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JIM CROW ROOM & BOARD:
THE EXPERIENCES OF AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS
AT UIUC 1945 TO 1955

BY

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THESIS

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The vast majority of literature on the history of education for African Americans focuses on the role of racism as the principle factor shaping their educational experiences. To understand what African American students inherited during the 1945-1955 era (end of World War II to Brown decision), it is necessary to investigate and interpret the traditions, rules and practices developed during the four and one-half decades leading up to 1945. This paper examines the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, centering on the special conditions confronting African American students. Furthermore it seeks to show how racism was a principle factor in shaping the educational experiences of Americans of African ancestry.

African American students that attended the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (UIUC, U of I, Illinois and University), from the early years of its founding had to bear much of the burden their ancestors had endured. They were allowed to attend the University, however enrollment was on a limited basis, and they were not accepted as full and equal participants. The experiences of African American students at UIUC from 1945 to 1955 (end of World War II to Brown decision), though unique in their own terms, were nonetheless part of a history of overt and institutionalized discrimination dating back to the founding of the University. In order to fully appreciate and understand the experiences of 1945-1955 it is critical to comprehend the traditions and customs of coping with racism and alienation that were established in the preceding decades. This

information is vital to the establishment of a conceptual framework for the history of African American students, at the University of Illinois, between the years of 1945-1955.

African American students were constant victims of discrimination from the start of their enrollment at the University of Illinois. The determination of these students, with the assistance of Albert R. Lee, the unofficial dean of African American students, the encouragement of African American elected officials, community individuals, the Interracial Committee, and individuals in the nearby cities such as Chicago and St. Louis, enabled them to fight discrimination emanating from varying levels, thus providing a coping mechanism that was essential in the survival and matriculation of African American students.

Understanding the history of the founding of the University of Illinois is crucial. The University of Illinois (U of I) was incorporated on 28 February 1867, as the Illinois Industrial University and opened its doors to students on 2 March 1868. At Illinois' opening, it was clear the institution was intended for white men, despite its public land grant status. There was nothing in its charter which compelled discrimination against students because of race, sex or class. Indeed, the U of I was chartered for all the children of the "industrial classes" of Illinois. Nonetheless, the University opened with fifty white males, establishing at the outset a critical distinction between democratic rhetoric and the practice of racism and sexism, a distinction that would plague the institution well into the twentieth century. The University maintained an all white male population until 1870 when it admitted its first female student, a white woman.

It was clear that women would no longer be excluded from admission to Illinois. This decision was prompted by the fact that this was a state school and taxpayers

demanded that their daughters as well as sons be educated. The Morrill Act established the land grant colleges especially for the sons and daughters of the common people. Although this was the case, it would be quite some time before white women matriculated at Illinois in any significant numbers. In 1887, the University admitted its first African American student, nearly two decades after the founding of the University. The population of African American students at the University remained at a minimum during the first half of the twentieth century, but there were relatively significant increases during the 1930's, 40's and 50's. From 1945-1955 approximately two thousand African American students matriculated at Illinois.

CHAPTER 2

AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENT ENROLLMENT

The first African American to be admitted to the University was Jonathan Rogan. Jonathan Rogan was from Decatur, Illinois, and attended the University from 1887-1888. After his short stay the next African American student was not admitted until 1894, and that was George Riley, from Champaign. The first African American to graduate was William Walter Smith who graduated in 1904 with a degree in architecture.¹ The first African American woman, Maudelle Tanner Brown, graduated in 1906 with an A.B. in mathematics.² This pattern of scarce African American presence at Illinois would follow for years to come.

To give an example of the scarcity of African Americans at Illinois, here are the numbers of students during the first few decades of the twentieth century:³

Year	Number of African American Students
1900	2
1901	5
1902	4
1903	9
1904-5	19
1904-20	N/A
1926-1940	1,335

During the very early years of enrollment for African Americans, Albert R. Lee, an African American clerk in the President's office, went to great lengths to help African American students in whatever capacity he could. Albert R. Lee was considered the unofficial dean of African American students. Lee was responsible for compiling data on students as well as other duties performed in the president's office.

Lee was very involved in the affairs of African Americans on and off campus. He was considered a leader in the Champaign African American community, and was very well respected. On campus his title was simply office clerk, where he was responsible for keeping records, accounts and performing routine assignments, but in essence he was much more than a clerk in the office of the president. Whenever there was a problem with African American students or concerning them he was called upon to provide assistance. Not only did students look to him for guidance and counsel, but University officials counted on him as well. It was not always clear as to why he was called upon by the University, however it was safe to assume that it was the faith they had in addition to the commitment he possessed towards helping African American students. Furthermore, University officials probably assumed he could relate to and understand the students based on their shared ethnic background. He was the highest ranking African American in the University. This illustrates the minor role that African Americans played in the University administration during this era. Yet, Lee played a major role in the lives of African American students. He was their mediator.

Lee had committed the better part of his life to the University of Illinois and African American students. As evidenced in letters from families of perspective students, Lee was responsible for almost all aspects of African American student life.⁴ In his papers exists a vast amount of information on African American students and their experiences. In addition to parents contacting Lee, they also contacted the University and several of those letters were forwarded to him, by the various deans and administrators on campus. He was responsible for investigating various aspects of African American

students' lives. Frequently Lee would receive a letter from a family requesting information about the University, and he felt obliged to provide the requested information.⁵ He also took it upon himself to document the number of African American students at the University and regularly submitted the information to W.E.B. Du Bois, editor of the Crisis. Lee was definitely a man committed to seeing African Americans obtain an education.

Lee was employed at the University of Illinois from 1895 to 1947. In that time he held a variety of positions. According to his papers, Lee was employed and utilized as messenger "boy," clerk, waiter, doorman at Presidents' Draper and James houses and unofficial dean of African American students. In his paper, "University of Illinois Presidents I Have Known," Lee describes his duties from the beginning of his time spent working at Illinois. Despite the various positions held, he was never paid for his duties performed in the capacity of unofficial dean of African American students. This was a position that Lee adopted for himself and as it became convenient the University recognized him in this position.⁶ Despite the lack of pay for his self proclaimed title, it was obvious from his correspondence that he was dedicated to African American students.

Lee wrote numerous letters throughout his career, and most of the letters pertained to the condition of African American students on campus. He was constantly writing to African American elected officials for their support in helping to secure equal accommodations for African American students on campus. Lee was always concerned with how to improve the experiences of African American students. Lee often wrote the presidents of the University when he felt a situation concerning African American

students could be handled more effectively and also when Lee saw the need to compliment the president on a job well done. Publicly he never denounced the University and its practices but often in his letters to the president he questioned issues of discrimination.

One of Lee's passions was the commitment of keeping track of the number of African American students on campus. Lee compiled a list of students that attended the U of I. He listed the name of each student, their address, fraternal or sorority organization if appropriate and often their major. In his papers there are several typewritten lists of this sort in addition to a few handwritten notes that contained the same information.⁷ He was very conscientious about recording methods, meticulous to the point of correcting the smallest error. For example, Lee annually took a census of U of I African American graduates and submitted it to the Crisis (The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People periodical) as part of the magazine's yearly account of black graduates of predominately white universities.⁸ Once he made a mistake and he quickly rectified the error in a letter to the editor of the Crisis, W.E.B. Du Bois. On 13 June 1927 Lee writes to Du Bois:

Dear Doctor:

In my recent letter to you giving the names of graduates from the University of Illinois, I made an omission. Kindly add to the list of graduates that of Ella Madalyne Towles, Piano, School of Music, degree of B. of Music, Harrisburg, Illinois.

Cordially yours

Albert R. Lee
Chief Clerk
Office of the President⁹

Lee kept lists of the students and graduates. He also monitored African American students on campus; kept records of their years of attendance as well as their campus affiliations. Lee knew which fraternity or sorority a student belonged to and where the student resided. Lee was very close to students, professionally, and was often, if not solely responsible for securing housing, which of course led to him being aware of their places of residence. It remains unclear as to Lee's personal relationship with African American students.

CHAPTER 3

HOUSING

From the opening of the University there was a problem for all students. Housing problems that dated back to the founding of the University were exacerbated during the 1940's and 1950's for all students. Black students who faced the additional problem of racial discrimination found themselves in a difficult struggle to cope with living conditions on a Jim Crow campus. Typically, students lived in private housing around campus or if from the area with their parents in town. The first dormitory was erected in 1915. This dorm was for white women only, and was named Laura B. Evans Hall. This alleviated the problem of finding approved housing for many white women on campus, but the problem still existed for African American women. Over the next three decades the University continued to deny African American students the opportunity to live in campus dormitories. The year 1945 marked the first time African American women were allowed to live in the residence halls. The historical record is unclear as to when African American men were first allowed to reside in University dorms.¹⁰ It seems reasonable to assume that African American men were first admitted to the University residence halls soon after the admission of African American women in 1945.

Whenever an African American student applied to the University and was accepted, housing became a problem. Since African Americans were not allowed to live in the residence halls until 1945, they were expected to find other means of housing, outside of the university system. These students ended up residing in the African American community, situated in North Champaign, and commonly referred to as the

“North End.” If the African American community had not been willing to accommodate Black students, most would have been denied the opportunity to attend the University of Illinois. With few exceptions, white landlords refused to rent to African American students.

African American students were only permitted to live in fraternity and sorority houses and the African American community. The University housing authorities made virtually no effort to provide housing for Black students. The most assistance afforded these students was provided by Albert R. Lee. Once admitted to the University their application would be forwarded to him, and he was then responsible for finding housing for the incoming African American students. Lee depended on the community to assist him in accommodating the needs of these students. African American students were expected to live off campus being restricted to certain areas. During this period there were racial covenants in effect. Realtors used these covenants to restrict various areas in and around town. African Americans were regulated to one corner of town based upon this particular situation. The covenants, although focused mainly on home ownership, also influenced renting to non-caucasian individuals. The covenants clearly stated that “no part thereof will be sold or leased, either in whole or in part, to or to be occupied as owner, or tenant by any person or persons not of the caucasian race,” and this restricted living environment set the stage for the limited choices African American students had for their living arrangements.¹¹ These covenants characterized the community into which the students were received.

Housing would become a long battle for the students as well as for the community. In many instances the dwellings' people lived in were barely large enough

for their families, not to mention students. According to the Champaign County Housing Authority survey, "110 out of 587 Negro dwelling units were occupied by more than one family group or had lodgers, although 67% had only 1 or 2 bedrooms."¹² During the academic school year 1929-30, there were 138 African American students, 66 of whom had room only and not board, and the remaining 72 received room and board from local African American residents.¹³

Along with African American students being expected to live in restricted residential areas, housing for African Americans in the Champaign-Urbana area in the 1940's was despicable. A study conducted by the League of Women Voter's of Champaign County in 1946 indicated that housing for African Americans was a total disgrace.¹⁴ Many families lived in shacks with no indoor plumbing and had to use outdoor privies. In most cases these privies were very unsanitary and caused many people to contract communicable diseases, such as tuberculosis. Furthermore the shacks' people were living in were previously coal bins.¹⁵ It was in these conditions the Black residents of Champaign-Urbana had to live, as well as the African American university students that resided with them.

It is very important to note that many African Americans living in these conditions were able to afford better housing. One woman was reported as saying that her husband made \$40.00 a week and that they were able to live elsewhere, and still have enough money left over for livelihood. Despite having the means to afford better, racial discrimination by the city Realtors and landlords prevented them from finding better housing.¹⁶ It was clearly a situation where they were forced to live in a racially

segregated and impoverished residential area, despite their economic capability to maintain a household in a more inhabitable environment. The condition of housing for African Americans in the community affected the majority of Black students, since most of them were compelled to live in the community. About the only exception were Black students who lived in fraternity and sorority housing.

A more inhabitable environment simply meant one that was safe and fit for people to reside in. Many of the homes in the African American community were substandard and considered dangerous to live in, including a lack of indoor plumbing, no toilets, one bedroom to accommodate several people, transformed coal bins and shacks and areas with no sidewalks. All these factors contributed to the unsanitary conditions present within the African American community. These conditions were due to a lack of concern on the part of the city as well as the racism present within the Champaign-Urbana areas. Many of these homes mentioned were considered to be health hazards to the residents and the rest of the area. The Public Health District "has the authority to condemn dwellings, but considers it impossible to exercise this authority when there is no other place for people to move."¹⁷ During this time it was virtually impossible for African Americans to live outside of this area. This was due in part if not wholly to the racially restrictive covenants. It was clearly stated that various properties were not available "to be occupied as owner or tenants by any person not of the Caucasian race."¹⁸ Long time African American residents of this community understood this arrangement, despite their disapproval of it. In addition to it becoming the case for them it also became the case for incoming African American students.

As enrollment of African American students increased, after World War II, so did their housing needs. When a student was admitted to the University it was without the promise of housing. Despite small and cramped accommodations the community and students made the best of the situation and it became mutually agreeable. The early generation of African American students at Illinois owed a lot to the African American community of Champaign and Lee. Lee was responsible for making the initial contact between students and potential renters.¹⁹ This informal arrangement lasted for several decades.²⁰

Lee would locate members of the African American community that were willing to rent to students. After potential renters were contacted in person and by mail, concerning the possibility of taking in boarders, Lee would compile a list of available housing for new students. Once an African American student decided to attend the University, Lee would provide the student with the housing list and allow them to choose their place of residence. In many cases Lee corresponded with the parents and they requested that he make contact with the potential renter and secure housing for their children, sight unseen. Moreover, Lee would often check on students and send letters to their parents informing them of their children's situation. Many parents responded very positively towards this practice.²¹

In the 1920's housing was a major concern, especially in light of African Americans not being allowed to live on campus or even in close proximity. Several meetings and planning sessions with African American students and community people took place surrounding this topic. Lee was again at the forefront of combating the

housing situation of African American students. Students and community members met at Lee's church, Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church (A.M.E.), to discuss tactics in combating the injustice that faced students in housing. The church would be the site for other debates as well. During these meetings minutes were taken and placed in the church file.²²

Early on, the role of fraternities and sororities became quite evident in combating the housing needs for African American students. Most of these organizations were founded on the principle of community service, and functioned as a vehicle for African American students to come together under a common bond of struggle. At UIUC one of the first organizations to fight for housing near the camps was the Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority Inc. (AKA).

The AKA's realized the desperate situation of housing and rose to the occasion. They began to question the dean of women as to why a house had not been secured for African American sorority women. This was one of the first efforts of a group to obtain housing on campus.²³ However, in a letter from Lee to the Dean of Women he conveys this housing was not meant to accommodate all women, just the members of the sorority. This fact was consistent with the nature of secret societies, fraternities and sororities. Despite the racial climate, all fraternal and sorority organizations limited their housing to the members of the specific group. The AKA's constructed a massive letter writing campaign to several people detailing their experience with lack of housing.²⁴

The letter campaign proved to be successful. Many members of the organization outside of the University belonged to other influential clubs and organizations.²⁵ One letter from a campus student to Miss Althea Merchant, an African American woman from

near St. Louis, Missouri, belonging to the sorority and a member of the Illinois Chapter of the National Association of Colored Women, played an important role in securing housing for women of AKA. Miss Merchant enlisted the support of her organization and wrote to the Dean of Women, concerning the housing situation.²⁶ As a result of this letter and others to state legislators, namely Adelbert H. Roberts, George T. Kersey and Charles A. Griffin, African American representatives from Chicago, the AKA's secured housing in 1928. They had the support of the sorority, members of the University, Albert R. Lee, state and local representatives, and community individuals that were concerned with their situation.

Upon the purchasing of this house it was established that each of the sixteen to eighteen members would share in the responsibilities and pay a monthly cost.²⁷ Although AKA had been able to secure housing for some of their members only, there was still an immediate need for more housing for African American women and men. The AKA house was filled to capacity with women in the sorority, but there were still others not able to secure housing. The women were excited about living on campus, at 1201 W. Stoughton, Champaign, Illinois.²⁸

Given the racial climate in Champaign in addition to the racial covenants that were in existence obtaining suitable housing was not an easy task. The undergraduate women were in constant contact with older members of the sorority which they in turn kept in touch with University officials to monitor the housing problem. It was this network that enabled the sorority women to obtain housing near campus. After Lee and the undergraduate sorority women wrote explaining their dilemma to Mrs. Anna W.

Ickes, wife of Harold W. Ickes a member of the Board of Trustees for the University, she took an interest in the housing problem for these women. Ickes decided to give monetarily and enlist the support of her associates. Aside from Ickes, President Kinley also proved to be a resource. He contacted Professor J. M. White to inspect the property and Lloyd Morey to draft a financial plan, draw up corporation papers to hold the title (which was succeeded by the sorority alumnae organization), and to finally make the down payment on the property. Through the assistance of these individuals and the persistence of the sorority women a house was purchased in an area that under normal circumstances would not have been rented or sold to African Americans.²⁹ According to Urbana Council meeting minutes, the residents of that area were not at all pleased with the purchase of a house by African Americans. The residents of Urbana protested but were unsuccessful in their attempts to have the women of Alpha Kappa Alpha removed from the house.³⁰

From the outset the problem with securing adequate housing and living on campus in the dorms for African Americans was denied by University officials, and as often as they could overlooked. In a letter to another official of a different university, the Vice President asserted that no housing problem existed for African American students, that they lived in the African American community, and living on campus was not an issue.³¹ In fact, it was very serious issue, but one that the University was not willing to recognize in the late teens and early twenties. It was not until state officials became involved that anyone, besides Lee took the issue of housing discrimination seriously.

Frequently, state officials would come to the campus to look around during budget talks. During the 1920's, the state legislature was comprised of a few African

American members. Lee would arrange a social for them and there they would have the opportunity to sit and discuss a variety of issues with members of the African American community, in addition to African American students. During this time the state officials were informed about the horrid state of housing for these students on campus.³² State officials later questioned the housing situation and the university's lack of appropriate response to the problem. Until that time Lee was instrumental in fighting for students and their rights when it came to housing and other issues.

After World War II the influx of African American students was on the rise, due in significant part to the GI Bill. The impact of housing discrimination increased significantly; as more African Americans entered the university. African American students were being admitted to the University at increasing rates. However no provisions were made for their room and board, they were not allowed to eat, live or interact socially on campus. If they were to attend the University it was an unspoken agreement on the University's part that they were to reside in the African American community. They were not to live on campus except in the rare instance of Black Greek houses located near campus.

African American students were forced to live in the "North End" of Champaign, which was a considerable distance from campus. Students had to live as well as eat in this area as they were not allowed to dine on campus. If students had chosen this route on their own they still would have to walk a distance to eat. However it would have removed the humiliation of not having a choice to be on campus outside of class time. Imagine that all other students had the opportunity to meet with friends for lunch on

campus, had the means to meet with their professors, or other students in their class for various student projects. African American students did not have any of this available to them, they were not asking for luxuries, just what was normally associated with student academic life.

The University prohibited students from living on campus. Through an unwritten policy that contradicted its written rules regarding equality of opportunity.³³ The unwritten policy was introduced in the form of a question on the housing application. All students were asked to designate "Race, and National Descent?"³⁴ This question prompted much debate from students as well as state officials. People wanted to know why this questions existed. University officials tried as best they could to explain, but the explanations were unsatisfactory. Lawyer and State Representative Charles J. Jenkins, from Chicago, was very concerned about the structure of the housing questionnaire. He was so concerned that he contacted the President of the University to inquire as to why these questions appeared on the form and what purpose they served. Arthur Cutts Willard, then president of the University had S. Earl Thompson, Director of Housing, to conduct an investigation. In a letter to A. J. Janata, Assistant to the President, Thompson explained that these questions were of much importance in order to avoid any major errors in room assignments.³⁵ However the most interesting part about his response is the meaning behind "major errors." In this context major error meant unwittingly assigning students of different races and religions to the same double rooms. Willard forwarded the results of the investigation to Jenkins, omitting the statement issued by Thompson to Janata in the letter dated 6 August 1945, it read,

Almost 90% of our residence hall spaces are in double rooms. It seems essential to us that we have information which we requested if we are to avoid major errors in the assignment of roommates. I know of no University or College which does not request similar information for applications for assignment to residence halls.³⁶

In the history of the University, no African American had lived in the dorms, so in 1945 when the letter was written, no presumable "errors" had been made. It was clear the President did not want any errors being made by way of even selecting African Americans to live in the dorms, hence the reason for the question about race. Why else would it be necessary for an official University application to list racial designation if not one of African American descent had lived in University housing. This was an issue representative Jenkins noticed immediately.

Jenkins began a campaign to ensure that African American females would have the opportunity to live on campus in the dormitories. He submitted several names to the President for consideration and awaited a response. In his letters he was almost pleading with the president for consideration of his suggestions.³⁷ He provided letters of reference for various women, as well as giving his word that they would be qualified and respectable candidates.³⁸ It was evident that African American women had to be hand picked for living in the dorms. There was no where on the housing application that indicated categories for respectable and qualified. Furthermore, it could be implied that a candidate could have the grades and still not be considered respectable by the University. The President had previously replied to Jenkins by listing several reasons for the refusal of African American women being admitted to University housing, including that one woman was on academic probation and her grades were not satisfactory enough to live in

the dorms.³⁹ Of the housing documents surveyed never was it indicated that a particular grade point average had to be maintained for residents of the dorm. The question became a point of contention for those interested in the housing of African American students. Why were grades an issue when the document itself made no mention of them as a prerequisite for dormitory living? This was interesting in terms of the University being able to document grades as a reason for housing denial. The President indicated "scholastic standing and promise will be considered in the assignment of residence hall space...."⁴⁰ This however did not discourage Jenkins in the least, he continued to submit names until he found women that were "suitable" to the President.

A. C. Willard, realizing this campaign would not end until African American females were permitted to live in the dorms, offered a token measure. In a letter to Jenkins dated 2 August 1945, Willard wrote him of his willingness to see African American women housed in the dorms. He went so far as to reserve one room for African American females.⁴¹ This gesture was an assurance of the commitment to African American females. Jenkins took this and worked diligently in finding women that would pass the standard of the President and others in terms of grades of current and college transfer students. It was 11 August 1945 that two African American women were finally agreed upon, Quintella King and Ruthe Cash. These women were the first known African Americans to reside in the dorms at UIUC. They were permitted to live in Busey-Evans Hall.⁴² It is clear that other African Americans lived in the dorms after this time, but currently no evidence has been found to substantiate a particular date.

In 1950, five years after the first African American females were admitted to the dorms, Vivian Adams experienced what may have been true for many African American

female residents, racism. It began in 1950 with a report of missing money from Vivian's room which she shared with her twin sister Lillian. She reported leaving the room with her sister for dinner and returning some time later to find the money missing. A report was filed and there was no clear indication of an investigation being conducted.⁴³ The next investigation that would take place concerning Vivian would be in January of 1951, which had nothing to do with the theft report she had previously filed.

Apparently there had been several thefts in Busey Hall, where Vivian resided, which were of great concern for the hall faculty as well as the women that resided there. In January of 1951 the dorm director called for an investigation indicating she had some information pertaining to the recent thefts. It was brought to her attention by some of the women living in the dorms that they had observed Vivian Adams going from room to room suspiciously.⁴⁴ It was at this point Vivian and her sister were called in for questioning by the University investigator and other dorm officials of Busey Hall.

Upon the questioning of Lillian, Vivian's sister, she revealed some distrust of her sister in this situation. She indicated the two of them had never wanted for anything, because money was not an object, but that her sister had been known to steal in the past. When they were seven years old Vivian had taken a nickel from an Armenian girl.⁴⁵ This questioning was done without the presence of her sister or at least someone who would represent the best interests of Adams' sisters. In addition to providing this information, she also indicated that Vivian had a fascination with clothing. This did not help in Vivian's defense because the majority of the missing items were clothing.

When Vivian was questioned she adamantly denied having anything to do with the thefts in Busey Hall. Furthermore she could not understand why she was even being questioned on the matter. During questioning, her room was being searched by dorm officials. In a report dated 2 February 1951, Florence B. Ingraham, Assistant Dean of women wrote to security officer J. E. Ewers that the end of the search resulted in the finding of several reportedly missing items. Vivian still denied having anything to do with the thefts and refused to talk.⁴⁶

The matter was going to go before the student disciplinary committee, and until a decision was made Vivian was placed on probation. In the interim Vivian was questioned again, and eventually she felt comfortable enough to tell what had happened in regards to the thefts at Busey Hall. Vivian admitted to stealing the items from various students in the hall in an effort to hurt them as she had been hurt. She further stated she had not intended on keeping the articles or disposing of them, she merely wanted to cause pain to the women in the hall by taking things they valued highly, as this was her only recourse.⁴⁷

Prior to the thefts in Busey Hall, Vivian had engaged in conversation with some of the other female residents in the hall. These women were Jewish and they indicated how they had never cared for "colored" people. Vivian was very much offended by this and questioned them as to why. They went on to explain how stupid African Americans were and cited examples in the area of real estate.

In a letter to J. E. Ewers dated 7 March 1951 Miriam Shelden, Dean of Women described the conversation that occurred between Vivian and the Jewish women, based on Vivian's account. The Jewish women in the dorm described ways in which "Negroes are

so gullible.” Real estate operators seek out African Americans to purchase property in an all white area. By purchasing property in these areas, African Americans are being set up to make white residents feel uncomfortable. Over time white residents fearing racial integration begin to move out of the neighborhood, at any cost even taking a monetary decrease in the value of their property. As more white residents move, real estate operators began to purchase the homes at a reduced rate, and eventually resell the property in smaller units at a much higher price. African Americans were the target population for this real estate phenomenon. The Jewish women students characterized the African American buyers as ignorant, implying that they were unwilling dupes of real estate operators, and therefore very easy and willing prey.⁴⁸

To these statements Vivian replied that African Americans were no different than other people who could also be victims of economic exploitation. The conversation ended in a violent argument, with the Jewish girls finally stating that Vivian and her sister were somehow different from the average “colored” person. This statement alone enraged Vivian, and she vowed to herself that she would repay them for their unkind words and thoughts about her race.⁴⁹ It was after this that she decided to take prized possessions from the women as they had ridiculed and insulted her individually and racially. Vivian stated, “I like to hurt them—I know I cannot hurt them by physical force.”⁵⁰ Vivian was obviously very distraught over the conversation and looked to inflict pain on those who had personally wounded her. Vivian was very clear in her admission of guilt that she had not intended to keep or use the items. In fact she intended on returning the items.⁵¹ The

taking of their possessions was a way to retaliate for the inappropriate comments made by her hall mates, for there were no other options available to her.

As a result of her confession and further investigation into the thefts, Vivian was brought before the University Committee on Student Discipline. On March 5, 1951, she was dismissed from the University for derogatory conduct. March 12, seven days later, she was readmitted provided that she attend the Student Counseling Bureau until they felt she should be released from their service. Dr. Leo A. Hellmer released his report to the committee stating:

If I assume that she is guilty of the thefts, and apparently you have good evidence for this assumption I should guess that the underlying cause for the motive, represents an unconscious attempt to pay back with hostility for what she initially feels is hostility and rejection of her...⁵²

There was no evidence found indicating that the other female students involved in the discussion were reprimanded for their behavior. Vivian made an error in judgment when deciding to take items that did not belong to her, however it is clear that she felt insulted, rejected and humiliated. Her actions, however inappropriate, constituted a vendetta against racism. Vivian's stealing was her response to one issue of racial discrimination that was present in the lives of African American students. There were many other instances that would require a response as well.

CHAPTER 4

BOARD

The problem of housing still existed but it was further compounded by a lack of eating places available to African American students. African Americans were discriminated against in dining facilities on campus well until the 1960's. African American students were not allowed to eat on campus or at any of the campus restaurants. Students were forced to carry meals or return to the North End for meals during school days. The trip back to where they resided could consist of an hour or so, allowing thirty minutes to walk and thirty minutes to walk back to campus. This did not include the time it would take for them to actually eat lunch. This created a hardship on the students and further demonstrated the University and white community's commitment to making this group of students feel unwanted.

African American students were allowed to purchase lunch meals at the women's residence hall at noontime, however, they were not allowed to sit in the dorm and eat.⁵³ It was not until 1930 that a restaurant appeared, one that would serve African American students. This was an interracial cooperative established to correct the problem but lasted for only a short time. Many white community members in addition to University faculty disagreed with this venture and were not in support of this restaurant. During the time the restaurant was open it was a successful venture in interracial relations. However, the restaurant was eventually closed due to financial hardship. In addition, there was a restaurant that did serve African Americans and was termed a "Negro" place, which closed after a while due to the owner moving.⁵⁴

Still, African American students suffered shame and humiliation from being denied the right to eat in public restaurants. Only African American students were refused service, making it known to all that they were uniquely despised and unwelcome in campus town. It was clear that restaurant owners did not want African Americans in their establishment, however they attempted to mask the racially motivated reasons in terms of potential business loss.

Restaurant owners claimed that they did not serve African Americans because of the harm it would do to business. Most restaurant owners claimed if they served "Negroes" their white customers would boycott them, and no longer patronize the establishment.⁵⁵ It was more important to save their business as opposed to fighting for and participating in equal practices. However, no evidence exists that supports the claim of restaurant owners. According to:

Bidwells Confectionery
Butschs Steakhouse
Chris's Candystore
DeLuxe
Hagens Steak House 2
Katsina's
Perry's Grill
Quality
Skelton's Drugstore
Steak & Shake
Todd's Café
Twenty T Hangar⁵⁶

all refused service to African American students on the grounds that it would offend their white customers, while maintaining that they harbored no personal prejudice against African Americans. Restaurant owners decided on their own initiative to

disregard the laws surrounding racial discrimination. They were willing to break the law just to bar African Americans from their eating establishments.

African American students of the 1930's, 40's, and 50's were dedicated to the cause of equality in general and in Champaign-Urbana specifically. They had the support of a few "liberal" whites and the African American community of Champaign-Urbana. Students were willing to risk being victims of violence for the sake of securing equality. These students were not satisfied with being ignored, they took matters into their own hands. Hence, African American Students, in cooperation with white students and faculty mounted a protest against segregation in food and dining places.

African American students at Illinois decided to take a legal approach to the discrimination they were receiving. The Student-Community Interracial Committee formed in 1946, including African American and white students, embarked on a letter campaign to the State's Attorney and a method of testing campus area restaurants. In a letter to John J. Bresee, State's Attorney, dated 14 May 1946, Paul Burt, a student provided a list of restaurants that had openly discriminated against African American students. He also included the date of the discriminatory act, address of restaurant, people that were victims of discrimination, along with any witnesses that were present. It was his hope that Bresee would write these restaurants and call their attention to the violations of Illinois laws that protected citizens against discrimination based on race.⁵⁷

In any place where students felt discriminated against, they conducted a test of the establishment. After a report was submitted to the committee, several students would frequent the establishment in order to observe the behavior of the owners towards them as patrons. In most instances the students were African American, since it was they who were being discriminated against. However, there were white students that were a part of the committee and were sympathetic to the cause and participated in the tests as well. These white students acted as a control group, whereby they would replicate the behavior of African American students and observe whether they were treated the same, by restaurant staff. In addition to the white students replicating the scene in which African American students were discriminated in they were also utilized as observers. They were responsible for taking notes of how African American students were treated in these instances and formally documenting what they had observed. This took valuable time away from their studies, but was necessary for African American students to challenge racial insults and degradation hurled at them on a daily basis.

African American students along with the assistance of white students and faculty decided to personally take on the white restaurant owners in the community and campus town. It was obvious to them that nothing would change if they were not willing to commit themselves to making that change. Beginning in 1946 there were several affidavits filed with the States' Attorney's office. Those affidavits tell a very interesting and informative story.

During the years of 1946 to 1950, the States Attorney's office was contacted, and John J. Bresee, State's Attorney at the time, responded to the request of investigation into restaurant discrimination. In an unsigned letter a student wrote:

The Student Community Interracial Committee presented to you evidence of discrimination against Negro citizens in certain restaurants of this county. On the basis of the evidence, you wrote letters to four restaurants calling their attention to the provision of the Illinois Civil Rights Law.

Notwithstanding, those restaurants and two others continue to discriminate against Negro citizens. Particularly, the following companies practice such discrimination:

Hagens Steakhouse
Steak-N-Shake Drive Inn
Skelton's Drug Store
Bidwell's Confectionery
Todd's Cafe⁵⁸

This gives a clear indication that this was not the first letter of its kind to reach the States Attorney's office, and furthermore it is evidence that the States Attorney found these claims to be valid. In another letter (dated 20 April 1947) written to the Acting Secretary of the American Civil Liberties Union, Gerald M. Moser, Co-Chairman of the Interracial Committee wrote:

So far the intervention of the State Attorney J. Bresee has been sufficient to make a few uncooperative restaurant owners in the University are abandon their policy of segregation. But our fight has not ended with that. Two restaurants, or taverns, the "De Luxe Tavern" on Green Street and the "608 Club" on Sixth Street, have been found to segregate again. A subtler kind of segregation continues to be practiced in several theaters in downtown Champaign. We may therefore need your help in the near future.⁵⁹

It becomes very obvious that forms of discrimination had not stopped and furthermore had spread to other areas of public accommodation. This letter clearly

indicates that despite the efforts of the States Attorney's office, segregation in restaurants has not ceased.

Besides writing to the States Attorney for assistance, students, as mentioned earlier, both African American and white, embarked upon a testing campaign, in which they documented discrimination found in various campus restaurants. It appears as if they went to campus town restaurants and documented what they either experienced or witnessed. In 1946 Eloise Ellison and Helen F. Welsey, both African American, went to Steak-N-Shake Drive Inn for a meal. Both women state that they experienced discrimination due to the color of their skin. In their affidavits they wrote:

On May 5, 1946 at about 4:10 p.m., I appeared at Steak-N-Shake Drive Inn and was humiliated and told not to return again to eat in the Steak-N-Shake Drive Inn because I am a Negro while at the very same time and place other persons of the Caucasian or white race were served without being humiliated and were not told not to return.

I seated myself in the Steak-N-Shake Drive Inn with a friend, also a Negro of dark skin. A waitress took our order and brought our food to us in a bag for us to take the food out. She replied that "Negroes can't eat here on the inside of the restaurant. They can take it out or be served in a car." We asked to see the manager. The waitress stated, "Well the manager is my husband." The manager repeated to us, "We serve Negroes when they are in cars but not in the restaurant." We explained to him that we did not come in a car. Then he said, "Well, since you aren't in a car you can eat here now, but don't ask me to do it again."⁶⁰

Also dining at the restaurant were white students Minnie Coon Wisegarver, Smith Wisegarver, Verna Volz and Charles Shatuck. These students were witnesses to the incident. They noted:

While seated in the Steak-N-Shake Drive Inn, I saw two Negro girls enter and sit down. I saw the waitress take their order and later bring it to them in a paper

bag. I heard the Negro girls tell the waitress they did not want to take the food out but wanted to eat it there. The waitress said they would not serve colored people inside the restaurant. The Negroes asked to speak to the manager. I heard him say he would serve colored people in cars but not inside the restaurant. After some discussion, I heard the manager say that he would serve them that time but that the Negroes should not ask him to do it again.⁶¹

Steak-N-Shake was not the only restaurant to discriminate against African Americans, but many others as well.

Also in 1946 there were acts of discrimination in the restaurants; Bidwells, Todd's Café, Perry's, Vriner's, Hagen's Steakhouse, Skelton's, Twenty T Hangar, and De Luxe's. While Melvin Humphrey was trying to get a beer at Bidwell's the bartender indicated that he did not look old enough to purchase alcohol. Humphrey told him, "I spent 15 months overseas."⁶² After receiving no clear response for the bartender Humphrey went home to retrieve his identification proving his age. Upon return to Bidwell's he encountered this response:

I gave it to the bartender, manager, or owner, whatever his position was and asked him if he could read. After looking at the card, he then told me that he would sell me a bottle of beer but I would have to drink it in the kitchen. I immediately asked him why. He replied, "That's my policy." I then asked him if he had anything against me. He replied no. Then I asked him again why he was refusing me equal accommodation. He point [ed] to a sign that read "We reserve the right to seat our customers.["] I asked him didn't he [know] that it was against the law to discriminate. He said he knew that or so what.⁶³

Virginia E. Murray, a white patron was a witness to the incident and noted:

I was standing at the bar with my husband, and noticed that at the other end of the bar the bartender was refusing to serve a Negro Melvin Humphrey a drink (beer). I saw him point to the sign "We Reserve the Right to Serve Our Customers" as though to justify his refusal of service. I went down to that end of the bard to join my husband, who had gone there to get cigarettes, and I heard the Negro point out that discrimination was against the law. The bartender answered that it probably was, but still refused to serve him.⁶⁴

Todd's Café was another place that refused to serve African Americans in the way they served white patrons. On 5 May 1946 Helen F. Wesley went to Todd's Café and:

was refused equal service because I am a Negro while at the very same time and place that I was denied equal service other persons of the Caucasian or white race were being served without discrimination. Mr. Todd stated that it was not his policy to serve Negroes and if I wanted to be served I would have to eat in the back.⁶⁵

Onlooker Smith Wisegarver was curious as to what was happening to the African American patrons and inquired of the manager. The manager replied:

that he did not serve colored people because it would ruin his business. He said he would lose \$50 a day if he served colored people and that no one would repay him the amount lost. Then I said to Mr. Todd that the Negroes there were obviously nice persons and as nice as anyone else in the restaurant. Mr. Todd expressed agreement with my statement but said that if he served them he would have to serve all kinds of undesirable people.⁶⁶

This restaurant owner expressed implied sentiments of other owners, being that to serve African Americans would hurt business. However, there was more to his statement than that. It was obvious that serving African American was equivalent to serving other less desirable individuals, thus rendering African Americans undesirable.

Marion McMEn was not told that she and her party were undesirables but they were encountered discrimination. McMEn describes her experience at Hagen's Steakhouse No. 2:

On May 7, 1945 at about 5:15 p.m., I appeared at Hagen's Steakhouse No. 2 and was refused equal service because I am a Negro while at the very same time and place other persons of the Caucasian race or white race were being served without discrimination. I entered Hagen's Steak House No. 2 with three friends of dark skin. Although customers who entered the restaurant after us were being served, we received no attention from the waiter. We asked for a menu

after waiting for some time. The waiter said "just a minute." When he returned he said that "we do not serve Negroes here." We asked to see the manager. Mr. Hagen came to our table. He said "we have never served Negroes here and we never will." Then he added that we could eat in the "back." We asked whether he meant the kitchen. He replied, "Yes."⁶⁷

These women must have felt humiliated, first to be ignored and then told that they will never be served unless it is in the back. Rev. Doran, Mrs. Bougin, and Paul Burt witnessed the incident and noted the following:

Four Negro women entered and sat at a table near the one where the Rev. Herbert Doran and Mrs. Bougin and I were seated and had been served. The waiter served some white patrons who came in after the Negro girls before approaching the latter. He finally came to their table without bringing water glasses, as to other patrons, and said something to them which I could not hear. But he pointed to the back of the room. Then Mr. Hagen came over and I heard him say to the Negro girls that they would have to be seated in the "back," as they "reserved the right to seat their customers," pointing to a sign to that effect behind the counter. The Negro girls left the restaurant. In paying my check I expressed regret that the Negro girls had not been served. Mr. Hagen said "I never have and I never will."⁶⁸

Rudeness was not uncommon when it came to serving African Americans, many restaurant staff and owners openly discriminated without any remorse. In fact, Charles Gaines was a victim of the brashness that was often associated with discrimination. On 8 May 1946 he went to Skelton's Drug Store. Gaines recalled that:

I ordered a cherry coke, and the fellow behind the counter said, "Just a minute." After waiting a while a man in a pharmacy jacket came over and said, "I have a seat for you back here," indicating a back booth. When I inquired why I couldn't sit at the counter he stated, "you just can't that's all." Then an elderly man came up and said, "Don't argue with him."... "If he doesn't take the seat you offered him he can sit here until the store closes." ...Finally I left without being served.⁶⁹

This was obviously not the first time that an incident of this nature occurred. At the same restaurant two white women were seated and told by the waitress:

“There’s going to be trouble.” We asked, “Why?” There’s a Negro at the counter: their third one this week.” We asked her if Negroes were not served, and she said “We don’t like it.”⁷⁰

Many places preferred the more direct and humiliating approach to discrimination, however there were some places that were more subtle in their approach. There was an incident at Perry’s which exemplified the “nice’ approach to segregation.

At approximately 2:20 p.m., a young, clean cut, neatly dressed Negro entered Perry’s. He went to the counter and asked for a cup of coffee. The waitress said that he would have to go around in back. The Negro said that he wanted to drink his coffee in front. He asked if he was being discriminated against because he was a Negro. Another employee of Perry’s joined the conversation. She (the third person) said there was no segregation, but that he would have to go in the rear. The Negro said, Thank you, and left.

After the Negro had departed, the waitress sat down at the table next to ours and engaged in conversation with an elderly man who had been in Perry’s throughout the entire incident. The waitress said, “We get a few like that every week.” Then a short time later she said, “we’ll be getting a lot more in a few weeks when school starts.”⁷¹

Overt racism would have been to place a sign in plain view that indicated no service allowed for African Americans, and a few places did just that. However, many other restaurants discriminated against African Americans on a more institutional level. They would serve African Americans if they were willing to eat around back or near the kitchen, or order their food and then take it out to be eaten elsewhere.

In the cases investigated whites were not treated the same as African Americans. Students would then follow the guidelines set forth by CORE (Committee on

Racial Equality). Based on a CORE workshop, students were supposed to address the issue of discrimination in an organized and non-violent manner. Students were instructed to:

- a. Plan campaign of testing—CORE tactics.
- b. Formal contact by letter, explain who we are, what we do, call attention to the incidents of discrimination in which we know about, recalling dates etc... Suggest we help them change policy without injury to their business—Ask for a personal conference with them.
- c. Have S-CHRC committee go down without invitation if they don't offer one. [D]on't wait for more than 10 days to do this.
- d. Leafleting in front of café—printed materials geared to action.
- e. Picketing.
- f. Be able to call off a campaign with dignity.⁷²

These students were committed to addressing the issue of discrimination in an organized and non-violent manner. So after each subsequent act of discrimination, African American students would file formal affidavits documenting their experiences. They provided a detailed explanation of the incident, with dates, times, places and names of individuals involved and would have all that information notarized to become a part of public record. These students were placing themselves at risk by this action, but equality was more important than the repercussions that often occur from combating injustice. There was an overwhelming amount of signed and notarized affidavits from the students involved in the organized testing of restaurants.⁷³ Their commitment to equality was proven through their persistence and organized campaign of letter writing and documenting their experiences. White participants in the organization, also registered signed affidavits, as witnesses, as a show of support to ending discrimination.

Another interesting aspect to the tests, was the behavior of restaurant owners, waiters and waitresses towards groups of African American and white students sitting together. In this case service was refused and at times the waiter would inform the white student that if he/she wished to receive service she/she could. In any case it was quite clear that the campus restaurants were not going to serve African Americans, and if they did it was in the back of the restaurant, or for carry out service.⁷⁴

The result from these tests of discrimination proved what most African Americans already knew, their second class citizenship. Although students were encouraged to exhaust all alternatives prior to legal action, often times the law was their only recourse. De Luxe was one of the restaurants that became a part of a civil suit. On 8 March 1955 the Daily Illini reported:

Jeanette Lasswell and Ora Lasswell, owners of the tavern, have a suit pending against them because they refused to serve James Montgomery, Negro law student on Feb. 9.⁷⁵

This is very important to note because this demonstrates the persistence in discrimination on the part of this particular restaurant. De Luxe continued to discriminate against African Americans in spite of approximately ten years of work by the Illinois Attorney General, States Attorney of Champaign County, the Student Community Interracial Committee, and particular African American students. Several civil suits were filed during this time. However, evidence only documents two cases appearing in court, and both times the court ruled in favor of the restaurant owner.⁷⁶

Discrimination not only surfaced in the areas of housing and dining, but other aspects of life as well. Local white barbers were unwilling to cut the hair of African American men.⁷⁷ Owners of local theaters refused admission to African Americans, and when these students were admitted they were escorted to a segregated section of the theater, reserved for "Negroes."⁷⁸ Additionally, African Americans were not allowed to swim in the pool at Crystal Lake under any circumstances.⁷⁹

It is apparent from this information that African Americans were discriminated against in all aspects of their lives. These students attended school under hostile and difficult living conditions. It was not until 1941, with the help of Albert R. Lee that African American students were allowed to dine on campus. Lee wrote to the president of the University and explained the hardship that African American students endured due to lack of eating facilities that allowed African American patrons to dine. This was the year the Illini Union was built, and African American students were allowed to eat there.⁸⁰

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

The cohorts of University of Illinois African American students changed every four to five years. However, patterns of contending with difficulties, stability and continuity were provided by the ongoing presence of Albert R. Lee, African American elected officials, Interracial Committee, some University officials, and by the Champaign African American community. These individuals were the backbone to the growth and development of the students during the days of segregation.

U of I represented an institution of higher learning situated in the "liberal" North, a place that was perceived as some how different from the Jim Crow South. However what students encountered here was very much the same forms of segregation their Southern counterparts experienced. Despite time spent serving their country, and devoting time to studies so they could compete academically at the University, those things meant nothing. African American students would not be able to change the view of whites in and around the University.

The complexity of African American student life at the University of Illinois was very difficult to comprehend. These students lived in an area that was perceived liberal, but in actuality a place where racism was of the most dangerous form, covert. Living in the South provided African Americans with a set of guidelines by which to live. Racism, Jim Crow laws and lynchings made it plain. Indeed there was a set of rules that applied to African Americans, and policies that called for equal treatment and protection under the law. Unfortunately students at the University rarely had the

privilege of being treated fairly or as first class citizens. They lived by the Jim Crow laws of the North, a set of laws that boasted the inferiority of African Americans.

In essence African American students at the University of Illinois experienced varying forms of discrimination. As their enrollment trends increased so did the discrimination acts they forced. These students attended school under very antagonistic conditions. Having to find a place to eat and live miles from campus, not being allowed to sit in adequate seats in theaters, or receive hair cuts, to name only a few instances of discrimination, were conditions that no student should have to live under. These various acts of discrimination had an impact on the educational and social environment of these students. Despite the less than pleasant or inviting instances, African American students were able to matriculate, persevere and achieve.

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