

SGA Racism Seminars Explore Ingrained Forms of Prejudice

By Robert Gibbons

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The number of students attending hasn't been overwhelming, but the general consensus of those involved seems to be that the racism seminars have been quite profitable. The program is sponsored by the SGA, and about a dozen groups have been meeting weekly. Leaders include undergraduates, graduate students, faculty members and campus ministers.

Emphasis is placed upon the study of institutionalized racism and its pervasiveness in our country. That racist attitudes have been ingrained into the structures of our society and must be eradicated is the basic premise which much of the discussion revolves around.

John McDargh, senior in the college is co-leader with Rita Kirchstein of one group. John says that the discussions and the research he has done in relation to the subject have shown him how widespread "subtle racism" is. The seminars, he feels, have enabled the participants to realize that many of their fundamental ideas and concepts which they had never thought to question are tinged with racist attitudes. The group had become aware of the fact that many sincere and altruistic persons and programs are often destructive to those they aim to aid.

A freshman in the college, Cheryl Currier, has been attending this seminar. Cheryl, who is from Massachusetts, says she decided to go because she wanted to become acquainted with the white racist problem in the South in order to compare it with what she had experienced. Her "only gripe," she says, is that "not enough students have shown up." Textbooks used in Georgia which perpetuate the false picture of the slave as happy and contented have amazed Cheryl and all the students. McDargh used books as evidence of the permeation of racism in our culture.

According to Cheryl, the most profitable aspect of the seminar has been the opportunity to communicate with others and get an idea of the wide variety of opinion.

Dirk Held of the Classics department feels his seminar is doing a "respectable job," but he says that the program has been hindered somewhat by lack of expertise and thorough knowledge of the subject. He points out that those who attend are mainly convinced of the

desperate need for the eradication of racism, and that the seminar is not reaching the many who refuse to face up to the problem.

His group has studied the history of slavery and Reconstruction, exposing the myths which have grown up concerning the black man in America. They have concentrated on what Held refers to as our many “insidious” structures which institutionalize racism. Ways to break the “vicious cycle” have been discussed, and he says it is realized that there must be startling change for there is no easy solution.

The conferences, a part of the SGA’s campaign against racism, will continue throughout the next few weeks.