

# HIDDEN RAGE:

A  
RING-TUM  
PHI  
SPECIAL  
REPORT

## Hate and Prejudice at Washington and Lee

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Walking home from class, he thought how exhausted he was. The exam was the most difficult the professor had ever given. He was up all night cramming for that midterm and enticing sleep was calling. He climbed the steps to his fourth floor Graham-Lees dorm room and shuffled down the hall. As he fumbled for his key in the bottom of his bookbag, he glanced at the bright blue writing on his dry erase board. His mouth dropped open in horror at what he saw. Scribbled in large block letters was the word: NIGGER!

### Not Just a Hollywood Problem

Most Washington and Lee University students would view this scenario as something reserved for pop culture movies. American college students regularly view films which glamorize and put a Hollywood-spin on hate crimes. Whether its following the trials of an embattled Jewish prep school student (School Ties) or watching Neo-Nazis mow down a peace rally (Higher Learning), hate crimes are often removed from reality by movie directors. Truth shows that hate-motivated actions are not relegated to the realm of fiction. Indeed, they play an all-too important role in daily college life. Acts of prejudice run rampant on real-life college campuses including that of Washington and Lee.

The accepted definition of a "hate crime" is a crime, action, or behavior that is directed at one person or a group of persons by another person or group of persons that are motivated by an intense dislike.

The hostility that exists on our campus is much more subtle than a John Singleton movie. After all, no one is painting swastikas on Lee Chapel or burning crosses in the Dell. The nature of hate crimes at W&L are clandestine. Surely, one would be wary of calling them hate crimes at all. Usually, they do not involve the breaking of any legal law. Hate-related acts of harassment and hostility are much more frequent at W&L than any violation of legal statute. However, they plague our campus nonetheless. Often the perpetrator is never caught; the victim rarely reports the incident, and most students are unaware of the scope of the problem. In this *Ring-tum Phi* special report, we will uncover the hidden rage and prejudice that persists on our campus and reminds us of a dangerous undercurrent that threatens our otherwise harmonious coexistence.

### This Party is Closed

Tear Night: W&L's night of male bonding and spilled beer. It's a night when most students make a beeline for the fraternities to enjoy the deafening music of local bands. With spirits in hand, everyone all over the campus gathers together to enjoy the revelry. Well, almost everyone.

Last Saturday John Branam, President of the Minority Students Association, was planning to join his fellow undergraduates in celebration. However, he and three other black students were denied entrance to one of those parties. The brother at the door informed them that the party was closed. He told Branam that those inside were "friends" and he wasn't. Branam attributed the incident to bigotry.

"It amazed me. I tend not to think of racism as the first motivation for rudeness," said Branam. "But I can think of no other reason except for racial intolerance."

Branam believes hate crimes occur on the W&L campus, but not in the typical sense

most associated with the term. Rather than blatant acts of aggression toward minorities, the acts of hate are subtle and covert.

For example, Branam said when a group of black students walk into a fraternity party, they receive inquisitive looks.

"You're looked at like they don't want you there," he explained.

Branam said that "nigger" is common language in some fraternity houses. The speaking tradition also breaks down. He spoke of one student ducking his head to avoid saying hello to a black student.

"The things that occur everyday have much more impact than a burning cross," said Branam. "That's a single event that can be discussed and analyzed."

Less pronounced acts of hostility toward blacks are difficult to quantify and therefore go unchecked, said Branam.

Some incidents have been recognized, however.

Dean of Students and University Mediator Anece McCloud said in her eight years dealing with hate crimes at W&L, two race-related acts of aggression have occurred. Both were in the dorms and involved threatening messages left on doors of black students. The incidents were reported to the administration.

"I don't believe they occur that often," said McCloud.

Students who are bigoted against another group generally ignore contact with that group or person. The rule is avoidance rather than confrontation, said McCloud.

Branam sees the picture differently. He believes that there is a strong contingent of W&L students who are intolerant of blacks.

Nonetheless, he said the MSA will actively work to involve more students in this year's activities to promote better understanding.

Despite the presence of racial intolerance on campus, the long-term prognosis for race relations is positive, according to Branam.

With the efforts of the MSA, there will be a shift from a stagnant tension to better relations," said Branam.

### Unusual Circumstances

The first year sororities colonized on campus was a breakthrough time for Washington and Lee women. They were launching a Greek system for females that would hold paramount the value of sisterhood.

One girl was refused membership from the sisterhood. Not because she was dull or homely, but because she was Jewish.

Professor Richard Marks, advisor to Hillel, the Jewish group on campus, recalled the story. The student went through Women's Rush, but was released under highly "unusual circumstances." President Wilson was called to investigate. Evidently, the girl had received a negative reference from a woman in Houston who recommended exclusion based on the girl's religion. The student withdrew from W&L the following year.

"(Jewish students) aren't unwelcome," said Peter Weissman, President of Hillel, "but, I believe if there was more of a presence and awareness on campus, we would all feel a lot more comfortable."

Weissman believes that some W&L students are unaware of the many aspects of Jewish culture. Nevertheless, he thinks that most Jews are received well on campus.

As evidence, he cited most professors' understanding that many Jewish students missed class on Monday because of the holiday, Rosh Hashanah. According to Weissman, the administration is also sympathetic to many prominent alumni of the 1950's and 60's who are Jewish and remember their alma mater generously.

Despite that, Professor Marks continues to receive phone calls from apprehensive parents of prospective Jewish students.

Additionally, some students do run into stereotypes.

Last year, Francie Cohen, a Jewish member

of the Class of '95, wrote in a letter to The Trident that Jewish students were prone to hearing friends make derogatory comments about their religion. She recalled one friend who proudly said he had "Jewed someone down" meaning to bargain aggressively. She also remembered hearing students make fun of the names of Jewish holidays because they were in a foreign language.

Despite having to conform to the traditional ways of the campus, most Jewish students do not complain about anti-Semitism. Most agree that Jews are widely accepted on campus and not discriminated against.

"I consider myself very lucky," said Marks. "(W&L) is a nice place for Jews."

### Dubious Distinction

Washington and Lee has the eyebrow-raising distinction of being the 4th most homophobic college in the country.

Homophobia is as common on this campus as Dave Matthews t-shirts and fraternity parties. Many students believe that this university is simply no place for gay students, and they promote attitudes of hatred toward them. The hostile atmosphere makes the life of a gay student very difficult.

"There have been numerous campaigns against gay students in the time I've been here," said Schroer-Lamont.

One such campaign included circulating a flyer that listed suspected homosexuals on campus. Schroer-Lamont said the posters were plastered all over the Hill, some even being taped to sidewalks.

Steve Powell, Coordinator of the Committee on Gay and Lesbian Legal Issues, also spoke of examples of anti-gay behavior at the Law School.

The bulletin board on which the committee places their posters was torn apart. Although, he couldn't attribute the incident to homophobia, it's rare that university bulletin boards are defaced.

Additionally, some Law School students who were suspected of being gay were left threatening messages in their cars.

Despite these events, Powell "doesn't see much intolerance in the Law School."

The undergraduate scene is a different story altogether, according to Powell.

Powell pointed out that the University's discrimination policy does not include protection for people of different sexual orientations.

Washington and Lee is a tough place to announce one's sexuality because of the climate of homophobia, said Powell.

Openly gay students run the risk of being excluded from fraternity life. They risk the threat of physical danger and verbal abuse.

For example, a few years ago, one gay alumni returned to his fraternity house for a party. Words were exchanged, and a fight ensued. This is just one example of physical intimidation directed toward gay students.

To confront the major obstacles facing gay and lesbian students at W&L, a chapter of the Gay And Lesbian Alliance was founded on campus last year.

"We can combat the problem through education," said Powell.

### Pictures on the Wall

It was Hell's Angels night at the Boiler Room. Everyone was decked out in their finest biker apparel. The room was filled with spiked hair, black leather boots and fake tattoos. The party-goers were there to have fun.

Some female guests didn't have fun, however. For when they arrived at the Boiler Room, they found offensive graphic graffiti awaiting them. Pictures of naked women involved in sex acts plastered the walls. The night of good-natured fun was shattered for them.

Some of the women reported the incident to the administration. The Student Conduct Committee heard the case, and those responsible

were reprimanded.

Blacks, Jews, and homosexuals are not the only groups on campus to be targets of hate-motivated behavior. Acts of hostility are directed at W&L women as well.

With each incident, we are reminded that co-education started only a short ten years ago.

Dean of Students Anne Schroer-Lamont spoke of the occasion when anti-rape posters in the C-School were destroyed.

Apparently, the perpetrator repeatedly wrote offensive language on several of the posters. The Student Health Committee had to continuously replace the posters which was part of their campaign against sexual assault.

Additionally, some women are the victims of sexual assault and harassment — the ultimate manifestation of anti-women behavior.

Unlike most hate crimes, sexual misconduct is included in the yearly report on campus safety.

The Student Faculty Hearing Board is the University committee which hears cases involving sexual misconduct.

In the 1994-95 school year, three cases were referred to the SFHB. McCloud, University mediator, heard nine complaints. Of the three that were referred to the SFHB, one case produced "no clear and convincing evidence that sexual misconduct occurred." One case found a student guilty and suspended him for one year. The final case found the student guilty and put him on social probation launching a student uproar that demanded that rape be included as an honor violation carrying the single sanction of expulsion.

In another scenario, one female student had a phone trap put on her incoming calls to screen for a caller who had been harassing her. A phone trap reveals to the receiver the phone number of the caller.

Head of Security Mike Young said that there were also two instances where female students came to him because they were being called by strangers. The callers would crudely solicit them for sex. Young placed phone traps on their telephones, and it was discovered that the callers were actually Lexington residents.

Although they comprise nearly 40 percent of the Washington and Lee population, women students are as likely to be victims of hate crimes as the much smaller minority groups.

Their superior size, however, has encouraged their coming together into groups to combat such acts of hostility.

### Ignorance and Isolation

What kind of person would hate so much that he/she could be driven to acts of aggression?

It seems completely absurd, never minding the fact that it violates General Lee's civility code.

"Prejudice is something that's taught," said Schroer-Lamont. "If bigoted attitudes have been reinforced by your family and community, it becomes second nature."

Not all perpetrators of hate crimes are taught to hate. Peer pressure can also play a role in encouraging acts of hostility.

"Students, who normally wouldn't do it, participate to go along with the group," Schroer-Lamont said.

They usually feel guilty afterwards, but the rational thinking that would usually prevent them from acting in the first place is replaced by the group mentality.

Of course, alcohol can also induce otherwise sober students to participate in dubious behavior. Indeed, perpetrators of several hate crimes, including sexual assault, are likely to act while under the influence of alcohol.

Understanding the psychology of the perpetrator is helpful in studying hate crimes. however sympathy lies with the victim.

Acts of bigotry against a student often leave that student feeling isolated and alone. The next step for the victim might be anger.

The anger can be both positive and negative. If he directs that anger into the proper channels

like seeking justice, good may come out of the incident. However, if he acts irrationally and retaliates with more negative behavior, the outcome could be disastrous.

While formal surveys have yet to be done at W&L regarding hate crimes, chances are many go unreported.

Many students who have been targeted for intolerance seek advice from University counselors.

For instance, Schroer-Lamont said black students have come to her describing discrimination they received at social functions."

Schroer-Lamont encouraged any students who believe they have been victims of hate crimes to seek help.

### Seeking Retribution

The victim of hate-motivated hostility at W&L has many different options in bringing his perpetrator to justice.

One of the most common locations for these types of incidents is the freshman dorms which has its own system of dealing with these problems.

McCloud said that most cases that occur in the freshman dorms are handled within the dorms themselves.

The cases usually involve graffiti on one's door or threatening phone messages.

Head Dorm Counselor Jason Ward '96 said it is difficult to catch the perpetrator of most hate-related incidents. Usually, they live on another hall or don't even live in the dorms.

However, Ward does hold hall meetings to discuss the incident after it happens.

Dean Dennis Manning said hate crimes are "very infrequent" and "highly unusual." In his five years as Dean of Residence Life, only one or two cases have been reported to him.

Nevertheless, a victim can seek him out to report incidents.

Additionally, the student could seek retribution through McCloud, the Student Conduct Committee, the SHFB, and the Executive Committee. Each has their own method of recourse ranging from a written letter of apology to expulsion.

One could also report to Mike Young. "They are rare and don't really stick out in my mind as being particularly eventful," said Young. "But they do happen."

"Because hate crimes occur so infrequently we don't target it specifically in University policy," said McCloud. "We address it in the general approach of promoting civility."

### Gentlemanly Conduct

One generalization that can be made about hate crimes at Washington and Lee is that they are usually hidden and subtle.

The examples don't signify major discord, but they do hint at an undercurrent of hostility and anger.

Another generalization is that administrators tend to downplay the frequency with which acts of hate occur.

Many did admit, however, that they may not be as in tune with what goes on when their backs are turned.

Students, on the other hand, were much more likely and able to discuss examples of prejudice that they had experienced.

When all new students go through freshman orientation, they learn that W&L prides itself as being a community which members behave with civility towards one another.

Acts of hostility based on hate stand in direct violation of this claim and leave many students wondering why.

Despite this, most students and faculty agree that Washington and Lee is basically a peaceable campus.

While there is ignorance and prejudice, few are marred by these traits.

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