, according to information released by SABU, address a number of issues "centering around the goals and aspirations of the black woman in the upcoming decade." All events are open to

the public at no charge.

So far, SABU has featured Beverly J.A. Burton, a lawyer for Virginia Legal Aid, on

John White, assistant dean of students who is coordinating the activities, says he has been pleased "on the whole" with local interest and participation in the events.

March 2, actress Ruby Dee in a special one-woman performance on March 9, and author Mignon Anderson, who spoke last night.

"There has been more interest than in past years," said White, "which at least shows progress in some quarters."

The appearance of Ruby Dee, veteran actress and writer, generated more interest than the first lecture in the series, and White said he is not surprised.

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"Of course Ruby Dee brought out a cross section of the community," he said. "We understand that these are educative functions, and I don't think success is based on large numerical turnouts. I'm fairly optimistic that we'll have a decent turnout for the upcoming events."

Scheduled to appear during the rest of the month are Vernese Oneal, director of admissions at Dillard University (and the only black woman who holds such a position in the United States) on March 26; and the Rev. Leyontine Kelly of Asbury United Methodist Church in Richmond, Va., sometime in April.

The annual SABU ball will be held Friday, March 21, beginning at 9 p.m., in Washington and Lee's Evans Dining Hall. Entertainment will be provided by the musical group Badwater.

Of all the scheduled speakers, the one who has perhaps best captured the black experience with the written word is Mignon Holland Anderson. Her stories and articles have appeared in the publications Black Books Bulletin, Black World, Freedomways and Black Communicator. A collection of her

works, entitled "Mostly Womenfolk And A Man Or Two," was published in 1976.

"White America," she wrote in a letter to Dean White prior to her lecture here, "has never fully accepted the responsibility for conditions which exist among the majority of Black Americans. To a great degree, white America thinks that it has done good by us, that it has tried, and that somehow, despite failed efforts, it is now time to pull back substantially from those efforts.

"During my visit to Washington and Lee (on Wednesday), I hope to accomplish two things simultaneously: One — to show, demonstrate, how the ideas, issues, concepts and feelings of a writer can be translated into fiction...Two — To express the ongoing rage and bitterness which Black people feel toward whites; the aloofness with which whites view Black people.

"I hope to share the beauty and sweetness in Black people's lives, despite all that is life threatening in that existence; to examine, even if only in shadowy form, the precept that

reconciliation and productive partnership between white and Black Americans is imperative if we are to survive as a nation."

The substantial electoral victory of Ronald Reagan, who blacks voted overwhelmingly against, has planted the seeds of racial activism in this country largely absent during the Carter administration. Any black agenda for the 1980's is sure to include plans for overcoming any obstacles the new administration presents such as its anti-busing stance and proposed social program cuts.

Why, Dean White was asked, was "black women" chosen as a subject rather than another topical aspect of black America in the years ahead?

"We examined the perspective of Washington and Lee as an all-male institution," he said. "We decided to give the average student an opportunity to look at the implications of racism and sexism in society as opposed to the more traditional approach of racism in society."

Past speakers have included the Rev. Jesse Jackson, comedian Dick Gregory and activist Stokley Carmichael.

LONG NECKS