

Return To Communities, Davis Urges

by Ed Edge

The responsibility of minority students, as well as all other black students, once they have been educated, is to not turn their back on their origin, but return to their communities and pass down the cultural riches to younger generations, Ossie Davis said last night in his speech at Washington and Lee's Warner Athletic Center.

Davis was presented by the university's Student Association for Black Unity as their third speaker for this ninth annual "Black Emphasis Week."

He stated that a person who belongs to a minority group can only advance as far in life as the others that are in his minority group, adding that he must have a "power base" of his people under him to back him.

"We (blacks) never had the same opportunities to get ahead
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Responsibility After Education

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as the immigrants of the 1880s and 1890s; those people came to America with strong backs and were willing to work to get ahead and were allowed to do so, but we were bound to the slavery system from the start and were not able to free ourselves from it," he said.

The blacks' relationship to society began as a purely economical one—picking cotton for the plantation owners in the South, and even after the Civil

War, they were not able to realize any full freedom, Davis pointed out.

"Instead of being slave labor, we were converted to cheap labor; we never perceived the '40 acres and a mule' that we were promised," Davis said.

Even though the blacks were supposedly "free" after the Civil War they were still oppressed by the society that freed them, Davis said and added that as long as the black people realized that they were on

the bottom rung of the societal ladder there was a place for them.

"It is not bigotry that has held us down for so long; we could outrun the bigots—it is the institution of racism that has been the barrier to us," he said.

Davis went on to explain that bigotry is purely related to individual beliefs, but racism is an institution that can affect large segments of society, and he cited the industrial shift of the factories in the Northeast to the South where there was little or no unionization and there was cheap black labor as an example.

In his call for the students to return to their communities to help the less fortunate ones left behind, he reminded us that what works for one group should, could and would work for another group and pointed out that all people are brothers and should keep in mind as we try to solve the race problems.

"As you prepared in these walls to find your niche in society, don't forget those you left behind, don't turn your back on them, for they are your base on which to build," Davis again pointed out to the students.

"Responsibility—never forget responsibility that you have to your fellow people, and keep in mind that you are the exception to the rule, you are the fortunate one—you are the one that the people will look to for advancement," Davis reminded the students.

NAACP Director To Speak

Benjamin Hooks, executive director of the NAACP since 1977 and former member of the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), will be the keynote speaker at this year's southern regional conference of the Black American Law Students Association, to be held at Washington and Lee University beginning next Wednesday.

This is the first time Washington and Lee's law school has been host to the conference, which will bring black law students from throughout the south to Lexington for a three-day series of workshops and placement meetings. A number of judges and lawyers are scheduled to lead the workshop panels, which will cover topics ranging from patents and trademarks to the role of black women in the legal profession.

Hooks will deliver the conference's keynote address at a Friday-evening banquet in Washington and Lee's Evans Hall.

Admitted to the Tennessee bar in 1948, Hooks engaged in private practice for 16 years in Memphis—at the same time serving as an ordained Baptist minister and as assistant public defender in the Memphis court system.

He was named to the FCC in 1972, and was a commissioner for five years before assuming his current position with the NAACP in New York.

Hooks is a popular television talk-show host as well, and is a member of the board of directors of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference.

W&L's chairman for the BALSOC conference is Barbara Ridley, a third-year law student from Richmond, Va.