Crossing Learning Boundaries By Choice

Black People
must save themselves

a memoir

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The decade of the 70's was a time of change in UCLA's Office of Academic Programs, and I am extremely thankful for the creative support of Meg Ross-Price, Vicki Nock, Susan Meives, and Nancy Cutter during those years. Meg pushed me constantly to document my initiatives as we crossed new social, cultural, and educational boundaries in academic and student development. She brought together papers, manuscripts, and memoranda from my years at Carnegie and SUNY and set in motion the practice of documenting our office activities. Vicki and Susan monitored and evaluated projects and programs, and as such, they steered, guided, and added further papers, notes, and correspondence to Meg's archival base. Were it not for these well-organized archived materials, writing this book would have been a long, arduous process with far less depth.

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the friendship and support of the late Robert S. Kinsman, Professor of English Literature, and truly a scholar and gentleman of great character. Bob Kinsman's leadership during the era of the Urban Crisis initiative was magnificent.

Nancy and I started pieces of this book in the late 70's when a young professor, David Boije in the School of Management at ULCA, piqued my interest in the concept of Boundary Management. Other than a few in-house memoranda, David Boije and I never fully developed the concept of boundary management for publication, but I benefited tremendously from his thoughtful suggestions and support. The derivative idea and concept of "Crossing Boundaries" was dormant for almost fifteen years. After retiring from the Wave Newspapers in 2001, I began reviewing my own history of experiences from a boundary-crossing perspective. Frank McRea, a friend and former senior writer from the Wave's editorial staff, and I completed the core draft of this volume in 2005. I benefited greatly from the yeoman-like editing efforts of Frank McRae. In early 2006, Sebastian Passanisi, a promising creative writer, pushed me toward bringing clarity and focus to the entire manuscript. He read and suggested hard-hitting revisions of the first five chapters of the current manuscript. Over the past six months, I have spent considerable time incorporating the writing discipline and suggestions of Sebastian and Frank.

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I, however, must assume full responsibility for the content of this book. All the sins of omission and commission in this manuscript are mine and mine alone. I am thankful for the presence and support of my trophy family: Kelly, my wife of twenty-one years, and my teenage children, Amanda and Walter Bremond, as I bring this project toward closure.

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Preface

Life for me has been about gains and losses. As a native son of inner-city black America and the Mississippi Delta, I believe it's time to take stock and reflect. Almost 60 year ago I was one of many black youths deeply immersed in personal activism to break free of the social and economic struggles of rural and inner-city black America. I have played major roles in defining social and economic expectations for a new middle-class black American. In addition, I have actively taught and provided leadership and support for large segments of America that today are deeply devoted to building a multicultural and highly diverse social and economic society.

Despite these accomplishments, I am saddened and frustrated as inner-city black America moves deeper into social and economic isolation while the rest of America and the world increasingly move toward globalization. From time to time, I am distraught over the deeply felt losses of my ability to transfer useful knowledge and visions and to share social benefits with families struggling in inner-city and rural black America. Members of my own extended family in Chicago and Mississippi have not been able to shake the demons of four generations of segregation and poverty. And I am not alone. There are few, if any, middle-class blacks from my generation without personal ties to inner-city and rural black America in the North or South. The quality of inner-city living has been devastated by gang violence, unemployment, poor housing, and major health problems generation after generation. Blacks in inner-city America have not been able to keep pace with necessary training and education to participate in the technology and economic revolutions in mainstream America.

Black communities cannot survive living in isolation. We must cross learning boundaries to mainstream America to pursue family

development and education opportunities and increase our social and economic mobility. Mainstream American families today are on course to become more independent, self-sufficient, and better decision makers and to become the most powerful economic force in the twenty-first century. Families are once again at the center of social and acculturation processes shaping economic, social, and moral values. Government is vigorously removing the financial, economic, and social nets rooted in the age of the New Deal. Despite the recent efforts to prop up affirmative action programs in education and employment, it is becoming increasingly clear that such efforts do not provide the deep, long-term support needed to stimulate and to sustain education, employment, and family development for black America.

Working from Within

Inner-city black Americans must lead efforts to save themselves. For more than 60 years after the Great Migration from the South, black inner-city communities are still choosing to live as though they prefer separate worlds. The physical, social, and psychological boundaries surrounding inner-city black America are still too often internalized as barriers rather than learning challenges to cross.

My experiences tell me that inner-city black Americans cannot survive pursuing the historical ways of life of our black forefathers. We must change. In the 21st twenty-first century, inner-city neighborhoods are becoming multicultural and diverse in terms of expectations and lifestyles. Inner-city black Americans will have increasing opportunities to become learners and to cross boundaries where family life becomes the center stage for promoting social and economic development.

Inner cities are becoming the "place" for affordable housing, accessible transportation, public social infrastructures, and ports of entry for immigration and migration. Increasingly these "new" and socially enriched multicultural neighborhoods are becoming active "first-time" home and family development environments. Families are

creating pools of social capital and viable community organizations and pushing for better educations. These environments can empower and stimulate black families to become more cohesive and viable decision makers in neighborhood and community problem solving if we accept and participate in such changes. Collaborations with other ethnic groups on issues of schooling, housing, and healthcare present new learning opportunities to expand the role of the black families in shaping their own survival. Black political and community leaders must challenge inner-city working-class black families to become active participants in such community revitalization.

About this Book

I have practiced what I am preaching. This book is about a life of crossing learning boundaries by choice. I left the Mississippi Delta as a 16-year-old kid during the Great Migration to Chicago with $50 in my pocket. I started with a simple goal of becoming independent and free to pick and choose what I wanted to do. Life was about me and the way I wanted to survive, then, in a white man's world. I learned to reject that world and all it stood for. I decided not to allow color, race, and class to prevent me from fulfilling my dreams, whether the origin was black or white. I became a great risk-taker and enjoyed crossing boundaries and challenging conventional wisdom. I never allowed any amount of risk, uncertainty, or personal hardship to deter me from moving forward.

I worked and survived a couple of tortuous and hungry years in the Black Belt of Chicago as a teenager and graduated from Wendell Phillips High School. I think the most important gift of those years was learning how to make choices and accept responsibility for my fate as a teenager. Teenagers are not the mindless, destructive characters depicted in the current annals of events. As a teenager I became aware of the fact that nothing was more important than learning and, particularly, learning to reach out to others. With a lot of support from my teachers and hard work, I enrolled in the University of Illinois at Chicago and transferred to the University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana after one year. Crossing learning venues at

Illinois was a major challenge for blacks in the fifties and is even more challenging today. I discuss those experiences at length. I stuck with my game plan to become a learner and completed a PhD at 27 with a lot of support from fellow gradate students and faculty mentors.

Early on, my late wife, Doris, and I made the choice to learn how to play the game of success in mainstream America. I fought for opportunities to compete for management jobs in corporate America and housing in Chicago's closed suburbs in the late fifties. We crossed learning boundaries in mainstream America and grew tremendously. Those experiences are discussed at length in early chapters of the book. Escaping the fears and anguish of inner-city boundaries of black America empowered rather than limited our abilities to assist other blacks and disadvantaged groups. We passionately pursued efforts to increase open housing and job opportunities for others. Success was not just about us. We felt a duty to increase opportunities for people less fortune.

My formal education is interdisciplinary and rare for the late fifties and early sixties. As a young black man, I made career and professional choices to explore ways of applying my training in economics, organization theory, and family development to urban and inner-city problems in education, economic development, and local governance. Several chapters of this book discuss the excitement of teaching, learning, and putting that knowledge to work at SUNY Binghamton and UCLA and in South Los Angeles. I believe those chapters present ideas worth further considerations by policymakers and public problem-solving agencies.

I made the choice to spend a major part of my career searching for models, planning apparatus, and organizational frameworks to improve and develop responses to the challenges of improving the quality of life in inner-city and rural America. Hopefully, the reader will find discussions of my experiences and, sometimes, "hang-ups" interesting and thought provoking.

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Chapter I

Growing Up in the Mississippi Delta

Life in the Delta

The Mississippi Delta was a world unto itself. The Delta was created by wealthy planters of Virginia, Kentucky, South Carolina, and North Carolina. The laws of planters rule the Delta and determine rights and wrongs for black folks. Greenwood was a major anchor of the northern border of the Delta in the early days of the Reconstruction Period, and Vicksburg formed the southern anchor where dreams of making the Delta the richest and most productive farm region in America were formulated and executed. The rich and the established planters nested in the antebellum society of Vicksburg and surrounding areas, while small and want-to-be planters lived in Greenwood and carried out the mission of shaping and expanding the Delta's productivity.

Greenwood was the home of the "redneck," local store owners, plantation managers and overseers, and small planters. It was the centerpiece in the planned development of large, absentee-owned plantations. To the west of Greenwood were rapidly growing towns such as Clarksdale, Indianola, and Tunica, where thousands of black were migrating to work as sharecroppers. Leflore County was the home to millions of blacks and poor whites in search of opportunities to work. To the northeast of Greenwood were the less productive hills and small plantations of the Delta, where poor whites and blacks worked as both day workers and sharecroppers. "Rednecks," however, were frustrated by the shift in economic and social power from Greenwood to the westward Delta land owners. Since Governor Vardaman was elected around the turn of the twentieth century, they

Chapter III

University of Illinois: Isolated Learning Venues

During the year of 1948, my last year at Wendell Phillips, I faced choices in living styles and housing that were difficult, fearful, and gut wrenching. I felt lonely and terribly isolated. Why was my effort to get support becoming so divisive among people who were so supportive of me when I initially arrive in Chicago? My aunt Annie Mae expressed the sentiment of most people migrating from Mississippi. She constantly reminded me that getting the kind of college education that I sought was a waste of time. As often as possible, she reminded me of how foolish I was trying to go to college. She would say, "You don't realize how tough is to get a job and make it in Chicago as a black man. Getting a lot of education is not going to help get you into the circles that you have your eyes on. College is for rich black folk with connections. You are too poor to be so uppity and demanding. From here on, after finishing high school, you need to go work and take care of yourself." She was kind of angry that she and my uncle had as much as most blacks, a new car and nice bungalow on the West Side of Chicago, but faced the same "rat race as every other working-class family." College meant different things to blacks depending on the class and economic status.

Chicago may have been the land of opportunities, but I had to come to grips with the realities of being a poor, in-migrant black male without social or economic connections. Working-class blacks coming to Chicago from plantations and some towns in the South made peace with segregation and adjusted to a quality of living that afforded in comparison better lifestyles and freedoms of choice not found in the South. The most important qualities were the freedom to speak out, to advocate, and to develop black community institutions. I was often reminded that blacks were still been hanged for looking

at white women or speaking up for the basic rights due to a citizen of this country. Blacks could have their own businesses, insurance companies, savings banks, and real estate offices. Blacks were free to develop their own way of life. There was basically nothing wrong with having your own community and not wanting to live next door to white folk.

My thoughts ran counter to expectations of the hardcore and working middle-class black community. I just could not accept any kind of segregated world as place of contentment and happiness. Being only two years removed from the Mississippi Delta of Greenville, I was still angry and not willing to allow white people to set limits and determine what was good for me. My attitude put me at odds with my aunt and many other blacks who were making it as postmen, hotel bellmen captains, sleeping-car porters, building superintendents, parking-lot mangers, and head cooks. I was considered abrasive and too aggressive. They were looking to political power as a way to improve the black community.

Middle-class blacks saw young, single, lower-class black men as threats to the serenity of their way of life. I was reminded by seasoned and supervising blacks, "You guys coming off plantations don't know how to act. You need to watch your manners and learn how to get along with people in power."

Upper-class blacks in Chicago who were doctors, lawyers, government workers, and small businessmen didn't want to mix with whites; they sought social and economic parity with whites. They were the leaders of fraternities, sororities, and social clubs and were advocates for better living conditions. They provided the intellectual leadership and models for success. They provided business and social services to newly arriving plantation blacks from the South, but didn't "mix" with them. Social case workers, employment office managers, YMCA directors, and local political appointees were often the children of upper-class blacks. Color and pedigree parentage could be as important in shaping entry into black upper-class circumstances as economic success. It was not uncommon for well-off blacks to

rrange marriages that would "lighten up" the next generation. Many f the divisive elements of color and class that influenced the social ynamics of the black families and communities in Mississippi, ouisiana, and Alabama continued to impact the social and economic fe of the Black Belt of Chicago.

hated the social and economic structure of the black community. I elt more isolated by class and color in Chicago than in Mississippi. saw how class and color created disparities and deeper segregation nd divisions within the black community. Class and position created false sense of security and undermined the urgency of blacks to ake initiatives to liberate themselves from the strangleholds of egregation and inequalities. The Black Belt was a solid geographic tretch of the city of Chicago roughly bounded by Cottage Grove on he East, Wentworth on the West, and as far South as 80th and as far North as 22nd streets. When I first arrived, 35th, 43rd, and 47th streets etween Cottage Grove and Michigan were the center of black ife. In 1948, neighborhoods south of 35th and west of Michigan were beginning to show the wear and tear of migration and impact of overcrowded housing conditions of low-income blacks from he South. Well-established blacks, second and third generations, moved as far south as the Black Belt could expand to avoid the social tress that came with black migrants moving into neighborhoods. The Black Belt created ugly social and economic conditions, and didn't come to Chicago to get caught up in a black class war. I had to deal with the day-to-day realities of having ambitions and hopes completely out of sync with neighbors around me. I needed to escape and move on.

Moving Beyond the Boundaries of the Black Belt

It was a blessing in disguise to have moved to the West Side to live with Uncle Thomas and Aunt Annie Greene. Going from high school to the West Side after school and sometimes late at night I learned to travel from the South Side to the West Side with a hop, skip, and a jump. Most of the time I caught streetcars at 39th Street and Wabash or near the Wabash YMCA and traveled to Roosevelt

Road, and from there I traveled westward to the West Side. With a single transfer, I could get home within an hour during rush traffic times. I could also reach the Chicago Public Library in the Loop in less than an hour. I sometimes branched off to Grant Park when time permitted me to do so during the school year. Going to school and working on weekends made it difficult for me to spend time in the Loop area, but I felt comfortable when I did. By the beginning of the summer of '48, I had learned how to make my way around the tennis courts in Grant and Douglas parks, hang out at the public library, and hang out at cultural sites in Grant Park like a real Chicago "park rat."

After graduation, our senior class at Wendell Phillips scattered in many different directions. During the summer of '48, I began to increasingly move away from South Side of Chicago and made special efforts to take advantage of social and cultural opportunities in Grant Park, Douglas Park, and the Chicago Loop. Everything was close to everything else in the Chicago Loop. It didn't take more than twenty minutes to get from my place of work on the near northwest side to the Loop. In the summer, my uncle started work at the plant about 7:00 am and my work day ended at 2:00 pm. By 2:30 I was in Grant or Douglas Park looking for pickup games with tennis players. I found tennis to be a point of entry into a broad and better-educated group of people. It was ironic that growing up in my father's house in strictly segregated Mississippi prepared me better to meet and interact with white people than living in the Black Belt of Chicago. I trusted and liked dealing with outgoing and smart white people. I felt secure playing tennis with people of different colors and nationalities.

Playing tennis was more than a sport to me. It was an avenue for building social relationships and creating learning opportunities. As I reflected on my gains and losses from growing up in Greenville, I became more and more appreciative of my boyhood friendship with Tom Gibson, Matthew Page, David Johnson, and Wilmer Jones when I think of our passion for tennis. Our tennis interests and passion for the game was a gift from strong boyhood bonding. With

the help of Rose and Walter Howard, highly seeded black players in Greenville in the late thirties and early forties, we taught ourselves how to play tennis. We pooled our money from paper routes and temporary jobs to share the cost of rackets and balls. Thanks to those wonderful times as young boys, I now had a sport skill that could serve me well.

In Douglas and Grant Park I counted on tennis to get me into social networks to play and have fun and to expand my knowledge base. I still wanted to be the "smart one," the learning kid that my father had cultivated in his house. I got attention as a tennis player. The rarity of seeing a black youth hanging around Grant Park's tennis courts was a source of curiosity. Sometimes I got opportunities to play with people whom I could never meet in business or professional circles. "Anyone for tennis" meant just that for many passionate players. I was a C-level player and could generally fit in with most "walk-on" singles players or substitute for an absent partner in a game of doubles. Grant Park tennis players were generally of a higher intellectual cut. They were interesting and well-informed people on many social, cultural, and political matters that I needed to be exposed to. Sometime players would sit around and discuss political, economic, and social policy issues well into the evenings. Old timers who had come through the depressions of the thirties were still concerned that a depression would occur now that World War II was over. Veterans who had spent time in England and France told stories about experiences in those countries during the war.

I found Grant Park and the public library to be havens for meeting interesting people. Through casual discussions with a retired writer while roaming the halls of the public library, I discovered a Chicago in the thirties where actors and writers such as Richard Wright found opportunities to shape their skills under the New Deal's Federal Arts Project. I learned about Chicago as a liberal forefront for the socialist movement by listening to a heated debate in Grant Park. Meeting and having casual conversations with old-time activists in Grant Park helped me to understand some of the deep ties between blacks and Jews in the union movement. Searching for materials for papers

in the public library led to some great discussions with strangers. Seemingly my thirst for knowledge was never ending. I wanted to know it all, and sitting around listening to smart people was fun. Hanging around the Loop and Grant Park helped me understand the power of a good education and how it could become a major source of joy and happiness.

Enrolling at Navy Pier

Summer quickly passed. I was happy and invigorated by visits with my former classmates from Greenville, Mississippi, before enrolling in Navy Pier. I was glad to see them and get updates and encouragement. David Johnson was planning to move to San Francisco and pursue engineering and drafting. Tom "Skip" Gibson was planning to attend Lemoyne College in Memphis. Wilmer Jones was planning to attend Central State University in Ohio. And Matthew Page was enrolling in Tougaloo College in Jackson, Mississippi. King Pye and I were the only members of our close-knit peer group who would ever be able to share a college experience together. But the prospects for maintaining the close ties that we enjoyed at Wendell Phillips were slipping away.

As we planned for enrollment in the fall at Navy Pier, King Pye and I both faced a brand-new world of student peers. At Wendell Phillips, we were able to study and look smart because many of our classmates really underperformed or didn't want to be in school. If they were smart, they were not encouraged to work hard. For many of our classmates, everything came before studying and getting homework done. Phillips did not prepare us for a competitive learning environment. Stopping high school students from dropping out and increasing the size of the graduating classes were far more important objectives than accelerating the development of a few. We understood that and did our best. Navy Pier was an exceptionally competitive learning environment.

At Navy Pier, I estimate that there were fewer than 25 black students enrolled in the entire freshman class. Most of the white

nd black students were geared up early on to be college bound, and ney were very well prepared to compete. Veterans were mature and ighly focused, and many came from the best high schools. Having ost time in the military added a special element of urgency and ompetitiveness in their approach to college.

King and I spend a lot of time planning and thinking through the hallenges of working and going to school. When confronted with Navy Pier learning environment, it was clear to us that going to Navy Pier was a full-time pursuit and we were at a distinct disadvantage naving to work. As an assistant manager of a super food market, King knew that he had to reduce his course load at the outset and develop a class schedule around work. It was hard for King to make that decision. But he thought that plan was right for him. After a lot of thought and discussion, I remained firm to my commitment to be a full-time student, come hell or high water. As I thought about my options, I concluded, "It's now or never. I can't back off my dream."

For the first time since I left Greenville, I was on my own without the support of a single member of my Mississippi peer group. I was sad. I was going to miss sharing our thoughts, learning experiences, and ambitions to succeed. My friendship with King went back to more than 15 years of growing up and attending Sunday school together in Greenville. As I looked back, I began to realize how rare our peer group from Mississippi was. I thought about the support I received during my suspension from Coleman High and my decision to transfer to high school in Chicago. David Johnson, Skip Gibson, Matthew Page, Wilmer Jones, and King Pye were there for me.

Through our peer group, we created a private small world that protected us from the disillusionment and anger of being black and poor in a segregated world. We had differences from time to time, but we always had each others' backs. We were free of class and color struggles, and we all came from working-class families. As peers, we all internalized a burning desire to be the best and were deeply determined to defeat a system of segregation that threw roadblocks in our way. We figured we were going to make things happen.

I quickly made the leap toward becoming a freshman at Navy Pier despite having at best marginal employment and housing support. Our Mississippi peer group was also moving ahead with a lot of obstacles. Matt Page and Skip Gibson went full-speed ahead toward becoming doctors. Skip worked the graveyard shift as dishwasher at a fast-food café and enrolled full-time as a pre-med student at Lemoyne College in Memphis while living with a sister. David worked days and studied drafting and engineering at night. King and I enrolled in an accounting course, but we didn't have time to hang around together. We all were determined to make it somehow.

Outside of my friendship with King, I had no other close peer friendship. I was lonely and felt isolated. Living on the West Side made things even worst. The West Side of Chicago in 1949 was rapidly becoming a series of struggling black neighborhoods for newly arriving families and single people. All along Roosevelt Road and 12th Street, small businesses operated predominately by Jewish merchants were vanishing. Boutique haberdashers were moving out, specialty stores in jewelry and neckwear were closing down, and small home furnishing stores were downgrading products and still having trouble keeping their doors open. Business sites and store vacancies were accelerating in numbers. I was reminded of the changing nature of the West Side by the mix of traffic and conversations on the streetcars as I went east and west on Roosevelt. In the spring of '48 as I traveled from 39th and Wabash to my aunt's home, I could strike up conversations with a teacher or professional person traveling to the West Side. Sometimes I encountered riders interested in math problems and would receive the benefits of friendly personal comments or suggestions on homework. By end of the summer, that friendly tone was replaced by uptight and often rude people. Everybody seemingly was angry about something, and it didn't take much to set off fight-like arguments, particularly between Jews who felt displaced and blacks who were looking to replace them under disappointing housing conditions.

Travel dropped off drastically on Friday nights and weekends when I first began to take the Roosevelt Road route in 1948. After 10:00

pm, I could sleep until I got close to my stop. The driver could call my stop and someone would wake me up. By the fall of 1949, that had all changed. Fridays and weekend trolleys were as crowded as during the rush hours. It was not uncommon to find black people heading to the West Side to party at "juke joints"; sometimes they were drinking and behaving very rudely. Instead of the trolley becoming a friendly social extension of my day, it became a source of social tension. When I made it home, I would be doubly tired.

Creating a Work/Study Environment

Having saved enough money during the summer working at the bag factory, I was able to meet the financial needs for books, tuition, and clothing for the first year at Navy Pier. I decided early on to pursue a prelaw curriculum in commerce. This meant taking core courses in accounting, economics, social sciences, and business law in the School of Commerce at the University of Illinois in Champaign/Urbana. At the end of three years, an undergraduate could transfer to the School of Law. To stay on schedule, I needed to take an average of 15 hours per semester.

I need to earn about $15 to $17 per week to cover basic living expenses during the academic school year. At the rate of $.75 per hour, I need to work at least 20 hours per week. Having to live in a black neighborhood and work in yet another neighborhood posed a commuting challenge even in a city with a well-organized transportation system. An even greater challenge was posed when neither the workplace nor the living quarters provided a true and active learning environment.

Uncle Thomas Greene, my aunt Annie Mae's husband, solved the job and income problem for me. As superintendent and second in command, he assigned hours of work after he knew my class schedule and gave me maximum flexibility in getting to and from the job. The nature of the job contributed nothing toward shaping a positive learning environment. It was hazardous and unsafe work, but it met my income needs.

The bag factory was a remanufacturing company that converted recycled burlap bags from agriculture product packaging into specially designed burlap containers for parts. For example, three tons of 200-pound burlap bags used to ship potatoes from Iowa to National Tea Food Stores could be accumulated after being emptied and sold to the Abe Greenberg Company. The Greenberg Company could in turn accept orders for four tons of small burlap bags meeting the size and volume specifications of small-parts manufacturers. The remanufacturing process started with cleaning the burlap bags as received from the primary users. Collecting tons of used bags involved buying unsorted bags from scrap dealers who collected the bags frequently and in small quantities. My job was to sort out shipments of used bags as they came in from scrap dealers, to open each bag into a sheet form, and to run the sheets through a heavy-duty air vacuum cleaner to remove lint, dust, and dirt. I worked through tons of dust and dirty air for hours without dust masks. The job was great in terms of reduced mental stress — it required a minimum of mental effort — but it was very unhealthy.

Living on the West Side was advantageous from the standpoint of work. But my building and living quarters did not contribute to a positive learning environment. Adele and Henry Jones were wonderful people, but they never graduated from high school. Their personal and social interests were not easily discovered. My neighbors were newly arriving migrants from the South. Adele had 10 to 12 kitchenettes in her building. If there wasn't a lot noise from tenants having parties or family debates, there was heavy traffic coming past my basement level room from local bars and clubs on Roosevelt Road. Nearby service businesses were quickly being replaced by taverns, bars, and juke joints. Almost for the entire evening, drunks would stand outside of my window talking as loud as possible. They drank booze and talked as loud as they could until ten or eleven o'clock during weekdays. If I had to study with any degree of intensity, concentration was very difficult.

To beat that noise situation, I adopted a plan of study that called for getting home as early as possible in the late afternoon and studying

before the dinner hour. Since I shared a "community kitchen," I had to rush to fix dinner (mostly cans of Franco American spaghetti, hot dogs, milk, and fig bars) before working tenants returned from work. As a rule, I would quickly eat and get about three or four hours of sleep while the crowd from the bars hung around my window. (I could sleep through anything!) I would generally wake up and study for an additional two or three hours after the trafficking ended and return to bed for least a couple of hours of quality sleep before getting up for the day. At Navy Pier, I used blocks of time to review notes and work with study groups from time to time. Weekends were divided between studying, working, and catching up on sleep.

College Readiness

In terms of preparation, I was not ready to meet the challenges of rigorous college study. Grades were not a fair measure of college readiness of low-income black students. Classes and formal coursework can meet some of the learning challenges, but poor home-studying environments can create a serious drag on learning conditions. As a bright and serious learner, I had accumulated years of shortcomings in communication skills. Early on, in high school, I needed extra reading time and opportunity to engage in dialog with parents or adult sponsors. I needed to understand the depth of the college challenge and needed to have preparation targets to be reached before leaving high school. Competition is not always the most efficient way to get youth ready for college. Sometimes collaboration, sharing, and working together are more efficient ways to raise the level of readiness. Looking back, I felt that it would have been better for me to have studied and prepared for college in a pass/fail math and science grading system than concentrating on a competitive letter grade framework.

As I struggled with coursework, I began to realize that getting ready for college was a lifetime venture. It required a lots more than getting good grades and excelling in high school. Family and the quality of schools were major factors. In my first year at Navy Pier, I earned a 2.9 average, slightly less than a B, but a full point below my

equivalent average in high school after coming to Wendell Phillips. Normally, freshman grades were expected to drop by a grade point. I sensed, however, that I was facing some much deeper background issues.

College was not as much fun as I anticipated. I made a special effort to change my feeling of isolation despite having to frequently rush off to work. I met several other black students from middle-class black families taking college work in stride and having successful experiences. As I talked and studied with them, I began to see the other side of the middle-class black family. For the first time, I came to appreciate the virtues of strongly educated black families. In my black classmates I could now see the nurturing role of the family more clearly. Families have to become the first major learning venue for black children. Parents shape goals, expectations, and basic knowledge foundations. They also help children escape the grasping hands of low self-esteem and the fears of uncertainty posed by learning challenges. Black middle-class parents, more often than not, assumed responsibilities for getting their children across social and cultural barriers.

As I reflected on schooling and the black family, I began to see the struggle that well-established blacks were having with migrating black families from Mississippi from another perspective, even though I didn't always agree with the way middle-class blacks treated low-income migrants. Black youngsters from families arriving during my period of migration, the middle of the 1940s decade, brought some very daunting educational issues to Chicago's black neighborhoods that had historically struggled to make a de facto segregated school system more responsive to black children.

Consider the following: Blacks over 25 years of age with one to four years of education in Mississippi numbered over 190,000, according to 1940 U.S. census estimates. Consider also the fact that the pool of sharecroppers and plantation day laborers was the main source of migrants to Chicago in the 1940s. In 1950, according to the U.S. census, Illinois, mainly Chicago, had over 170,000 blacks over 25

years of age with one to four years of education. Needless to say, a large number of the uneducated, unemployed, and under-housed black households in 1950 were parents and children from the 1940 pool of Mississippi sharecroppers. They complicated and deepened an already desperate struggle over schooling and housing in Chicago.

In response to the changing structure of the Black Belt, middle-class and educated black families were attempting to mute the impact of rapidly declining schools with dominant black enrollment, some "exporting" black children to Chicago schools with white-dominated enrollment using special address changes to beat restrictive boundary policies of the Chicago Board of Education. Others were buying farther south in Chicago, seeking new neighborhoods. The tension that I felt in finding housing when I first arrived in Chicago reflected the frustration and anxiety about the future of education as much as about housing.

King and I, like so many other migrating young adults, didn't have family and supporting learning environments in Mississippi or Chicago to create preparedness and college readiness that students were getting at white-dominated schools like Hyde Park, South Shores, Evanston Township, Proviso, and Lane Tech. Preparations at Coleman High (Mississippi) and Wendell Phillips were good but not as competitive. My science and math skills were adequate but not at the level needed to concentrate in a science curriculum at the University of Illinois. Getting a "C" in college algebra was a wakeup call. My aspiration of being a quality science student received a hard jolt. In hindsight, I began to wonder to myself if efforts to make the top "10" graduating student in our graduating class at Wendell Phillips should have been traded off for better college readiness, languages, and communication skills. I had major catching up to do without the time or family support. "I crossed a river but an ocean was before me."

Historically, job discrimination and restricted career expectations had undermined my college readiness and learning, particularly in business. When I was in Mississippi in 1945 to 1946, I was restricted

to training as an automobile mechanic. At Wendell Phillips I was so busy wheeling and dealing to get into college, I never found time to talk with bookkeepers or teachers who taught business. At Navy Pier, I was now taking a full year of accounting principles with complete lab sessions and a practicum without ever seeing a set of real business books. My white classmates could talk about Uncle Gerald's or Cousin Jason's books. Working toward a major in business was a "first-time" experience for me as a black freshman. It would have been helpful to have prior exposure to the subject and practice of accounting.

I did have some opportunities to meet with Mr. Abe Greenberg, the owner of the bag factory, but not about accounting. He could be stimulating and passionate when we discussed the impact of unionism on Chicago's small businesses. He understood business from the inside and had a lot of ideas and dreams for future of small businesses in Chicago. Sometimes I couldn't hurry fast enough to get to the bag factory before Mr. Greenberg left for the day on Fridays. About 3:00, he ended his day before going home to begin the Jewish Sabbath. If I got there around 2:00, we would talk business and economic history. He was particularly sharp and knowledgeable about Chicago's business history. His father had come to Chicago from Poland without a dime and settled on the West Side and was part of the small-business merchants association that was now being moved out by the black migration. At the bag factory, Mr. Greenberg and I debated sometimes about the history of the labor movement. I recalled completing a short paper on the "Pullman Car Strike," and Mr. Greenberg spent time with me discussing the labor movement in Chicago. Most of the time, however, I was stuck with unbelievable schedules, commuting from the Navy Pier to the factory and from the factory to my kitchenette on the West Side. Having time to think and debate with classmates and business people would have allowed me to fill some of the gaps in my working-class background.

Navy Pier: A Campus in Transition

There were implicit messages in my learning struggles at Navy Pier. If I were to succeed, I needed to exploit the entire set of learning venues. Learning through interactions between students, work experiences, and classroom teaching were part of a total learning paradigm, and they all needed to be more connected. I needed to take advantage of my basic intelligence and analytical strengths but yet deal with the harsh realities of a very porous and limited college readiness in languages and communication skills. Navy Pier and I were not a good fit from a learning perspective.

Navy Pier was not another Champaign-Urbana campus. It was an urban transitional response to the challenge of providing entry-level space and classes to nontraditional adult students, veterans, and their families. It was also intended to be a service campus for students seeking to stay at home and help with rapidly expanding post–World War II businesses. Course offerings and scheduling made it possible for students to fill immediate technical training gaps, to explore interests, and to make choices to attend other universities such as DePaul, Loyola, and Roosevelt College and University in very inexpensive ways.

Navy Pier was also an urban intellectual hangout. You didn't have to scratch deep to find social activists busy working at efforts to bring about social change. Mostly the social activists were "professional" students living at home, well traveled in academic circles and excited by the presence of Navy Pier in Chicago. Many of these students could never face crossing the great divide of "upstate" and "downstate" Illinois. For them, "Downstate was a place for country hicks."

It was becoming very clear to me after the first semester in Navy Pier that there were advantages to going to school at Champaign-Urbana. I had a straight, full-time diet of work and study that literately consumed my life during my second semester at Navy Pier (University of Illinois). I took 16 semester hours of college work, including Accounting Principles, Economic History of the United States, General Geography, College Algebra, Freshman Rhetoric

and Composition, and a PE course in boxing. The latter course was instrumental in my later winning the Intramural Middle Weight Division Championship at Navy Pier. Except for my boxing and training exercises, I lived a very stoic life.

I needed to get beyond the struggling neighborhoods of black migrants where increasingly they were isolating me as a different type of youth, and I knew that I would have to work even harder. That didn't seem to be feasible given my target of being a full-time student.

Also, I was 19 and developing more than a casual interest in a very special college woman at Champaign-Urbana. Doris Thomas was graduated at 16 from Hyde Park, one of the leading high schools in all of south Chicago, and we really liked each other. In her letters, she talked about how much easier it would be to work and study on a large university campus.

In my second semester, Larry Conway taught economics and business courses at Navy Pier and took a personal interest in my development. He noticed that I was beginning to drift toward nonacademic challenges. My PE teacher, a former collegiate champion in boxing, had encouraged me to enter the novice category of the Golden Gloves Tournament and hang around with young fighters that he was grooming for possible boxing careers. Larry Conway called me into his office and remarked, "I had the impression that you want to be a serious students. How does getting your brain beaten in make you smart?" It was a surprising and much-needed statement of support from a young instructor. I took his advice, gave up boxing, and returned to my goal of becoming a serious student. As we developed deeper student/faculty ties, Larry brought up the idea that I could transfer to Champaign-Urbana as a "hardship case."

I decided to visit my teacher Ms. Burke at Wendell Phillips at the beginning of the spring semester to tell her of my success at Navy Pier. During that visit, I asked her about the pros and cons of transferring to Champaign-Urbana. Ms. Burke introduced me to

Mr. Roselle Nesbitt, a shop instructor who was a graduate of the University of Illinois. Mr. Nesbitt, as I recall, was the one of two black male teachers and very professional about technical education in high school. After we began talking, I remembered having seen Mr. Nesbitt in the hallways, but I never had a chance to meet him as a teacher.

We went back to his office. He asked me point blank, "How are you doing at Navy Pier?" I told the truth. I said, "The pressure of working and living in Chicago is wearing me down." He, then launched into his experiences at the University of Illinois. Mr. Nesbitt had grown up in Champaign and attended public schools. His mother was a cook for one of the fraternity houses. She pushed all of her five sons through the University of Illinois in the thirties. As I recall, Roselle became an electrical engineer in 1934, another son was graduated from law school, two sons were graduated from the School of Medicine and became MDs, and a fifth son was graduated from the College of Letters and Sciences. They were a distinguished family of brothers working in professional jobs and fully accepting roles of helping others. We talked with candor about his disappointments and the challenges of succeeding in job markets with major job discrimination. I talked with him about my success in business and economics courses at Navy Pier and real interest in the possibility of a future major. I indicated that I would like to transfer into the College of Commerce at the University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana.

After almost an afternoon of taking and chatting, he suggested, "If you really want to go down to Champaign, I think that I can help you get a job and a place to stay." I said, "Yes sir, I could be ready to go by August of '49 and I would appreciate all the help you can give me!" He responded in a business-like manner, "I have two tasks for you to complete before the end of April. First, I want you to grab a train and travel to Champaign to meet my cousin, Horace Long. He will give you a job at the U of I Bookstore as his assistant and provide enough work time to help you pay tuition and buy books. Then I want you to go by the Alpha House and check the house out

for living quarters. I don't know what the space situation is like even though I am one of the graduate Alpha members with an interest in the Alpha House. You will have to pledge and become an affiliate member of Alpha Phi Alpha. In Tau chapter, the University of Illinois has had an active, scholarly Alpha presence on campus for many years. As you probably know, new members are selected on the basis of several criteria by votes of active members of the chapter at Champaign-Urbana. You will be in good company if you decide to become affiliated with Tau. I can write Chavez, the chapter adviser for Tau Chapter, and have him introduce you around. Just let me know what additional help you will need." As an aside, he reminded me that Kappa Alpha Psi has an excellent chapter in Champaign and they also have a house. "You may want to check them out also."

I had never met an educated black man who projected such personal power. He spoke from a positive frame of reference at all times and held to high levels of expectation. He was sensitive at the same time about the potential uncertainties and fears that he was introducing in my life. But he engaged in straight talk and left no doubt that he thought that I had a real option of getting out of Chicago and moving successfully to complete my education in Champaign-Urbana.

The actions he posed required that I make some risk-taking choices about establishing new ties that may well change my life's course. Nothing, however, was guaranteed.

By April 1949, I was about to become 20 years old with no social contact with close peers from Wendell Phillips. The one person that had showed an interest in me was Doris Jean Thomas. She wrote to me and had arranged for me to meet her mother. I embellished and coveted that friendship with Mrs. Thomas. She would frequently invite me over to use the family's adding machine when I had to prepare my final accounting practicum. I found her to be a fascinating woman. She was graduated from Evanston Township High School in 1930 and well read. I could hardly wait for Doris to come home so that I would have an opportunity to be with her and Mrs. Thomas. During the first week of April, I wrote Doris and told her that I was

coming to Champaign to make arrangements for leaving Chicago and enrolling at Champaign. I wrote Mr. Long and asked if I could follow up with a personal visit to talk about the job opportunity that Roselle Nesbitt had asked him to arrange and sent a copy of the letter to Mr. Nesbitt. I also ask Mr. Nesbitt to contact Mr. Chavez about me pledging and living in the Alpha House. Doris wrote back, as I recall, and asked that I come down the third week of April; Alpha Kappa Alpha was having a spring event and she wanted me to be her date. As they say in the Mississippi Delta, "I was in high cotton heaven."

Before going to Champaign-Urbana, I asked Larry Conway to write the College of Commerce and the office of admission to recommend me for a "hardship transfer" to Champaign-Urbana and to start the transfer process. He remarked, with a smile, "It is an honor to help you follow through with getting out of Chicago and become a budding scholar." I wanted to make sure that everything was in motion. I explained my opportunity to explore a move to enroll at Champaign to my uncle Greene and Mr. Greenberg. They were happy for me. Mr. Greenberg told my uncle to pay me for 20 hours in April to help me along. That was the validation I so desperately needed.

When I arrived in Champaign, I was surprised how the black community looked so down and out. The Champaign train station reminded me of some small towns that I had past through during my first trip to Chicago in '45. In fact, I may have passed through Champaign while I was talking to my newly found friend, Steve, on that trip to Chicago without even noticing it. But Champaign in the spring of '49 had my attention.

Black people stood around the station helping with luggage, and nobody appeared to occupy a position of authority and responsibility. Blacks weren't even driving cabs. I made a note to talk with Mr. Long about my feelings and observations.

My first stop in Champaign was to spend time getting to know Mr. Horace Long. He was a thin and elegantly spoken black man

with a tremendous reservoir of knowledge about the university and Champaign-Urbana. He was born and raised in Champaign and had gone to school with the Cunningham family, second-generation owners of the largest private bookstore in Champaign-Urbana. The U of I Supply Bookstore had been around since World War I. It survived the twenties and thirties and was well on its way to flourishing in the post–World War II period. They bought textbooks smartly and shifted as much of the risk to publishing houses as possible. In addition to cleaning up the store, Mr. Long packed and returned books to publishing houses. That was a time-oriented job. The store had a 20 percent markup on textbooks. If the sales department made poor estimates of student enrollment in classes and the "unknown" number of used copies circulated by student, the book division could lose a lot of money on books. The publisher's distribution center would accept unsold books within very limited time frames. Large inventory of nonreturnable books could eat up the 20 percent gross margins very quickly.

Mr. Long was also janitor and depended on students to help to keep windows and display cases cleaned during the day. Major janitorial work was done after 5:00 p.m. and into the evenings. The store closed at 1:00 p.m. on Saturdays. Between Saturday afternoon and Monday morning the heavy cleaning, mopping, and waxing had to be completed.

Mr. Long and I became good friends during my short visit. I knew I would be comfortable working with a man older than my father who thought the world of helping black college students at the University of Illinois. He saw us as the future of the black community. I pinched myself and quietly thought, "At last I have found a working-class man, a janitor no less, who wants to help young black males get through college." We spent the morning talking about the bookstore and what was expected of me. Mr. Long introduced me to the Cunninghams, and he got approval on the spot to hire me in the fall. By all standards, the visit and job hunt was a success. Getting that job changed the course of my personal development forever.

In the afternoon, I visited the Alpha House and met a stellar group of Alphas: Alex Poinsett, Carl Brown, Kidd Moore, Roland Stewart, Joe Blackwell, and Robert Norwood. Homer Chavez, the chapter advisor, had informed them of my visit and they had hastily made arrangement for me to spend the night at the Alpha House as a guest. There weren't many black students coming to Champaign-Urbana by way of Navy Pier. They seemed to have been glad to have me and I was happy to be there. Meanwhile, I expecting to see Doris and Cynthia before the afternoon was over to tour the campus. That evening I also planned to go to the AKA House as Doris's date.

In one fell swoop, I was introduced to fraternity life, found an on-campus job, dated the girl that I was going to marry, and toured the University of Illinois campus. I felt personally enriched and gratified. At last I had made it to an outstanding university on my own terms.

Transferring to Champaign-Urbana

During the summer of '49, I worked as much as I could at the bag factory. My goal was to save about $100 toward a $40 per semester tuition bill, $30 dollars a semester for rooming expense, and $30 dollars toward books and supplies. If I could cover the first semester from savings, I could cover the second semester from working at the bookstore and possible meal jobs. I wrote Mr. Long that I would come to Champaign on or before the first of September. That would give me about two weeks to get settled before school registration.

When I arrived in Champaign, I found a letter waiting for me at the Alpha House declaring that I was an out-of-state student and my tuition was $80 per semester rather than $40, and it was all due at the time of registration. To get a loan, I had to have a co-signer or parents participation. Having neither, I was sent directly to the registrar's office and, as luck would have it, I was sent to see Mr. Grossman, who was in charge of the admissions office. I went in with a chip on my shoulder, angry at a university policy that denied me (the great Mr. Wilson!) the official privilege of being a state

student, when in fact I had struggled to survive for three years in Chicago to get there. (Never mind that I was still not 21 and not emancipated from my parents!) He was obviously a man sensitive to students' perceptions of rights and wrongs. It was clear to both of us as I cooled down that I had come to crossroads in my effort to liberate myself from a tough education situation. I needed to find a way to get a loan without getting my parents involved or dropping out of school. With wet eyes and a sense of defeat, I asked, "What can I do? I can't ask my parents to help — they don't have it!" He could see through the tears that I was serious about my plight and my father and mother's situation. I would never take bread away from my brothers and sisters.

The truth of my parents' situation was very daunting. Dad and Mom were making less than $50 a week in Mississippi with two new babies in the house. I had just become the big brother of twin boy babies, Terry and Jerry Wilson, in 1947. At the same time, I was not about to go back to Chicago for help. I had moved on from life in the Black Belt. My pride would not allow me to go back to Chicago to look for financial assistance.

Mr. Grossman quickly offered me a temporary loan to cover not only tuition but also books. As I recall, he asked, "What kind of grades do you have?" I said, "About a B average for the school year 1948–1949." After I completed the temporary loan application, he pushed an application for university scholarships into my hands and said, "Fill this out and return it to me by tomorrow morning. We are having a scholarship meeting this week; maybe the Scholarship Committee can give you a grant to cover tuition." In four days, my cash-flow disaster was resolved. I was awarded a scholarship of $225 to cover tuition, fees, books, and boarding expense for each of the remaining three years of my undergraduate education, beginning with the fall semester of '49. That tidy and timely little sum of money was the difference between having and not having the financial capacity to

stay in school. Thanks to Mr. Grossman, who I later learned was chairman of the scholarship committee.

Crossing Learning Venues in Champaign-Urbana

Champaign was the heartland of a very rich agricultural region. With a large inflow of federal agricultural subsidies in place, Champaign became a major corn- and meat- producing center. Wealthy farmers and agricultural corporations held major sway in Springfield, particularly in higher-education matters. Champaign and other small towns in rural Illinois created a "downstate" power base that fought to protect a rural way of life through conservative leadership. You didn't need to be a Nobel Laureate to understand that the budget of the university would be safe and well protected as long as the university protected the values and social mores of downstate interests. Champaign and Urbana were segregated towns, and the situation was not going to change soon. Urbana had more of the post–World War II faculty and at best could be thought of as more open to change if it had to come. Covert discrimination was practiced on campus, and overt discrimination was practiced in the towns of Champaign-Urbana. The university was tied to the politics of local state legislature leaders and prepared to make few if any policies that would antagonize them.

Acting to protect its long-term image of conservatism, the university allowed learning through unrestrictive student interaction to be tainted by segregation and discriminatory practices in the towns of Champaign and Urbana.

Housing for black student was not available except in designated black housing units owned and operated by black Greek organizations. The Kappa, Alpha, and AKA houses were independent and black owned. The university not only refused to challenge community practices of housing discrimination, but it mirrored such practices in its university-owned dormitories.

Campus housing authorities refused to enforce nondiscrimination in university-approved housing. The university was intricately tied to apartment owners to meet its housing shortages. Not having dorm space for many of its students, the university collaborated with private homes and rental companies to provide undergraduates and graduate students with independent housing. Housing standards were prescribed and regulated by the university, but ownership remained in the hands of private individuals or corporations. The power of the university to influence housing practices stemmed from its capacity to regulate and approve housing on a "rating" scale from A to C. Failure to achieve a rating of A, B, or C resulted in disqualification and generally fewer applications. Both landlords and students responded to the rating system. It was a loosely regulated housing environment with the university as the 2,000-pound bear.

Even if the power to regulate housing off campus was not absolute, positive steps through "moral suasion" and coercion could have made a difference in the learning environments available to less than 200 black students in an overall enrollment of over 20,000. But even more damaging was the university's own in-house practice of using subterfuge to sanction discrimination against black students.

An even larger source of barriers to healthy student interaction was the overt discrimination in restaurants, theatres, and personal-service shops. Discriminating practices in movie houses persisted until 1946, just three years before I arrived. There were over 65 restaurants in Champaign-Urbana that discriminated against blacks in one form of service or another.

Failing to promote and to encourage positive student interaction on a campus-wide scale did not allow the multicultural student environment to realize its full potential as a learning venue. In retrospect, I believe that the failure to generate responsive and caring student learning venues in major white-dominated universities during the fifties paved the way for nonresponsive leadership in urban America during the sixties.

Blacks, like me, from inner-city, low-income America needed to learn about the complexities of community growth and development through interactions with students from other cultures. At the same time, other groups needed to be more open to blacks about problems they were facing in establishing their own identity. Jewish students, for example, were not the homogenous, overachieving stereotypes projected in social circles. There were average Jewish students, sons of retail store merchants, sometimes inner-city hardware stores, coming to college in search of career opportunities to move ahead in life beyond their birthright. I became friends with one such student in Pi Lambda Phi. There were also Jewish students from New York following the family dream of become a doctor with the hope of easing into scholarly research without suffering from the slings and arrows of an ambitious family wanting them to make it big on 5th Avenue in New York City. And there were Jews financially well off, liberal, but determined to become corporate CEOs and entrepreneurs in open competition; they were determined to end "quotas" in corporate America's executive hiring. These sons and daughters of the Jewish Diaspora did not want to be relegated to their "own" companies and country clubs.

There were white students from the heartland of agriculture seeking to become social workers, psychologists, and public policy administrators in large cities. They brought a different perspective to social policy, having seen farmers benefit from family and business subsidy programs. I remember deep and penetrating discussions after my agricultural economics class with such students. Looking back, the university's resistance to open housing on campus prevented this type of debate and discussion on a broader scale. Issues of social and economic policy cutting across "downstate" and "upstate" public interests could have provided a useful framework for social interaction as well as educational growth. As a large campus of diverse students, the U of I needed to promote rather than restrict student interaction at every opportunity to create an open learning venue.

The university further restricted student learning from student-to-student interaction by discriminating in its selection of teaching

assistants (TAs), graduate student counselors, and tutorial staff. There were probably less than five black TAs on the entire teaching staff. There were no black student counselors in the dean of student's office. The special flavor of having an opportunity to pursue undergraduate learning in a graduate environment was lost as a result of the university's barriers to creative interactions between undergraduates and graduate students.

In retrospect, black students and the entire student learning environment suffered from the failure of the University of Illinois to confront overt and covert racial discrimination. Black students had to be creative in cutting across the many learning venues at the university to fully exploit learning opportunities.

College Life and Greek Organizations

The Alpha House became a home and support system for me. Indeed, it was a great learning venue for me because of its original goals as an organization. Alpha Phi Alpha grew out of the need to offset the loss of fellowship and student bonding in major white universities around the turn of the twentieth century. Black fraternities were primarily about promoting learning and personal development for black students in major white universities. At the Alpha House, many of us worked meal jobs serving white fraternities and sororities in much the same way as the founders of Alpha Phi Alpha. We worked to pursue our educational goals of excellence through creating our own supportive and sometimes isolated social environments.

I fitted in well with the Tau chapter's membership and leaders in the 1949–50 school year. The active membership was mature and highly diverse. Some were coming back to school to finish after dropping out for military service. Others were older guys coming back to school on GI benefits after working for a while. As a group, the brothers and the pledges pursued a wide range of academic interests. Joe Blackwell was majoring in accounting and clearly headed in the direction of business law. Luke Stone, a veteran of the Normandy invasion during World War II, was deeply interested in Germanic languages.

Roland Stewart was headed toward becoming a lawyer and was back at Champaign to complete course requirements to enter law school in Chicago. Kidd Moore, a nephew of Joe Louis's wife, Marva, was majoring in philosophy and religion and planning a career in the Baptist ministry. Carl Brown, a science student, was from Maywood, Illinois. He was a year or so ahead of me. David Snyder was in the School of Architecture and Design, a veteran on the GI bill. Alex Poinsett, a serious writer, was majoring in journalism.

You could always get counseling and advice from fellow fraternity brothers. After discussion with Joe Blackwell, I pretty much decided on attending the College of Commerce and continuing my progress toward a business major. It was very helpful to talk with students already moving down a path of development. Lucius (LJ) Barker was a brilliant student model for me to emulate. He had a lot of character. He was personable, articulate, and full of confidence as a first-year graduate student in political science. He was already graduated with a Bachelors Degree from Southern University, and we were about the same age. Lucius would argue and debate with undergraduates over studying and achieving. He held to high standards of performance. Tau Chapter had the highest undergraduate grade point average for all Greek fraternities at Illinois during the 51--52 academic year. Lucius and Stephen McPherson, an equally brilliant first-year graduate student in zoology, helped us all understand the potential of genuine learning. They set the tone for academic development at the Alpha House.

Contrary to the popular notions of fraternity life, we worked hard at balancing our social and academic lives. The end game was preparing for a very few employment opportunities. Firms, corporations, and even some government agencies were discriminating covertly if not overtly in hiring. If they didn't exclude you on color and race, they scrutinized your record for opportunities to reject you. Returning veterans and alumni brothers presented some hard reality checks for us. The first wave of graduates, often returning to get additional coursework and masters degrees just after the war, shared job-interview experiences with those of us still pursuing undergraduate

degrees. They painted some very discouraging experiences and reminded us that we had to focus and take our academic objectives seriously.

Some of my greatest learning experiences occurred during the summers. The Alpha House provided housing for returning faculty members from black colleges during summers. Black colleges were under pressure to increase the number of faculty with PhDs to maintain accreditation by college and university accreditation agencies. Well-established black faculty found themselves taking coursework during the summers to meet coursework requirements for the PhD. Once the coursework was completed, they would take leaves of absence, often without pay, to complete preliminary examinations and begin dissertations. Most of the faculty had to leave families behind. On the average, most of the faculty members took from four to seven years to obtain a PhD after getting a masters degree. This was not something unique to blacks. White faculty members too were coming back to finish PhD degrees. White returning faculty, however, did not face bleak housing and on-campus employment situations. There were no teaching jobs at the instructor's level for black faculty. Moreover, many returning black faculty had pre-teenage children in middle schools where social development and education were intricately tied together, and they faced major huddles in family housing and neighborhood living in Champaign-Urbana.

Some black faculty faced tough political situations on black campuses where presidents ran universities like plantations. They had absolute control over budgets, appointments, and departmental operations. If you didn't have a PhD and wanted to teach, you were constantly on the move and your family had to live on the margins in a constant state of flux. On the other hand, If you had a PhD in your field, you had a lot of leverage. Tenure and salary could be demanded, blunting the power of presidents.

The Alpha House was a meeting place for black graduate students during the summer. Graduate students from different black

universities could meet and share experiences as well as socialize. I gained a deeper understanding of the South and the painful struggle to maintain class and status. I gained insight into faculty struggles taking place in black colleges and the woeful shortage of black leadership. Sometimes I would become chastising and obnoxious about the way that visiting black faculty appeared to be accepting conditions in the South. I could be militant and hard when discussions about the South would arise. I had to learn that my views could be morally justified but not always practical for black men with families and commitments. When I got out of hand, Emmit Bashful, a natural leader and former captain in the army during World War II, would pull me aside quietly and help me return to earth. I recall him saying, "Chuck, you have a lot of fire in your belly. But you cannot succeed unless you get control of yourself and respect others." I listened, because I wanted to succeed. Emmit Bashful completed his degree and became a very successful college administrator. He organized and developed the Southern University Campus at New Orleans.

Summers were great times to contemplate the future and rejuvenate both intellectually and physically. Generally I focused on playing tennis and working on campus. Being on campus over the entire year made me an attractive candidate for running the Alpha House. I became house manager in 1950 after being initiated into Alpha Phi Alpha and worked hand-in-hand with Homer Chavez. In the regular school year, I fired the house furnace and oversaw household operations. For providing these services, I received free housing and a small stipend. Having that additional employment gave me more financial security. I often thought to myself and thanked my father for teaching us how to work. "Don't let the sun shine on your butt in bed" was his call to action.

In the fall of '50, I was well established and posed to take off as a business and economics student. I worked every angle possible to get exposure in study groups of bright and competitive students. I had a streak of luck in the spring of 1950 when I followed my own rule: Never take a TA's quiz section of a lecture-driven course if you can

get the lecturing professor. E. T. Weiller, professor of economics, not only lectured, but also served as professor-in-charge of freshman and sophomore courses in the department of economics. He was a young full professor on the move, recruited by Dean Howard Bowen. I got lucky and literally set the curve in all sections of the Principles of Economics course. My final score was 20 points ahead of the next-highest grade in any of the sections. Over 150 students were enrolled in the spring session. E. T. Weiller thought that I displayed unusual analytic ability in economics. With his encouragement, I majored in economics and began a long journey toward graduate work. We became friends: student and sponsor. The fact that we both loved tennis cemented our relations further. Through him I got to meet other professors in the College of Commerce who were good tennis players. Among that group were Bob Mautz, a very famous professor of accounting, and Don Paden, who later became chairman of my doctorate dissertation committee. I was now entering a new learning venue.

Black students generally shunned economics as it was taught and developed in the College of Commerce. It tended to serve as the "core science" for business majors and stressed a lot of institutional and industrial economics. Professors of transportation, public utilities, labor, and finance were tied into consulting and business development interests. Undergraduates who majored in economics and marketing, finance, and management leveraged those backgrounds into good entry-level jobs in business. There were no entry-level jobs in marketing and management, for example, before 1955 for black undergraduates. New York Life Insurance Company "broke the ice" to recruit Carrillo McSween, an all-big-ten track star at the University of Illinois. Carrillo wasn't even a business major. I knew one other student in economics, Art Waters. We became good friends as he pursued his bachelors and masters degrees. Art was his own person, bright and personable, but seemed to have been more interested in bridge and skiing than economics at that time. He was a good friend to know, but educationally he marched to tunes of his own drummer.

Being located in the College of Business sent a different kind of message about economics as a social science major and elective. Economics centered in the College of Letters and Sciences was just one of several social science disciplines. The role of economics as a policy science and study of human behavior was just beginning to emerge in the early fifties. Economics was the high science of the College of Commerce. It shaped and guided the intellectual contents of marketing, management, insurance, finance, and transportation.

As I become a more "sure-footed" academic, I began to look at sociology and history as fields of interests. But like most business majors, we all hung around the College of Commerce taking courses geared to preparing us for the front lines of business.

As I reflect on economics as an undergraduate major, its greatest contribution was providing frameworks for rigorous thinking. There was a growing gap between the theoretical frameworks of economics and their relevance for business and government problem solving. The impacts of "busts" or "booms" in economic business cycles placed heavy burdens on both businesses and households. Markets were far from perfect, and there was an increasing feeling among businesses that aggressive marketing and internal resource management could make a difference in stabilizing revenues and getting bigger shares of markets. Economists on the forefront of policy change were gradually easing away from the dominant thinking of microeconomists, the worldly philosophers.

Settling Down For a Hard Life Ahead

In the spring of '51, I became acutely aware of the danger of being drafted. Things were heating up on the Korean Peninsula, and draft boards were giving students in their senior-year 3A classifications. I had purposely registered at Draft Board # 57 on Ogden Avenue near Roosevelt Road. The neighborhood was changing, and very few blacks on the West Side were going to college under a 2S deferment. But Doris, then my fiancée, and I didn't want to take a chance of having a draft board stop my momentum as a student.

Of more importance, she and I had become very good friends and were deeply in love. She was one of the smartest women on campus, and we made a great, hard-working team. She would come by the bookstore almost every day in the spring and go to an early dinner with me at the local Greek Restaurant, one of the few restaurants with a nondiscriminatory policy. After keeping me company while I ate, she would rush to the AKA House and have dinner with her sorority sisters. In the evenings, I would meet her at the main library and walk her home. Around periods of finals, we would not see each other at all. It was getting hard to leave each other; I wanted to get married and so did she. We look at the numbers and thought we could make it as married couple, both pursuing full-time degrees.

By the spring of '51, I was working at the bookstore and really getting paid for 35 to 40 hours week when in fact I worked about 20 hours. Mr. Long treated me like a son, and I watched over him like a father. I would do the heavy work including waxing hallways and offices on my knees as he had been doing for 15 or 20 years. In the winter, I fired the building furnace, which served the quarter-of-a-block-long building that housed the bookstore and second-floor office suites. It was a massive furnace "stoking" and cleaning job. In the heart of the winter, over a ton and half of coal per day would be burned, and the leftover "clinkers" would have be carried 15 feet upstairs from a basement, bucket by- bucket. In addition to the hours, Mr. Long got the U of I Supply Store to pay me a stipend of $40 dollars per month for handling the furnace. Only a few star black athletes had a better and bigger deal than I.

Moreover, both Doris and I were on full tuition and housing scholarships. We felt that with my bookstore job, she could work a couple of hours in the student union and get us over the top. We got married in a one-day ceremony with Doris's mother and aunt present at the office of a justice of the peace. It wasn't what we wanted, but it had to happen that way.

When we announced we were getting married, all hell broke loose in Chicago. Doris's father refused to speak me, but we got married

anyway. Of course, that anger quickly passed as we moved lockstep toward our degrees.

We faced our first big test looking for housing as a married couple. I was surprised to find that some of the black families in Champaign really exploited the housing situation. You had to pay through the nose for substandard housing. We finally settled for a one-bedroom place carved from attic space. We didn't care. We were too busy being in love and planning for graduate school.

Doris decided to switch from political science to elementary education. She had great language and communication skills and felt that she could be a first-rate language and reading specialist for young children. While she switched majors, I dug deeper into economics. That year was the beginning of wonderful partnership that was critical to my career development.

Going to Graduate School

Graduate school is at the top of creative and quality of learning opportunities. Great universities are built and destroyed by the quality of graduate faculties and students. I looked at an offer of a TA (teaching assistant) appointment in economics at Syracuse University, but we had too much invested in relationships and income earning opportunities at Illinois. Moreover, there were greater opportunities to be on the forefront of economics advancements at the University of Illinois.

Howard Bowen, a mover and shaker in economics circles, was appointed by President George Stoddard to develop a quality college of business by bringing in new faculty on the cutting edge of business research, marketing, and economics. He moved fast and decisively, minimizing the role of some of the older and entrenched professors, who at best were textbook writers and did little if any quality research. Howard Bowen had Stoddard's permission to bring in faculty with quality research in place. He appointed Everett Hagen as head of the economics department, who recruited bright

young scholars in macroeconomics. Among his appointments were John Due, Franco Modigliani, Robert Ferber, and Robert Eisner. The Bureau of Economic Research under the leadership of V. Lewis Bassie was focused on economic policy: consumer behavior, production planning, and full employment. As I recall, these were all areas where the "new economics" of Lord Keynes was raising more relevant questions than traditional classical economics. Bob Eisner and Franco Modigliani were looking at railroad shippers' forecasts as predictors of ups and downs in short-term aggregate economic changes. Bob Ferber, a mathematician and economist, was looking at the behavior of consumers and the implications for aggregate or macroeconomics. There were still fears about a deep economic downturns and the consequences of large-scale unemployment. Most of the modern economists thought that government-planned fiscal policies held the answers. V. Lewis Bassie, successful in forecasting oncoming recessions in pre–World War II periods, was absolutely convinced that the country was headed toward another depression as it roared to new heights from the pinup consumer demand after World War II. Of course, it never happened.

Meanwhile, Howard Bowen was placing increasing pressure on unproductive professors such a Ralph Blodgett, an anti-communist faculty leader in the eyes of "downstate" legislators and key political leaders. Local newspapers, the *Chicago Tribune*, and popular magazines such as *Time* turned Bowen's effort to build a first-rate college into a personal struggle between Bowen and Blodgett. It was billed as an ideological struggle between "classical" and "Keynesian" economists. As I reflect, it was really about errors in judgment on the part of Bowen and Blodgett. Howard Bowen misjudged the winds of change and move too decisively against Blodgett, whom he felt should have left without a fight. Blodgett used the politics of the board of trustees and a few threatened colleagues in the college to fan the flames of fear.

The struggle ended in Howard Bowen being fired, a major loss to the rebuilding effort of the university. Bowen's credibility was restored in later years through his work at the Claremont University and college

complex on the West Coast. Blodgett left for Florida, where he later retired. Some of the newly recruited and leading-edge faculty left with Bowen. Both Bob Eisner and Franco Modigliani left for Northwestern. All of this happened within my first year, 1952–53, in graduate school. I was personally hurt by the departure of Modigliani and Eisner. I had been assigned to Bob and Franco as a research assistant (RA) during the summer of '52.

Classical vs. Keynesian Economics

The Howard Bowen fiasco was a lose-lose situation for the economics department of the University of Illinois. It took 10 years for the economics department to get beyond the negative perceptions and labels of that event. The lost of Bob Eisner and Franco Modigliani was more personal for me than to many students. I was working with projects in business and public policy. In addition, the field research efforts of Ferber, Eisner, and Bassie was getting me into statistics and research methodology.

As I reflect back on the purportedly classical and Keynesian conflict, there wasn't a conflict as such. Students of macroeconomics came to the table with an empirical, problem-solving orientation. The economics policy failures of the 1930s left deep scars on the reputations of both liberal and conservative policy wonks. At Illinois, there was no love lost between many our conservative and liberal teachers. Joe McConnell, one of my favorite liberal professors, used to openly ridicule conservative economic principles. He would ask, "How can you buy into a body of economic theory that justifies one-third of the labor force unemployed in the middle of the Great Depression by arguing that unions and workers were asking higher than market wage rates?" Sarcastically, he would conclude, "Then all of the workers in the hundreds of soup lines in Chicago, Detroit, and New York could be fully employed if they were willing to take lower wages, right?" Indeed, classical economists did argue that the ups and downs in the marketplace were short-term adjustments that worked in the long run to correct the pricing of labor wages, capital costs, and products in a truly competitive marketplace to ensure full use of

the entire supply of workers, capital, and products. But such classical economic predictions were deductive and tightly derived economic dictums. They were not intended to offer directions for policy interventions. Classical economic advocates strongly argued that the marketplace was self-regulating and did not need government intervention. My socioeconomic thinking has always been tied to advocates of government interventions. Government intervention, however, did heed some of the pricing concerns that classical economics expressed as New Deal programs were implemented. There were elements of both classical and Keynesian ideology that were relevant for developing policies to improve the economic well-being of our country.

What made Keynesian economists a breath of fresh air were the humanistic undertones of public policy advocacy. Simply put, "We cannot allow the uncertainties of economic systems to dictate the quality of life for economic players... consumers, workers, firms, and government agencies. We need to get a handle on ways to predict, forecast, and deal with the uncertainties and dynamics of economic marketplaces." Universities such as Illinois and Michigan were at the forefront of understand and forecasting consumer and business behavior. President Roosevelt had brought some of the brightest economists into government and given them major sway in designing federal spending projects. We will never know whether Mr. Roosevelt's New Deal would have brought the country through the second depression of 1937–39. But we do know that government intervention did much to reduce the level of suffering brought on by unemployment during the Great Depression. World War II began, revved up the demand for manpower, and eliminated the vast underemployed manufacturing and agricultural capacities of the country, and it may have saved us all from the misery of further economic struggles.

Keynesian economists gave macroeconomics a major place in economic departments; teachers and students of macroeconomics were bold and unabashed about commitments to develop theories of economic behavior that would allow firms, consumers, and

government to deal with the vast uncertainties of the marketplace and control the quality of life for everyone. I was lucky and privileged to have been associated with the Bureau of Economic Research. Howard Bowen provided institutional resources and support to Robert Ferber to spearhead major research on consumer behavior, to V. Lewis Bass to support and stimulate the embryonic field of economic forecasting, and to Franco Modigliani and Robert Eisner for empirical inquiries in the railroad shippers' forecasts. The modern fields of marketing research and strategic planning have deeper roots in the economic behavioral research of Robert Ferber and Franco Modigliani.

The Bureau of Economic Research awarded me a research assistantship. RAs and TAs were seldom given to blacks. As an RA, I received $1,800 per year for the full year. In 1952, there were still less than a half dozen black TAs and RAs on the entire University of Illinois campus.

Bob Eisner and Franco Modigliani took a special interest in my development in the summer of 1952 before leaving. It was Bob Eisner's personal intervention that changed faculty/staff housing policy toward black graduate fellows, TAs, and RAs in the Green Street faculty/staff housing complex in Urbana.

I learned from a fellow student that he and his wife were breaking up and that their apartment could be available through a sublease if I could get someone to go up front and help me make a deal through the dean's office. Bob Eisner without hesitation went directly to the Dean Green's personal secretary and asked that I be put on the waiting list, and that I, his RA staff member, be allowed to enter into a sublease agreement during the summer. We both gambled that the dean would opt to keep rather than evict me from the apartment. An eviction would send the apartment back to the pool for some other dean's waiting list. With all the noise being made about housing discrimination, it was not an option for Dean Green to replace a black RA.

We remained the only blacks in the faculty/staff apartments, 1107 W. Green, until Ed Twine, a fraternity brother and law school fellow, and his wife were assigned an apartment during the next year. To my knowledge, we were the only two black families in the faculty/staff apartments during my four years as a graduate student. The policy was changed, but there were no black staff, faculty, or fellows living in the apartments.

Hanging out with Franco Modigliani and Robert Eisner provided a rare glimpse of truly great men at work. They were personable and exceedingly hard workers. As a matter of staying on course, they would easily work 12-hour days. They became very productive economists. Franco Modigliani became a Nobel Laureate in Economics and president of the American Economics Associations. Bob Eisner became president of the American Economics Association and remained at Northwestern for his entire professional career. Outstanding graduate learning venues are places where creative differences of faculty are nurtured. Every effort in great universities is made to promote such an environment.

Finishing Graduate Work

Having witnessed the personal difficulties of fellow graduate students returning to school to complete coursework or write dissertations after taking leaves, I knew that I had to complete my PhD before leaving the campus. Black graduate students entering the job market were doomed to teaching at second-rate colleges or government work without a conferred degree. At black colleges without a completed PhD, I would have been at the mercy of black college presidents, who were notorious for taking advantage of black faculty without PhDs. Given the scarcity of black PhDs in the social sciences, I became convinced early on that a PhD in economics at a young age would give me a rare competitive advantage in the marketplace. Given the princely status of economists, you looked smarter and more promising. Going straight through a graduate program without stopping for a masters degree would be risky, but the payoffs would be worth it. I was encouraged to do so by James Chastain, a fellow

graduate student from Jackson, Mississippi. Jim, a veteran of World War II, decided to come back to Illinois to complete a PhD after teaching at one of the colleges in Mississippi. He gave pep talks all the time about getting in there and completing my courses. He suggested a kind of "Go-Go" heuristic for going straight through the PhD program:

1. Starting in your first year, get the language requirements out of the way. Don't consider stopping for a masters; it has little market value.

2. Take a beginning course in French for a half term, drop out, and get yourself a tutor to prepare you for the examination. (He gave me the name of the best tutor on campus.) Remember that it's economics, not French, that you are trying to get through!

3. Follow up with German if you pass your French language requirement; there are some carryover learning benefits. Take a half term of German and get a tutor. Take the exam as often as necessary. Treat it like a barrier to your degree. Requiring languages for degrees is obsolete. Don't waste your time trying to change the inevitable.

4. Take your preliminary exams as close to the end of your coursework as possible. Your pool of knowledge will be fresh.

5. Don't try to write a great treatise in economics. Work with your thesis committee to complete a competent document.

Following Jim's advice, I started my run toward the PhD. Doris and I disciplined our lives to make finishing my degree everything. We never entertained the notion of having children despite having a number of married friends with growing families. In that respect we weren't alone in deferring children, particularly in staff/faculty housing. Many of the married couples with husbands or wives pursuing PhDs in the sciences deferred have children until the

completion of the degree was in sight. It was quite common for PhD candidates in chemistry to complete coursework and a dissertation in four full years or less. Carved-out research papers from the sponsoring faculty's research grants was the key to that success. Like many of our neighbors in the apartments, Doris and I planned to have children when my degree completion was in sight.

Having supportive graduate-student peers made a difference. While preparing for the written preliminary examinations and writing my dissertation, I became a member of a very select group of graduate students. Robert Robertson and I enter graduate school together. Tom Winslow was nearing the end of his dissertation and preparing to go to Oberlin College, where he later became president. Ted Worland was working on his dissertation. Ed Sussna was completing his dissertation. He became a distinguished professor at the Graduate School of Business at the University of Pittsburgh and played a central role in revamping the business-policy curriculum. We have remained best friends for the past 55 years. Phil Carroll, of Ohio State, was working on his dissertation. Cecil Mackey, who became a university president in Michigan and Florida, was completing his dissertation, and we lived in the same building of the faculty/staff apartments. Those of us at the dissertation stage hung out in the main library where we had contiguous work spaces assigned for study and research. Arnie Weber, who later became dean, Graduate School of Industrial Administration, at Carnegie Tech and president of Northwestern, then a graduate student in labor relations in the Institute of Labor and Industrial Relations at the U of I, used to come by and hang with us. About ten o'clock each morning in the student dining area of Newman Hall, we all gathered for coffee to talk about nothing in particular, but no topic was sacred. It was time for bonding, fellowship, and prognostics about the state of the world. We got to know each other on a personal level. My perspective on many challenging problems was greatly enriched by the friendly debates and interactions of that group.

PhD candidates participate in a highly specialized learning venue. Sometimes a handful of graduate students and several professors

create major breakthroughs in fields. Sharing and collaborations between students and faculty were intricate parts of the learning process. Research assignments tended to buttress and strengthen the contributions of graduate courses. Moreover, I was able to learn from exposures to the research initiatives of Bob Ferber and Marvin Frankel, faculty appointments to the Bureau of Economic Research. Even though I disliked being barred from TA assignments because of race discrimination, my appointment as an RA accelerated the development of a capacity to undertake investigations and complete research in a timely manner. As I remember, my first assignment from Marvin Frankel was to research price fixing and pricing behavior by Gimbles and Macy's. They were engaged in a price war where they were cutting "fair-trade" prices, a holdover from the New Deal years. The research addressed a major contemporary issue: Should there be government intervention or laws prescribing pricing behavior? Are there public interest issues at stake? What are they? That investigation allowed me to identity and pursue in depth a whole array of journals, popular magazines, research investigations, and major newspapers.

Marvin Frankel had completed several papers in the general area of production and resource allocations and assigned me the tasks of preparing preliminary updated bibliographies with commentary. An idea for my dissertation came from one of my research assignments. Unselfishly, Marvin Frankel worked with me to redefine my idea into a feasible topic and outline for the dissertation.

As I moved toward taking my preliminary exams, it became clear to me that unless I could devote full time to writing a dissertation, I would not reach my target of graduation by September of 1956, four years beyond my bachelor's degree. I immediately began to look around for dissertation support. Paul Brown, professor of biology at Southern University, contacted me as he was preparing to return to Southern. Flat out, without reservations, he said, "Here is Charles Jones's address. I have recommended you as the caliber of graduate student who could finish a dissertation in one year."

With that recommendation, I received a grant of $2,200 with a small expense allowance for one year, starting in August 1955. If the grant had not come through I was prepared to work as an RA with Doris, then pregnant with our son, Chuck, accepting an offer for a full-time position with the Champaign school system in the spring of '56. We were going to complete that degree before leaving campus, come hell or high water. However, with the Whitney Opportunity Fellowship, once again an unanticipated source of support came to my rescue. Doris stayed home, took care of our newborn son, and typed drafts of chapters and statistical appendices of my dissertation. She also became pregnant with our second child. I finished my dissertation on time, in September 1956. Having completed my bibliography and a good share of the statistical analysis during the summer of '55 before starting the fellowship made a difference. I was in a different place. In terms of time required to complete a dissertations, RAs clearly had an edge.

Finding a Job

I pretty much limited the scope of acceptable jobs by refusing to consider any black college appointments. We simply were not ready to live in the South. I had too many emotional scars from growing up in Mississippi. By the spring of '55, I was rapidly moving toward either a teaching position in a small college or a staff economist position on a research team in the corporate offices of a major corporation. I had become very conscious of the growing power of research and research experience in advancing careers. Even if I only worked for three to five years as a research economist, I could develop a competitive edge in future academic employment. It became clear to me as I applied for teaching and research positions that I was going to face major discrimination.

It was a matter of choosing my fight. Looking at the economics of teaching versus research in corporate America, I chose to challenge corporate America's hiring practices. I prepared over 90 resumes for distribution directly to presidents or CEOs, presenting myself as a business economist looking for a position in economic forecasting

or planning. After all, I had over three years of experience with some of the top economists in business research. Doris and I debated whether I should send pictures ("I am a Negro") or let the corporations pay to see and interview me. We decide to send some resumes with pictures (a common practice in the fifties) and some without pictures. As a first effort, the Graduate Student Placement Officer wrote the American Airline Pilots Association, a union in search of an economist to carry out business research and market forecasting, and forwarded my resume to facilitate an appointment in Chicago. They enthusiastically invited me for an interview. When I entered the executive offices, they looked at me and immediately dismissed me by saying, "There is a mistake, and we have no such position available." I pulled out the announcement for the position and a copy of the placement officer's letter with my resume. After fumbling around, the head staff person in the office suggested that I wait until the vice president of personnel returned. He retorted, "We will get this matter cleared up." After I waited two hours, the vice president, who had obviously been briefed on the fact that I was a qualified black, came out of his executive office. He confirmed the early response of his management staff, "That position has been withdrawn because it conflicts with some other positions." Then he remarked, "If something comes along that fits your qualifications, we will call you." I reported back to the graduate student placement officer. He was livid and enraged by the shabby treatment that a union had given me. He tried several times to contact Walter Reuther's office to protest. Coming from a union-leadership family, he couldn't believe my encounter with the Airline Pilots Association. To my knowledge they never apologized for the behavior of the staff and vice president. To this day, the Airline Pilots Union has consistently denied qualified blacks equal opportunities to be pilots and top-level union executives.

Eastman Kodak was clever and less obvious in rejecting me for a position. The manager of the forecasting group had written a letter to the Bureau of Business and Economic Research outlining a new position. They were looking for a PhD in economics. The inquiry explicitly stated that "no prior experience is necessary." Don Streeter,

a fellow RA, wrote Eastman Kodak and indicated that he had not completed his degree but that I was interested and would be available. I sent a resume without a picture, and they invited me to come to Rochester, New York. Doris and I were reasonably sure that the issue of race would not be a major barrier in upstate New York. As I recall, I took a Capital Airline flight to Rochester and arrived at the airport with the department head there to meet me. When I introduced myself, he turned pale as a sheet. As we drove to his offices, he gave me a quick tour of the company's headquarters. We arrived to a waiting group of about four more young staff-officer types. I was introduced, and the manager and the staff asked me to excuse them for a few minutes. They met for at least two hours and returned. We had coffee and arranged for lunch. I was really grilled and interviewed as if they were going to hire me. After lunch, I was showed some of the work and models developed by the economic staff and invited to comment. It was a nice give-and-take discussion. Before heading for the airport, I shook hands with the staff and talked about further meetings.

The manager of the department walked me to my gate and cordially began to discuss the group's decision. They liked my background and experience but "they knew that I would not be happy working with the team." Moreover the job search for the team member would be suspended for the time being. Obviously, they quickly recovered from the shock of having a competent black applying for the position and agreed not to hire me early in the interview. Eastman Kodak managers and executive were obviously well schooled. Their "good ole boy" system of closed hiring was executed in a manner to cover up racial biases. We were disappointed but decided to continue to press my case regardless of the odds.

Dow Chemical's response to my aggressive recruitment efforts was even more convoluted and organized. They were looking for a research economist to participate in marketing research. Scholars like Bob Ferber placed marketing research at the center of developing and expanding markets. They encouraged manufacturers to focus on consumer decision making; measuring the impact of advertising,

product designs and packaging, and brand identity. That emphasis created an expanding demand for economists who as a rule were better trained in applying advanced quantitative and analytical techniques to marketing issues. Dow Chemical's corporate marketing department approached me about becoming a member of a newly formed research evaluation team at corporate headquarters. It was organized to facilitate policy reviews and decentralized marketing initiatives at regional offices.

I submitted my resume without a picture. The marketing VP sensed something different about my profile and called me. He asked me if I were a Canadian or "American Indian" and suggested that we ought to meet and have dinner on his next trip to Chicago. Instead of inviting me to Chicago, he came to Champaign-Urbana, about 150 miles out of his way. He arranged a dinner at the best restaurant in Urbana where, of course, few blacks were encouraged to dine. He started off by raising questions about my home background, my club memberships, and hobbies because, as he pointed out, these were as important as my economic and research skills. We talked about Dow Chemical and its plans for expansion. In the middle of the conversation, he asked for a wine list and suggested that we have an expensive bottle of French wine. He responded to the list, "What type of red wine would you prefer?" I suggest that he select the red. Obviously, he came down to put me in "my place." At the end of our evening, he thanked me for having dinner with him and indicated that I would be hearing from the marketing department. I knew that I would never hear from him or Dow Chemical ever again. He came all the way to Champaign to protect the public image of the corporation, not to interview me for the job. He tried to tell me that I wasn't ready to be in the corporate world, that I was different because I didn't have the "upper-class breeding" for the job. That made no difference to my drive. I was accustomed to being rejected because of being black and from low-income black status. This time I had the upper hand — I was smart and ready to make the leap into his corporate world. He did, however, pique my interest in getting exposed to the full benefits of corporate America, including accessing

quality wines. Doris and I were disappointed but undaunted. That had to be at least one opportunity out there in corporate America.

I did get a job offer from the U.S. State Department to work with an economic task force in Brazil, South America. The job would have been a five-year assignment. Doris and I both felt that such a job would bury me and I would have very little chance of finding a job in the private sector with essentially a blank portfolio at the end of five-year contract. Most of the work would have been highly classified. Similarly, I had an offer to work with an economic planning firm doing most of the planning of the West Side (Division) freeway expansion in Chicago. But I was hell-bent on crashing executive suites. My priority was to enter corporate America. I continued to work on my dissertation. The more I was rejected, the harder I pushed to complete my dissertation. I was fighting back with an "in-your-face" determination.

One of my letters was sent to the office of the president of Commonwealth Edison of Chicago. That letter had a resume with a picture. Doris felt that the top management of the company ought to be very sensitive about rejecting a "Negro" who had made it from the Black Belt. My fight and determination to compete and make it out of the Black Belt was a major asset, not a liability. She felt that corporate America needed me. Val Leister of the corporate personnel office called and asked if I was interested in a position with Commonwealth Edison. They had reviewed my resume and were impressed with my background. This was the first openly positive response that I had received. Most of the responses made subjective evaluations: "you are overly qualified for the position"; "you wouldn't be happy with us"; "we are not quite ready to bring someone aboard with your qualification; but let's keep in touch." Some of these were responses to avoid hiring a black, others were responses to the unknown qualities of having a PhD aggressively seek them out. Later I learned from Ray Lewis of the Chicago Urban League that one of my professors given as a reference was "killing me softly with his letter of recommendation." It created doubt in the mind of the reader with faint praise.

After responding positively to Commonwealth Edison's invitation for an interview, Ray Lewis assured me that I had made an excellent move. He and the top management had worked hard to find the right person to enter the "executive suite" in the second-largest utility in the country. After a couple of visits to meet with Gordon Corey, vice president of finance, and Tom Ayers, vice president of sales, I was made an offer around the first of September 1956. I became the first black management executive in the history of Commonwealth Edison. Looking back without rage and competitive blindness, becoming a black manager was not an insignificant accomplishment 10 years after leaving the Mississippi Delta.

In the month of September, we had our second child, Joyce. I completed my dissertation and passed my PhD dissertation review and accepted the job with Commonwealth Edison. We faced the hard tasks of reentering the most racial discriminating housing market in all of urban America. Doris and I spent many hours talking about the difficulties that we had to face. We were very schizoid about going back to Chicago. Doris, a native of Chicago, had parents and extended family there, and I had deep ties with lifetime friends from Mississippi. I had come through the hell of under-class living. We wanted a new start for our children, a multicultural environment with few of the struggles and tensions that we have endured for most of our lives. On the upside, having a job paying $6,500 a year was not a bad place to start.

Leaving Champaign-Urbana and Facing a Changing Black World

By 1956, 10 years after leaving Mississippi to demonstrate that blacks could achieve on par with whites if given a fair chance, I had literally moved to the head of the class of young black men who must assume leadership in shaping a new black middle class. Doris and I both recognized that my success was not the product of my initiatives alone. I got to the University of Illinois through a lot of special contribution of other blacks and whites.

I didn't have to go very far to be reminded of the legacy of my parent's generation. Champaign-Urbana was one step removed from the segregated life of Greenville. Public accommodations were open, but a day didn't go by when I wasn't reminded that I may be smarter than most blacks in Champaign, but I was still a black man. Black families in Champaign were living on the margins of the university. They cooked and cleaned the floors of fraternity houses and apartment buildings, worked in the stock rooms of department stores, and occasionally worked on the building and ground crews of the university. Supporting staffs for faculty and administrators were three to one. That meant that hundreds of jobs — plumbers, electricians, carpenters, welders, laboratory specialists, and administrative clerks — should have been open to competition from black residents, but they weren't. Champaign had not changed much during my time at the university.

In the black community there was a culture of passivity. Blacks did not aggressively pursue their interests. In part, this occurred because the best and the brightest of black youths migrated away the area and never returned. Also in part, the city of Champaign had roots deeply tied to the past. Migrating rural blacks from Mississippi, Tennessee, and Louisiana still dominated the expansion of the black community in Champaign. In the 1920s, track-maintenance crews for the rail yards of the Illinois Central heavily influenced the flow of unskilled migrants, unattached and living temporarily, according to Mr. Long. Aspirations to share in Champaign's social and economic success were just beginning to develop.

I still had very deep concerns for inner-city America; I knew how difficult it was to get families to upgrade education opportunities even when given direct help. A case in point was my own family experiences while I attended the university. In the spring of 1953, my father died at 48. It was unexpected; he died of high blood pressure and a massive stroke. My mother wrote me many times about my father's weight problem. He was 6 feet tall and weighed 350 pounds. He worked in his garden and worked as hard as ever, but he just ate too much all of the time. Doris and I suggested that my brother

George, then in the tenth grade, come to Champaign and stay at the Wells House, an all-male, private student facility next door to the Alpha Kappa Alpha House. We would pay for his room. He could attend the University High School of the U of I, a few blocks from the Wells House. We would help him get work after school at the bookstore for a couple of hours to get spending money, and he could study and eat with us, several blocks from the Wells House. George came and studied very hard, and the school made special efforts to help him make the transition from Sacred Heart High School. Being an experimental school they viewed George's success as special, and George did better than average; they were pleased with his progress. We discouraged him from going back to Greenville after that first year. But the call of the lifestyle of Greenville was too great; his peer groups, his brothers, and his family could not relate to the hard work that George was facing to be graduated. George could not fathom the value of an elite university high school education in the context of expectations of others around him. There were subtle pressures from my father's friends not to return. My father's employer and lifelong friend talked about George succeeding my father. They suggested that he finish high school there and they would work him into my father's job. They never discussed the power of education and its ability to give him many other options. I was at a major disadvantage trying to convince my own sibling to break away from the siren calls of the ghettos of Mississippi. George never came back from Mississippi, but he did graduate from high school and later in life went back to a junior college in New Mexico after 10 years of military service to get a certificate in accounting. I thought that I could be a role model for my younger brother. But I could not convince him to stay the course in Champaign, a university environment. What about the youngsters growing up in Champaign without big brothers at the university?

In addition I had other uneasy feelings about my newly found successes. My deep interests in improving conditions for black folk in urban America from the migrating underclass were still close to the surface. Even though everyone marveled at my completion of a PhD in economics, I still felt inadequate to tackle issues of public policy

and community development. I longed for a better understanding of social systems and public-policy models of change. Economics as I learned it was much closer to being a "dismal" rather than "policy" science. I still had deeply unfulfilled intellectual and social problem-solving curiosities.

I was now a new member of a middle-class black society that I didn't quite understand. My under-class background made me suspect of black people who complained about the conditions of black communities but consistently created isolated social worlds that made them appear to be better than others. The posture of being of such a middle class had to be reconciled with the realities of my life's experiences. In reality, all black people have to struggle. If you have more to give, you get out front and make things happen. I thought black fraternity men should be at the head of the crowd in making changes in black communities. I was very pragmatic in dealing with my peers. When classmates came for help, I thought I had a duty to help. Mr. Long and I always found temporary hours of employment to help my black classmates get over financial humps. It was not about being big man on campus; I felt that I had a different calling and other responsibilities. Doris trained as a teaching assistant, working on a masters, in the Champaign school system and was disturbed by the gaps in black children's opportunities to learn and was already beginning to lean toward "activism."

What kind of middle-class family were we going to become? One quality I felt essential was a program of consistent efforts to help peers. My success at the University of Illinois was made possible by the advice and support of Art Waters, Roselle Nesbitt, Emmett Bashful, Paul Brown, and Mr. Horace Long as well as by the rare gifts of support from Mr. Grossman, E. T. Weiller, Marvin Frankel, Robert Ferber, Bob Eisner, and Don Paden. It wasn't always about race as much as about people uniquely caring and willing to act and contribute toward the personal growth of others in need. I learned not to buy into the myth of being a "black Horatio Alger." I worked hard, but my overall success came about though critical help from others. In my last year, I received a good deal of satisfaction from

helping other graduate students, blacks and whites, in business and economics. I coached several students past the graduate economic theory requirements for noneconomics majors. It was all in the spirit of supporting student-to-student learning. I learned with the help of other graduate students, and it was very rewarding to participate in reciprocating initiatives. That was one of the highlights of a graduate learning venue.

But my difficulty in developing a black-middle-class model of living stemmed from having to return to an open and complex world of discrimination and economic class differences. Doris and I had positioned our family at Urbana to become an active part of a less complex social and economic environment. Returning to Chicago was going to introduce major changes in our lives.

Alfreda Duster

After weeks of churning thoughts of returning to Chicago, I reached a level of internal comfort on returning as the "new" middle-class black. I found a model of family and community leadership that I wanted for my future.

I chose the matriarchy leadership of Alfreda Duster, not because she was the daughter of Ida B. Wells, but because of her everlasting love and commitment to improving the lot of the underclass in the Black Belt of Chicago. She demonstrated both the strength of family and the power of personal leadership to improve conditions.

It probably didn't matter at the time of my deliberation that I was going to emulate Mrs. Duster over the rest of life. Our hands were full with the logistics of leaving Champaign and taking care of two babies. As part of my inner growth, however, I thought that a personal model of living should have been developed from crossing the many learning venues of the University of Illinois. Getting to meet Alfreda Duster as a young man started from my association with one of her children at the Alpha House, a major learning venue for me.

Charles Duster, one of her five successful children, was a senior at Wendell Phillips at the time of his father's death, but he enrolled anyway at the University of Illinois. As I recall he, more than any of the other Duster children, was affected emotionally by his father's death and dropped out of Illinois. He returned in the academic year of 1950–51 and pledged Alpha, his father's fraternity, and lived in the Alpha House as my roommate. Chuck worked with Mr. Long and me at the U of I supply store and we became great friends.

The Dusters were a close and modest middle-class family. Chuck Duster never talked with me about his mother's or grandmother's leadership qualities or contributions. I really got to know Alfreda Duster as a friend and professional on my own. She was committed to serving under-class families and saw me as a future member of her legion of middle-class black activists. She recruited and encouraged us all to work toward improving the lives of under-class children and families. As I progressed toward the completion of my degree, we shared aspirations and hopes for improving South-Side Chicago.

Alfreda lived and worked among under-class families. When the Illinois Institute of Technology "removed" families from areas north of 35th street, she was among the last to leave. She spent a lifetime working to impact the quality of life for blacks. The Ida B. Wells Project was a living legacy to her mother. The Duster family and Alfreda Duster's legion of professional friends working to improve the lives of poor black families is her legacy.

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In October 1956, I rented a U-haul trailer and loaded it with our Emerson TV (with headphones), a living room chair purchased from Sears, and seemingly "tons" of books, mostly outdated textbooks. Doris and I placed Chuck, then one year old, and Joyce, then two months, in a portable backseat baby bed, and the Wilson family headed north to Chicago to conquer the world. We borrowed $500 from the university to get enough cash to settle in Chicago; that was the extent of our debt after eight years of education for Doris and me.

Chapter IV

The Park Forest Incident: A Reality Check

Welcome Back

In the fall of 1956, we reconciled our return to a city offering few of the social, cultural, and economic amenities we valued so much. Chicago was one of the nation's most racially segregated cities. By 1960, it contained 812,000 blacks in a total population of 3.5 million, where more than 97 percent lived in the city's Black Belt. African Americans had almost doubled between 1948 and 1956, the eight years we lived in Champaign-Urbana [1].

In addition to the issue of race, Chicago faced a major class struggle. Chicago early on had been developed with an eye toward building neighborhoods to serve a growing industrial presence. Immigrants came from every part of Europe. Chicago was a melting pot of European immigrants: Italians, Irish, Germans, Poles, Greeks, Danes, Hungarians, and Norwegians. Neighborhoods in Chicago were ethnic and racial enclaves.

Blacks were newcomers. The prospects of relocating my family in quality housing were bleak but not altogether hopeless if you were educated and willing to move outside of the Black Belt. The growth of new towns and villages was breaking the pattern of neighborhood development

In the past, the structure of metropolitan Chicago's neighborhoods, villages, and towns grew out of the twentieth century's industrial challenges. South metropolitan Chicago was developed in response to the rapid growth of heavy industry: steel, aluminum, iron works

products, chemicals, and oil refineries. Working-class Irish, Italians, Germans, and other immigrants developed neighborhoods with affordable housing but restricted it to their "kind" of people. If blacks moved to such communities, they lived "across the tracks" in polluted and poor housing just as in Champaign-Urbana. World War II intensified the demand for skilled, semi-skilled, and low-skilled labor. Because of labor shortages blacks were able to find reasonably well-paying job in heavy industries. They lived, however, on the South Side of Chicago in the Black Belt. But by doing so, they became locked in to the largest pattern of segregated housing in the country. The city fathers and town leadership of South Holland, Harvey, Riverdale, Dalton, and Calumet closed ranks and made it clear that blacks were not welcome. Southwest neighborhoods grew out of the stockyards and meat-packing industries. Blacks found jobs but were not welcomed to back-of-the-yards white neighborhoods. Violence, riots, and neighborhood solidarity discouraged blacks from living west of State and Wentworth Streets or, for that matter, past the nineties without struggles. Essentially all working-class neighborhoods south, west, and southwest were closed to working and middle-class blacks.

Doris and I were confronting a growing and different urban and industrial environment. As Chicago diversified its industry structure and rebuilt the Loop, it placed northwestern neighborhoods and northwestern villages and towns at the forefront of science research, high technology, marketing, and corporate America's leadership. The new college-educated, middle-class, managerial families were moving to suburbs. New suburbs near well-established and wealthy communities such as Oak Ridge, Skokie, and Hinsdale were emerging. If we were going to find housing it would be in newly emerging family-centered communities, someplace beyond the working-class struggles between blacks and whites.

We were eager to move forward. At the University of Illinois, we learned to appreciate racial, class, and cultural differences among people. We wanted opportunities to live, work, and associate with people of many ethnicities, religions, and cultures. We were buoyant