

University of Illinois Student Life, 1928-38
Oral History Project
Albert Spurlock '38
Indianapolis, Indiana
January 21, 2001

START OF TAPE 1, SIDE A

Ellen Swain: This is an oral history interview for the University of Illinois Archives. The interviewer is Ellen Swain. The narrator is Albert Spurlock, a U of I alumnus from the class of 1938. We are at Mr. Spurlock's home in Indianapolis, Indiana and the date is January 21, 2001.

Okay, Could I ask you first what your full name is and your date of birth.

Albert Spurlock: Albert C. Spurlock. April 17, 1913.

ES: Tell me a little bit about where you grew up and what your parents did and your brothers and sisters.

AS: I was the second child, and my mother over in Peoria, Illinois. And, being the second child, my mother wanted to move home with her parents so I was born in Huntington, West Virginia. And, after nine months, we came back to Peoria and I grew up in Peoria.

ES: Did you have brothers and sisters after you?

AS: I had two sisters. My older sister [Eloise M Spurlock '32] graduated from Illinois. She's deceased now. She majored in foreign language and her senior year made the honor roll [laughter].

ES: How did you get connected to the University of Illinois? What attracted you to it?

AS: I guess it was Red Grange. Growing up, Red Grange was running wild on the football team. In our play in the neighborhood and at school we would try and emulate Red Grange if we were playing football, and 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 [laughter]. I wanted to get away from Peoria.

ES: What did your parents do?

AS: My father was a stationary steam engineer. But as these factories changed over to electric motors. That meant the steam engineers that operated the plants that ran on steam engines were not needed. So my senior year in college, his plant in Peoria closed. He was offered a chance to go to Terre Haute to the other plant, but he was too old at that time to change, so my parents remained in Peoria.

ES: How were they able to cope with Depression during the 1930s? Did that affect your family to a great extent?

AS: Not until 36 and 37 when his plant closed. He was able to get a position with the state, Illinois State Highway Department [*laughter*]. Managed to get through the Depression without too much loss. I had to find ways to help with school, and we worked for our meals at the various sorority and fraternity houses. The last one I worked at was the Kappa Kappa Gamma sorority house and the Kappa Sigma fraternity house for our meals.

ES: You said you were a member of the Kappa Alpha Psi fraternity? How did you join that? When did you join that first?

AS: That was my freshman year when we pledged. But that was when I was in school it was during the time of discrimination and segregation. The Kappas were formed at Indiana University by a group of black students who felt that they needed some kind of social organization like the, like fraternities and sororities. So I knew about the Kappas, and since we only had a few black students compared to the entire enrollment of the school.

ES: How many would you say were there when you were a student?

AS: I think it was between 150 and 200 black students, and about 11,000 to 12,000 white students at the time. It might have been a little lower than that, but the enrollment was over 10,000 I know [*laughter*]. On the campus itself, we didn't feel any discrimination. But don't go in town, Champaign or Urbana. In 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. I don't think we ever went to Urbana to try to go to the theater. Although, our fraternity house, the house that we had as a fraternity house, was in Urbana. 707 S. Clark in Urbana. We'd walk past the University High School gym and cut through the Engineering Schools to get to the main campus. Cross the Boneyard [*laughter*]. But—

ES: Did the black students mingle with the other students?

AS: The thing that happened with me now when 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. And, 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. But at that time, the few black students that were in engineering were all ahead of me, and there were only two [*laughter*]. One was a senior and the other was a junior. I started out in the school of Electrical Engineering.

I had a black fraternity member who was in Electrical Engineering, was in the 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 even stop at his booth. He felt quite bad about it. But he started teaching, he got a job teaching at Tuskegee. He worked there until after the War. After World War II he went to RCA in New Jersey. So he finally got a job in engineering other than teaching it.

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. That would have been my sophomore year, I transferred to Industrial Education. I got my grades up and decided I wanted to change to Architectural Engineering [*laughter*], so I transferred to the Architectural department. I was three years and there was no sign of my getting any, 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 [*laughter*]. I had to graduate in summer school to get all my education courses in. Other than that, on the campus, like I said, there was no discrimination. Some of the teachers didn't care too much for having black students.

ES: Is that right?

AS: But Dean Turner, who was an excellent Dean of Men, he would come out, he even came to one of our monthly meetings and talked with us and even had his picture taken. 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. He wouldn't fail them, but he wouldn't give them anything but a C. He was in Education. My sister got a C out of him, and she was good student. I was just an average student who didn't care too much. I got a C also [*laughter*].

ES: Was that ever brought up? Did anyone challenge that?

AS: No, no. What could you challenge in those days? One of the reasons, another reason that we didn't socialize with the white students other than in the classroom was because if you got to friendly or such and they'd say, "Come on lets go by Strauss's and grab a coke or something." Strauss's wouldn't serve black students at that time. Neither would any of the other little restaurants or things along campus row. Rather than go through that embarrassment you just would speak to whites and that was it.

ES: So that your friends were mainly among the black students?

AS: My friends were all black.

ES: What did you do for fun?

AS: Well, I went to the Freshman Frolic and the Sophomore Cotillion and the Junior Prom and the Senior Ball [*laughter*]. Me and my date were the only black students there at that time. Other black students had gone since to the various dances. But, we had our own dances and parties. Homecoming and a lot of us would come back from, to the campus that had graduated. And then, students from the various other schools would come down and we'd go over to Indiana for their Homecoming. Or they'd come over to Illinois from Iowa and University of Chicago at that time.

ES: So there was a connection among black students?

AS: Of black students in the neighboring schools.

ES: What was the fraternity and sorority life like for black students? How many were on campus?

AS: I've got some records like those that I showed you, I can give you copies of. We had three fraternities, and two black sororities. Let's see there was, the Alpha's, the Omega's and the Kappa's were the fraternities. The AKA's and the Delta's were the sororities. So they had to get their members out of the 150 or 200 that we had. So they weren't very, they weren't large. I think the largest while I was there, we had 30 men, that was about the largest that our fraternity ever grew while I was there. But, they had this house on Clark, it had a dormitory that would sleep 30 in double-deck, double bunked beds and a study room. We moved from there to a house on Main Street, while I was in school, and from Main Street, this is in Urbana, from Main Street we moved over to 3rd Street over in Fraternity Row. That was that first house that had formally been a fraternity house or something, the other were just houses.

The AKA's were the same way, but they had, they had a house mother. The Delta's didn't have a house, they had a room. And the Alpha's and the Omega's didn't have a house during those days, I don't think they do now. The Kappa's had to close their house, they finally got one. The alumni got them a house across the street from the Armory. It was formerly a sorority house. That was the first real fraternity house that they had, even though it was a sorority house at first [*laughter*]. Then there was a shooting at one of their parties. Some town people tried to get in or something and we had to close it down. So I don't know whether they're active on campus, but I don't know whether they're living together in a fraternity house now. You might check when you go back [*laughter*].

When I went out for track, I was the first black to win a varsity letter, after World War I. For a while there, way back in the early 1900's, 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. There was one exception, Doug Turner won a letter in Tennis, but that wasn't considered a varsity sport at the time, I don't think. I believe he was captain of the varsity tennis team back in 28 or 29 or 30—one of those years. I think he was captain of the tennis team. But after Doug Turner I was the first black to win anything in sports. And—

ES: Tell me about track. Did you go to Illinois on a scholarship in track? Or did they not give scholarships?

AS: They didn't give scholarships to blacks in athletics at that time. It wasn't until after my letter, I won my letter in 36 which would have normally been my senior years if I had gone through the engineering school, but by transferring—

ES: When did you, what was your freshman year?

AS: 32, September of 32. So—

ES: So then you tried out for the track team in 32?

AS: At that time, freshman couldn't win a varsity letter. Freshmen had to win numerals. So I won my freshman numerals for 36. And, got eligible my second year in the school of architecture, and I probably was the first athlete to win a letter in architectural engineering [laughter]. I won my letter that year and then the year after I transferred back to education.

ES: Did you travel to different schools in the Big Ten to compete?

AS: Yeah. I got second in the high jump to [David] Albritton of Ohio State who went on to win the Olympic gold. That was during the Jesse Owens time. Ohio State had all the great athletes, with Jesse Owens and Albritton on the Olympic team, they won about six gold medals between them.

ES: That's really good to get second to him.

AS: Yeah, in fact, I got second indoor and outdoor. We went over to the Kansas relay the team stayed at the largest hotel in Kansas City, Missouri. That night I went out to visit my sister who was teaching in Kansas at that time. And, they wanted to know where I was staying. They said, "You can't stay here. They don't allow blacks to stay here" [laughter]. When we went to a school where there might be some discrimination I usually stood in the center of the group, stood up [laughter]. I guess the coach just passed me off as an Indian or something. Of course, they were just as bad on the Indians as they were on the blacks. By being in the center of the group and not wanting to turn away that much money. I went out to my sister's home out by taxi but she brought me back by car. I can just see me standing in the hotel. But other than that, no, that was the only place we went south. The rest was Chicago, or Columbus, Ohio, or Wisconsin. 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].

ES: Where did the independent black students live?

AS: In private homes, in private black homes.

ES: Were they in the area of the University?

AS: They lived quite a ways away. Mostly on the north side of town, in Champaign. There was one family in Urbana, next door to the Kappa house, that kept students also. But other than that they stayed with families around town. There were quite a few black families in Champaign. I don't know. There were also some in Urbana too.

ES: But overall you felt that Champaign-Urbana was kind of hostile?

AS: They were. I didn't feel it, they were hostile. We did most of our things in the house, in the fraternity house, or on the campus. We didn't have a student union at that time. Student union came in, I missed everything. But we did have some nice dances. They'd have

Jimmy Lunsford, or Cab Calloway, Duke Ellington, Lombardo. We were able to dance to some of the big bands [*laughter*].

ES: Were the student activities open to blacks?

AS: Yeah. Except the band. We had some good students in the music department, and they tried to go out for the band, the marching band, wouldn't let them. I don't think while I was there anyone tried out for the Choir, the Chorus, or the Glee Clubs or anything.

ES: Were black students active in student groups?

AS: Not that I know of. 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, after the Civil Rights Act of 64. Up until that time, there was this discrimination. It really made you bitter at times. Other than that, I enjoyed my years at Illinois. I'm a life member of the Alumni Association, what else, the Athletic Association, even though we don't call it that. What do we call it? Anyway, I'm a life member of that also. I'm proud of it: Illinois.

ES: You've mentioned Dean Turner. Could you talk about him for a little bit? What was his role on campus?

AS: Dean of Boys. Dean Turner was Dean of Boys. And to him it meant all the boys. He seems to have no negative feelings towards a person because of his race or color.

START OF TAPE 1 SIDE B

ES: Ok, you were talking about Dean Turner?

AS: Yes, Dean Turner was Dean of Boys and like I said he had no, he 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.

ES: Was he pretty visible among the students?

AS: Yes. I haven't heard of any student who didn't like Dean Turner: white, black or yellow. And, he stayed at Illinois for years.

ES: What were some of the rules on campus when you were in school? Rules for students, regulations?

AS: I don't recall the rules [*laughter*]. I never went to the campus. I only went to the campus in the day time hours or the few class dances. We ate lunch, a lot of us at lunches at the Home Economic dining room. It wasn't a dining room, but they had lunch ever day before the Student Union opened up. I guess you eat in the Student Union now. Like I said, we didn't

have a student union, so as I said, the Home Ec lunch room was the only thing they had on the campus and all students could go to it. As far as I know the students could go to any affair on campus, and did. But, don't go off the campus.

ES: Did you get a sense of how Illinois compared to other schools in regards to discrimination?

AS: It 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. I can't think of anything else.

ES: Was smoking or drinking a problem on campus?

AS: Well, we couldn't, as far as I know, you couldn't smoke on campus. But drink, we couldn't drink on campus. No one tried, that I knew of. But the fraternity houses, we drank. Have our beer. Smoking didn't bother me because I never smoked. But there was no smoking on the campus that I know of, but if there was you had to go and stand outside or something. I'm not too familiar with it.

ES: You mentioned this before, but I just wanted to ask you again: You said you did have to have a job while you were in school to support yourself?

AS: Well, my job was to wait tables and save my money. My parents would send me meal money. We had to have meal money to buy our food out in town at a black restaurant or lunch counter. The AKA's had their meal in their house. They had enough students and a house mother, so they had their meal in the house. But the rest of us, if you didn't eat with the people you roomed with, then you had to go around town. The Kappa's didn't have enough money to have any cooks, so we didn't have a cook. Some of the fellows cooked their own meal and became quite efficient at it. My parents sent me \$10 a week for meal money. I would work in the fraternity house and save that \$10 and be able to do something else. A couple of the other members of the fraternity did likewise. Some of them had to work, were working their way through school. In the summer time they would take jobs as Pullman waiters on the railroad trains or as Pullman porters. They'd get a summer job on these scenic trains. At that time, trains would have Pullman cars and dining cars and that sort of thing and they would get their summer jobs on that. Not from Illinois, but I understand that a lot of the students from southern schools would go up to Connecticut and pick tobacco during the summer. They would send down and bring them up to Connecticut and that's how they would earn money to stay in the school that they were at. Most of the jobs were waiting tables while they were in school.

ES: What did you do during the summer? Were you in summer school a lot of those summers?

AS: Just the one year. One summer I worked up in Michigan at the Roaring Brook Inn near Potasky, Michigan as a pantry boy [laughter]. Another summer I worked in Lakin, West Virginia at the State Farm for black people. The state institution, asylum for black people. My uncle was the superintendent of lands and buildings. So I worked there for the summer as a post master. And then another summer I worked at in Peoria, my home, at a cooperage shop.

ES: What is that?

AS: A cooper shop made barrels. This coppers shop made whisky barrels for Hiram Walker's Distillery. Hiram Walker's had a large distillery in Peoria. So I made these whiskey barrels and I ran the machine which cut a groove so that the head of the barrel would fit in. I would get these hot, charred oak barrels because we were working with whiskey and whiskey had to age in these oak barrels that were charred. The char gave the whiskey a little color so instead of coming out white, it came out amber. They would run the whiskey barrels to my machine from the fires. So it would come to me hot. I would have to clamp them into this machine and cut this groove and release it. First two days on the job I could hardly open my eyes I was so tired. But after that I got used to it. Wages in those days were something else. I was working at the cooperage shop for 17 ½ cents an hour. That's what the family men were working for, the same wage, 17 ½ cents an hour. And the prices of everything now. Those days you could buy a Ford for about \$500 or \$600. They would raise a family on \$15 or \$16 dollars a week.

ES: It's hard to believe.

AS: It is.

ES: Not having lived through it, it's hard to believe. How did you get around campus?

AS: Walked. We walked. One year, they were roller skating.

ES: Oh is that right?

AS: That was while my sister was there. When I got there they had banned it because they'd go up in the stadium and come down the ramps. They'd hurt someone and bump their head.

ES: Were bicycles prevalent?

AS: Oh yeah, quite a few had bicycles. But being interested in track, walking wasn't any problem for me [laughter]. Yeah, we walked. There were a few at the fraternity house that had bicycles.

ES: What, did students and faculty have relations outside of the classroom, or was it pretty much--?

AS: Only if a black student worked for someone, they had relations, but other than that. Dean Turner was the only one that had any relations that I know of, outside of the campus.

ES: Did you have any impressions of the President. It would have been Chase and Daniels, or Willard while you were there?

AS: Well, it was Willard. No *[laughter]*. Willard's secretary was a black man [Albert Lee], but I never saw him. I saw him at Commencement.

ES: Sure, but he really wasn't a visible part of student life?

AS: No, no.

ES: How important was religion to students while you were there.

AS: Not too important. Several of the fellows went to church, but other than going to church. Marshall came to, of the NAACP and Hastie, came to Illinois while I was there, as young men, trying to start a NAACP chapter on campus, which they did. This chapter would meet in churches, but that was our biggest relationship with the church.

ES: How would you characterize the moral code on campus?

AS: Seemed to be pretty strict. I think there was a panty-raid once or twice *[laughter]*. Not frequent panty-raids or anything. All the sororities had house mothers and things.

ES: They kept them in line.

AS: Uh-huh.

ES: What did you do on a date? What kinds of things did you do for fun?

AS: Sometimes we'd drive to the show and sit in the back *[laughter]*. We'd set in the balcony. What else would we do? We'd put the records on in the fraternity house and play records and dance. Sometimes, if somebody had some beer or something, we'd have a little party.

ES: Where did you study?

AS: We had study rooms, of 4 to a room. Study desks and everything, books. Sometimes we'd walk to the library. When we got to the school of architecture I had to spend most of my time in the drafting room or in the library of the college. But the main library

reference rooms were a frequent place, when a black student wanted to be alone he'd go and study there, rather than in his room.

ES: Do you think being in a fraternity elevated your status? How did the Greek and the Independent students get along?

AS: Not very well. Well, the independents were living with the town people. The younger town people, some of them didn't get along very well with the male black students because some of the male black students were going with the town girls. There wasn't a close relationship at all with any of the town youth except male and female dating.

ES: How did they meet women in town to date them?

AS: When they'd happened to go places to eat, they'd meet some. Or by reference. Someone who knew them told them to look them up when they came to town. That would be the way, by reference mostly. There were enough girls, although the boys outnumbered the girls, I think the boys outnumbered the girls on the white campus at that time too, although I think now it's the other way around. I heard that it was 51% female now. But anyway, in those days there were more men at Illinois than women, white or black. I was trying to think.

ES: I'm just looking over my questions, you've answered a lot of my questions.

AS: You said something in the letter that you might want some souvenirs or something. I've got some stuff that you might want.

[Interruption.]

ES: I maybe have gotten to this earlier. I was wondering if you could just talk about what you think the strengths and weaknesses of your education at Illinois were, academically or socially. We talked about the discrimination. Did you feel like you missed anything?

AS: No, I don't. I think that Illinois gave me the best foundation that I could find any place. The various classes that I took while I was there showed that you have to keep on learning. That you don't stop learning when you get out of school. That the school gives you the background but you have to continue to look up references, continue to meet people, continue to strive and improve on what you feel you already know. That was 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. Socially, they did as much for a black student as any school at that time could do. 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 that I was in: education.

ES: When you were in school, how aware of the outside world were you? Did you, on a daily basis were you aware of what was going on in the state and the country and internationally? How in touch were you with world events?

AS: Because of the radio and the *Daily Illini* we stayed abreast of everything. We were around the radio when the King of England gave up the thrown and everybody was wondering whether he would ever regret if he gave up the thrown of England for a woman. We followed the prize fights of Joe Louis at that time. We were well aware of the things around us and the *Daily Illini* kept us abreast of everything. Between the radio and the *Illini* we were current.

ES: Were students involved in politics on campus?

AS: No, not at that time. If there were, they were planning on going to law school or something like that, they were in that field to get involved in politics. Very few engineering students got in to politics. I don't know of any fine art students in architecture that got into politics. So no, the black students didn't get involved in politics at that time. I don't think too many had a sense that I have seen in the Alumni News. Although, one of our fraternity brothers was, Ted, Theodore Jones, from Chicago that was on the University Board. He ran for the school board.

ES: When you were in school, there weren't student protest on the Quad or radical student groups, that type of activity?

AS: Not that I recall. But students were too poor to protest. I don't think there's any protest that I know of during the six years I was at Illinois.

ES: We talked about fraternities a little bit, but I want to know why you wanted to join a fraternity?

AS: Well, I read a lot of books when I was growing up, Rover Boys and books like that, where they went off to schools and joined a club. Then I had a sister who joined the AKA's and she told me to join so-and-so fraternity when you go to school. So, between the two things, and having some place to stay while I was at Illinois was the third.

START OF TAPE 2 SIDE A

ES: You said your sister was in the Alpha Kappa Alpha's.

AS: Yes, she was.

ES: What year did she graduate?

AS: 32.

ES: Was education important to your parents?

AS: Yeah, both of my parents were college graduates.

ES: They were.

AS: My mother graduated from West Virginia State in 1905. That was when it was a two year school. Then she taught in Waco, Texas for four years and then she married my father. My father graduated from West Virginia State in 1903 and then he went to Tuskegee and graduated in 1905, and then went to work. But, when he graduated he ended up out in Seattle, Washington, operating the steam engines for the saw mills. And since that was seasonal jobs, I think he stayed there for two years. Then he started working his way back East. He stopped off in Kansas during harvesting season for the wheat, and operated the threshing, steam threshing machines they had in those days. While he was operating this threshing machine at this farm, service men and one of the owners of a factory in Peoria came to buy straw. They had a factory that made boxes out of straw board, what they call straw board. They had to have the straw to make the straw board. He saw my father on this steam threshing machine and told him that they had a vacancy for an engineer in Peoria and was he available? Pop was very available and went to Peoria and he worked at the straw board factory in Peoria for 34 years, until they closed. That was back in the days when factories were operated by huge steam engines that had belts that ran to other belts. Each machine operated off of the smaller pulley. The whole factory, everything mechanical that operated in the factory, operated from this one engine. He was a licensed Stationary Steam Engineer in Peoria for 34 years.

ES: So that's where you grew up. What high school did you attend?

AS: I went to Peoria Central. And Peoria Central happens to be the oldest high school in the state of Illinois.

ES: Is that right.

AS: And still goes strong.

ES: Did you run track in high school?

AS: Yes. I ran track and cross county at Peoria Central. My senior year I was captain of the Track Team.

ES: So when you got to Illinois you had to try out for the team?

AS: Yes. There were no scholarships for blacks in the Athletic Department.

ES: What did that involve?

AS: The scholarship?

ES: The tryouts?

AS: They had a freshman track coach, I can't think of his name right now. His father had an athletic company in Urbana that made equipment for track. I can't think of his name right now, it might be in the book. But anyway, we 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 it's 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.

ES: Was it competitive to get on the track team? How many people were on it?

AS: Yes. There were quite a few. Most of them were for the running events, but there were two or three others for the high jump too.

ES: What were your events, the high jump and--?

AS: My main event was the high jump, but I ran on the mile relay team. I ran on the shuttle relay, hurdle team at Kansas, and Drake relays.

ES: Did you feel like you made friends on the team?

AS: Oh yeah, I made some friends. But, like I said, I didn't, we didn't associate after the meets, so I didn't make any effort to develop a friendship. On trips, I usually set by myself, because I was the only black. No one offered to sit down with me. And, that was the main thing. I didn't make any effort to become too friendly, but we would talk.

ES: Another question that we've kind of talked about, but I'll ask you. Could you talk about the relationship between the town blacks and the University? How did the blacks in Champaign County view the University of Illinois, to your knowledge?

AS: Most of the blacks in town worked in some way with the University. Either custodial or carrying the mail. There was one of the secretaries to President Willard was a black man, and he lived in town. He was directly connected with the University. There were no professors at that time. So in my opinion most of the black townspeople were employees of some form, either in sorority and fraternity houses, or for the University: grounds, upkeep, and things like that. Same thing was true in town. They were mostly porters and janitors. I don't think any of the hotels had black waiters, because they could get students at that time. Wasn't much opportunity for blacks in Champaign. I understand now they have black teachers in the public schools of Champaign and Urbana. to which was unheard of in my day. Even Peoria didn't have black teachers when I was growing up. We've come a long way, we really have, but we still have a little ways to go.

ES: The student and the young people in town, you were saying, didn't get along?

AS: They didn't mingle much. I don't recall more than three members of the fraternity that had girlfriends from the town girls. It was just a matter of not seeing them. We were in

this house and on the campus and Friday's or Saturday's, if they had a football or basketball or some kind of sport going on, go to that. But we weren't involved with the town much at all.

ES: Was your fraternity a part of the entire Greek system?

AS: Yeah. Even the Interfraternity Council.

ES: You had a member that was a representative of the Interfraternity Council?

AS: Yeah, uh-huh.

ES: Did you mix socially?

AS: No, he was just a member of. He went to the meeting [*laughter*]. And we were in the intramural sports and that kind thing. They'd have an intramural track meet and an intramural basketball game and we'd have a team for that.

ES: I see, that was just for the Greeks?

AS: The Greeks, uh-huh.

ES: Could you tell me about the Inter Scholastic Circus?

AS: They had a gym class called Circus Stunts in those days. I took one course, tight rope walking [*laughter*]. Whatever stunt you majored in, if you were good enough, you performed it in the Circus.

ES: I see.

AS: They had trapeze acts. We had a member of our fraternity, he was small, and he was in the trapeze. When I took the circus stunts, I took tight rope walking.

ES: This is a class?

AS: This was a class. Uh-huh. You got an grade for your Phys. Ed in it. You had to walk to the middle of the wire and you could juggle or sit down on a chair or something. You had to do some kind of little stunt at of the center for your final grade.

ES: And then Inter Scholastic Circus came out of that?

AS: Came out of that.

ES: Kind of an end performance or something?

AS: Yeah, uh-huh. For the best of your classes.

ES: So that wasn't necessarily a Greek thing?

AS: No, it was the whole school.

ES: I see.

AS: It was the Phys. Ed department.

ES: No, they don't have that anymore [laughter]. Did your house decorate for Homecoming?

AS: Tried to, we tried. When they moved over on Third Street, they had a good display. We always had people coming in for Homecoming and we'd have a party for them. They'd come in from various schools and the Alumni would come back. So Homecoming was a big social time.

ES: Did you go to other schools for their Homecoming?

AS: Once, it took money, and transportation.

ES: I wondered if we could we finish off by talking about what you did after college? You graduated in 39 and got your masters degree?

AS: I graduated in 38 and got my masters in 39. Then I was out in the world looking for a job. My first job was in the Atlanta. I was at the Laboratory High School, they had a Laboratory High School on the campus for the practice teachers and for the students, anyone that wanted to come there really. The only ones who could afford it were the professor's children and the upper class of Atlanta. I worked there two years and then came to Indianapolis. I was at Crispus Attucks High School for, let's see 39. I worked in Atlanta in 39 and 40, and 40 and 41. I came to Indianapolis in 41, and 42 was my first year at Crispus Attucks High School.

At the end of my first year, World War II had started, and I was drafted. They started after me in Atlanta but I transferred my whatchamacallit, I transferred to Peoria and then I got my job in Indianapolis so I had to transfer to Indianapolis. So the board was able to let me finish the school year out. June the 6th, I think it was, I was inducted into the Army. We went down to Camp Gordon, Georgia, outside of Augusta. At the end of basic training we moved to Camp Hood, Texas. We opened the Camp Hood, Texas, it was the, going to be... I was with the Corp of Engineers. The Camp at Camp Hood for the motorized Army, they called it something else, it was the ex-Calvary and the tank destroyers of World War II. From Camp Hood we were sent to New Guinea, we went by the way of San Francisco. We were sent on one of the Kaiser ships for Navy troop carrying. On the shake down cruise something happened and they had to hold us in the camp, in San Francisco for six weeks until they repaired it. When we went out we were unescorted because it was a Navy troop carrier and it had it's own guns. So, we went down the coast of South America, across the equator, and then turned and we ended up in New Guinea. We were at sea 31 days because we were going by ourselves. We

landed on Oro Bay where the Japanese had placed a small camp. They were trying to, they were going down South Asia and the peninsula into Australia. In fact, they had air strips on the Northern shore of New Guinea, at Oro Bay and that's where we went in.

After we destroyed their base and captured the Japanese we stayed in Oro Bay long enough to build another airfield. Then we went down the coast to down to Milne Bay. That was to be the main point where the US was building to start up to the Philippines again. The main depot for supplies and things to go. At Milne Bay our outfit built the hospitals for the wounded there in the fighting and built some roads and docks for the ships to land. Then we started up to the Philippines. We went up the coast from New Guinea to Hollandia. Spent a day in Hollandia and then started north to the Philippines.

We arrived in Manila four days after MacAuthor's outfit had taken Manila. We stayed in Manila until the Japanese surrendered. We were in New Guinea for 12 months and in the Philippines for six months: I was ready to come home. When I got back to the states I took a summer session, my wife was from New York so I transferred back to New York instead of Indianapolis. And while in New York I went to Columbia for summer session, took some refresher courses and then came back to Indianapolis in the September of 46 and I've been here ever since. I taught Industrial Arts, Electricity for five years and, then Drafting and Architectural drawing and Mechanical drawing. I coached track for 21 years for Attucks. And I was also the Assistant on the basketball team during Ray Crowe's year when we won the State Championship. I became Head of the Industrial Education Department.

ES: Is that right, wow!?

AS: It was the first time a school from Indianapolis had won a Championship. And the first time in history that a black school had ever won a State Championship.

ES: What was that like?

AS: It was a different feeling. It really was enjoyable. So many of the students and the players have gone onto success also. They transferred me from Attucks to Northwest High School when they started integrating the schools. I stayed at Northwest for 12 years as Industrial Education Department Head and then I retired.

ES: What year was that, when were you transferred?

AS: 78. No, I retired in 78. 66 they transferred me to Northwest and I retired from Northwest in 78 and 79. I've been retired for 21 years now.

ES: When did you get married? How did you meet your wife?

AS: I met my wife when I was in Atlanta. She was getting her masters in social work and sociology from Atlanta University. I met her there when I came to Indianapolis, she got a job in Arkansas, at the Arkansas A & M College. The year before, I mean, that summer, May the 22nd, I even know the date, we got married in St. Louis. One of my fraternity brothers was my best man. And—

ES: What year was that?

AS: 42. I went into the Army the next week.

ES: Oh no. And, do you have children?

AS: We have two children. They're both in Atlanta, Georgia now. They have children now. Two of the grandkids are still in college, one of them just graduated.

ES: Have you stayed in touch with your Illinois friends?

AS: My fraternity friends, yes. But quite a few of them are dying off now [*laughter*], yes quite a few are dying off. The brother that was my best man for the wedding, I was the best man for his wedding earlier. He and his family came through about two weeks ago. He has a daughter in Washington D.C. He has a big family. He had three children, I only had two. And each of his three children have three children too. They sent us a family picture of them at a reunion outside of Hilton Head. They were down at Hilton Head for a reunion, and sent us a picture.

ES: And what's his name?

AS: John Davis.

ES: Well, thank you for talking to me. Do you have anything else you want to say?

AS: I think you learned everything.

END OF THE INTERVIEW