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Albert C. Spurlock

Class of 1938

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Albert Cornelius Spurlock was born in Huntington, West Virginia but grew up in Peoria, Illinois, where his father was a stationary steam engineer. His attraction to the University of Illinois was two fold. He recalls, "in our play in the neighborhood and at school we would try and emulate Red Grange if we were playing football. That was one of the attractions. Being the state school was the other. I could have gone to Bradley, but I didn't want to go to school in my hometown." Albert entered the University in 1932.



Albert C. Spurlock, circa 1938

Class	BS 1938, MS 1939
Hometown	Peoria, Illinois
Major	Industrial Education
Activities	Tribe of Illini; Freshman Varsity Track Squad; Varsity Track Letter
Personal	Industrial education teacher at Crispus Attucks High School (1942-66) and Northwest High School (1966-78), Indianapolis, Indiana. Retired in 1978. Married with two children.

Academics:

"I started out in the Engineering school. A lot of the students in the Engineering school were from small towns. They hadn't been with blacks or Chinese or colored people at all. They would speak to you things like that. But when you had to have a partner for a lab experiment or something, you'd find yourself by yourself unless there happened to be another black student there."

"I had a black fraternity member who was in Electrical Engineering, was in school at that time. When he graduated, he couldn't find a job. In fact, when they had their show, Engineering Open House, recruiters from the various factories wouldn't stop at his booth... That wasn't a very good thought for me during the Depression, trying to find a job. So I transferred to Industrial Education and got my grades up [sophomore year]. I got my grades up and decided I wanted to change to the Architectural Department. I was three years and there was no

sign of my ... being able to start my own architectural office or anything and thinking of how I would get a job, I changed back to Industrial Education and graduated. I had to graduate in summer school to get all my education courses in."



Albert Spurlock, January 2001



Albert's friends in front of the Kappa Alpha Psi House

Social Life:

During his freshman year, Albert pledged the Kappa Alpha Psi fraternity. He remembers, "when I was in school, it was during the time of discrimination and segregation. The Kappa's were formed at Indiana University by a group of black students who felt that they needed some kind of social organization like fraternities and sororities. So I knew about the Kappa's since we only had a few black students compared to the entire enrollment of the school."

"We were by ourselves. That helped to create the black fraternities and sororities. That's the only good thing that I can think of that came out of it. Everything opened up after '64. Up until that time, there was discrimination... My friends were all black. Another reason that we didn't socialize with the

on Clark St. in Urbana, circa 1936.

white students other than in the classroom was because if you got too friendly or such and they'd say, "Come on lets go by Strauss' and grab a coke or something." Strauss' wouldn't serve black students at that time. Neither would any of the other little restaurants or things along campus. Rather than go through that embarrassment you just would speak to whites and that was it." "I went to the Freshman Frolic and the Sophomore Cotillion and the Junior Prom and the Senior Ball. Me and my date were the only black students there at that time. Other black students had gone since to the various dances. We had our own dances and parties. At Homecoming, a lot of them would come back to campus that had graduated. Students from the various other schools would come down and we'd go over to Indiana for their Homecoming. They'd come over to Illinois from Iowa and University of Chicago at that time."

Athletics:

Albert lettered in track in 1936. He was one of the first black students to do so after World War I:

"For awhile there, way back in the early 1900s, there were a few blacks that had won letters at Illinois. But, in between, because of discrimination and the coaches didn't want to be bothered with it I guess, the blacks couldn't win a varsity letter." My main event was the high jump, but I ran on the mile relay team... They didn't give scholarships to blacks in athletics at that time... I got second in the high jump to [David] Albritton of Ohio State who went on to... the Olympics. That was during the Jesse Owens time. Ohio State had all the great athletes..."

The freshman squad "had regular meets, they called them telegraphic meets, against other schools. They would telegraph the results from our meet to the other school and the other school would telegraph its results to us, and they would compare the results to see who won. If you got enough points in the telegraphic meets then you got your numerals. Just like if you got enough points in the varsity meet, you got your letter. So it was the same. So I won my numerals for '36."

The track team traveled to other Big Ten schools to compete. Albert remembers:

"When we went to a school where there might be some discrimination, I usually stood in the center of the group, stood up [laughter]... When we went to Michigan or Wisconsin we stayed in dormitories. But in those days, Illinois didn't have dormitories for men. They had one or two for women but nothing for men. All the men had to stay around town or in fraternity houses. That was another reason for the black fraternities [laughter]."



1936 Varsity Track Team, Spurlock is seated in the second row, second from right

"[Illinois] was better than some, and not as good as others. As far as I know, the best schools were Wisconsin and Minnesota. But they only had four or five black students [laughter]. Even when you visited it, Wisconsin, there was no sign of discrimination at any of the activities. In those days, Indiana wouldn't let a black student in the swimming pool. After the track meet we had with Indiana, I went swimming. Jumped in their pool. Their track and their swimming pool were in the same building. So after we got through taking our shower, one or two of the other track men and myself went in the swimming pool. So I integrated their swimming pool [laughter]. Illinois had no discrimination like that. All students had to take swimming."

Relations on and off campus:

"On the campus itself, we didn't feel any discrimination. But don't go in to town, Champaign or Urbana. In the largest theater in Champaign, they permitted blacks to sit in the back in the balcony. In the smaller ones, they wouldn't admit blacks at all. Urbana was the same way... We did most of our things in the house, in the fraternity house, or on the campus... "

On campus, "there were some teachers who didn't care much for black students. It was felt by the students, of course there was nothing that they could do about it. One teacher that I had wouldn't give a black student anything but a C." Dean of Men Fred Turner "didn't discriminate against us. You didn't feel any discrimination from him at all. He was open to trying to help any student that went to him... He was open to any invitations to speak to black student groups. And that was really appreciated by the various black organizations."

One "of the main things that I got out of Illinois, is that you don't give up. You might not make it the first time, but you go back and try it again... I enjoyed all of my years at Illinois and hated to face the world, which at that time there were food lines, they called them bread lines in those days. People out of work, no chance of a job. In fact, that is the reason why I stayed in school and got my masters. I came out in summer time and what few jobs were available in my field had already been taken. So, in that respect, it was a good thing. Having a MS along with my BS really helped me in the line of work that I was in: education."

After University of Illinois

Albert Spurlock graduated from the University of Illinois in industrial education in 1938. He completed a masters in education the following year. After serving in W.W.II, he taught industrial education at Crispus Attucks High School from 1942-66, and at Northwest High School from 1966-78 in Indianapolis, Indiana. Retired in 1978, Mr. Spurlock is married and has two children.

Albert Spurlock graciously has donated his varsity letter sweater, news clippings, and photographs to the Student Life and Culture Archival Program (see RS 41/20/137 in the Archives database).

The tapes and complete transcript of this interview, conducted January 21, 2001, are available for research use in the Student Life and Culture Archives.

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