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Title: The Baraca–Philathea Lyceum of Bethel AME Church. Redistribution of Rhetorical Activities seen in Current Church Practices (Proposal)

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Abstract: Literary societies formed in the early 19th century in the US, were inexpensive sources of education and entertainment for adults in a community (Logan, 2008; Ray, 2005), which emerged in response to increasing democratic spaces (Bode, 1956), and whose lectures were given in public spaces (Logan, 2008). Among these societies, the lyceums were instances of evening entertainment, which served as sources of practical education (in the sciences) and community information (Bode, 1956; Logan, 2005; Logan, 2008; McHenry, 2002; Powell, 1895; Ray, 2005). Research on these societies suggests that black lyceums, which seldom intersected with their mainstream counterparts, and were extensions of former abolitionist societies (Logan 2008), were sites where African Americans obtained and displayed their rhetorical education, as a by–product of their political activism. While most scholars agree that these lyceums declined when their activities were taken over by the formal training and entertainment offered by public schools, museums, libraries, and universities (Powell, 1895; Bode, 1956; Logan, 2008), this research will question this approach. By collecting oral histories from members of Bethel AME Church, an African American congregation in Champaign, this research will explore an internal redistribution thesis, which understands current literate practices as residues of former lyceum–type of activities.

Initial Exercises: Analysis of ‘Letter to Officers of the Baraca–Philathea Lyceum’ (1922) and related notes

After studying the ‘Guide to African American Research Resources’, I

became interested in exploring what official communications, or those stemming from authorities at UIUC, might reveal about African American participation in campus and in the community. From the 'Albert R. Lee Papers (1912, 1917–1928)', I chose a 1922 letter from Albert R. Lee, chief clerk in the President's Office (David Kinley), addressing the officers of the Baraca–Philathea Lyceum, an organization cited throughout the guide as an auxiliary to Bethel Church, a possible site of rhetorical education for African Americans in Champaign. Although the letter concerns the organization of the programs in this lyceum, its connections to the university and to the community become clear through related documents.

This letter was written following Lee's appointment as president of the lyceum in 1922. It is part of the 'Albert R. Lee Papers (2/6/21, boxes 1–3),' a collection of letters (personal and institutional), and other records (notes, programs, invitations, and clips) that extend from 1912 to 1928, and which document Lee's involvements with the university, student organizations, superintendents from Springfield, and Illinois districts, and with the NAACP. In particular, this letter was stored within the 'Bethel AME Baraca–Philathea Lyceum, 1920, 1922–24' file (box 3). This document has been part of the University Archives since its creation

in 1963; and it was added to the guide, most likely when it was first compiled in 1994, since the latter has undergone minor additions, as I learned from one of the library specialists in the Archives. Since reconstructing history—making inferences—from collections of primary sources that might be fragmented and incomplete, demands that you do some cross-references, I selected from the same records, two related pieces—an open communication to members of the lyceum (1920), and a set of extempores (ca. 1922–1924) to the programs—that clarify and extend part of the letter’s content.

The ‘Letter to the Officers of the Baraca–Philathea Lyceum’ (November 15, 1922) was written by Lee in his new capacity as president of the lyceum, and serves as a means to present his plans to the officers (his audience), and to solicit their assistance in its execution. Little is known about the audience, although a roster of the officers (both male and female) follows the letter in the file (November 24, 1922); and no follow-up letters or responses were found in that file. However, from its emphatic (‘you will have to act at once,’ or ‘start now’), and inclusive (‘we want our meetings to,’ ‘we want our business carried,’ or ‘we want our Journal to’) tones, officers may have understood this document as a forceful request, thus highlighting its purpose to communicate and enforce a plan of

action.

This letter's focus is on the lyceum's programs, as the core of its success. Programs should be composed of both literary and musical numbers. In particular, "[t]he literary numbers should include readings, declamations, papers, orations, extempores on current question[s], and an occasional debate." This aligns with Logan's (2008) description of lyceums as forms of evening entertainment and education (p. 59). Furthermore, the letter establishes its connections to the community and the university by listing as participants "University and High School students, young and older people of the community, University Faculty, and local professional men." The letter also discusses practical matters, such as the distribution of tasks for committees, relevant meeting dates and hours, and seating arrangements and roles for the officers.

The letter to the officers may very well be read as any communication organizing the programs in a lyceum. However, additional pieces do reveal its connections to the African American community, and the lyceum's role in the 'race work,' which Logan (2008) explores as both challenging inferiority notions, and seeking for the uplift of the 'race'. A second communication, dated two years

earlier, provides some insights into the lyceum's history, purposes, and scope. According to the 'Circular to the members of the Baraca-Philathea Lyceum (signed by Gray and Thornhill, President and Secretary, on January 6, 1920),' which encourages former participants (broader audience) to attend meetings and to invite prospective members, we know that the lyceum was founded in ca. 1910. "... [B]ut just as it was entering on its fourth successful year, along came the World War [first] and tore it asunder" The letter explains how it has been reorganized, and asks for the members' help in its revitalization by promoting "[e]verything that is good for the *Race* [my emphasis] and the community," The letter also expresses its openness to all sorts of participants—old, young, church members or not—and points to its affiliations to the Bethel Church, but clarifies that this lyceum is non-denominational. Most notably, the letter lists the lyceum's regular activities (live discussions, civic betterment, debates, and journals), as part of their entertainment (possibly musicals and socials) and benefit (possibly literary) programs.

A third piece, which helps us understand part of the content discussed in this lyceum's programs, held on Fridays, is an annotated set of informal extempores. This set lists various current

topics; yet racial matters are always part of the agenda. Topics listed are the following: ‘How may the race students of the U. of I. get together?’; ‘Champaign Branch NAACP’; ‘Negro Immigration North—benefits and dangers’; ‘The Klan—present tendencies and outlook’; ‘What might we reasonably expect from Champaign Branch, NAACP’; ‘Possibilities of Engineering as a vocation for the Negro’; ‘Colored students in Champaign/Urbana High School[s], number progress, activities’; ‘The Negro in business in the twin cities’; and ‘Are the activities against the KKK well directed?’ Therefore, rhetorical education appears to be a “... by-product of political activism.” (Logan, 2008, p. 69).

This letter and its related documents are relevant illustrations of a lyceum’s concerns for community and race issues. I think it exemplifies the sorts of behavior that oppose apathy in civic matters, which I repeatedly observe in Logan’s (2008) portrayal of individual and institutional rhetorical initiatives. These documents suggest that African Americans (students and faculty) in campus and in Champaign may have been engaged in the programs as spectators or discussants; in terms of literacy, they suggest extended abilities, focused on public discussions, aligning with Logan’s (2008) understanding that “[t]he first half of the nineteenth century in

America has been characterized as ‘oratorical’… .” (p. 96). They also portray an idea of rhetoric in service of political activism, and the interconnection of education, community, religious organizations, and literary societies, where as Logan (2008) indicates, “[m]any of these associations were formed within black churches, especially in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries … [to promote] learning … to challenge notions of black inferiority.” (p. 67).

For a research concerned with African American sites of rhetorical education at UIUC, studying this lyceum (as a ‘safe space’) and its programs, suggests it might have become an alternative public site, with its black counterpublic. At the same time, the sense of urgency conveyed in both letters—the need to gather people (in the 1920 communication), and the need to excel in their programs (in the 1922 letter), might also align with Logan (2008) in that the ‘decline’ of these societies is mostly seen in their functions being redistributed to other institutions (pp. 91–92), in this case, most likely to the spaces that UIUC might have provided.

However, to understand this document in full, or the relevance of this lyceum in the ‘advancement’ of African Americans in Champaign, we still need certain information on names, events, and places that the

letters and extempores do not cover (and the file did not provide). For instance, it might be interesting to know the connections of the officers in this lyceum to the university and the community, and their extended work; it might also be interesting to know about other initiatives (institutional ones), which Lee may have been able to promote in his capacity as chief clerk at the university—initiatives with students and beginning student associations. Assuming he was African American, which I believe he was, the history of his employment in UIUC might be relevant too. As for the lyceum, knowing how long it lasted, or whether it evolved into a new society (within Bethel church, for instance), should be insightful too. In particular, understanding any possible impact of the lyceum's discussions, their speaker guests, and what the print media (UIUC black media probably) reported on these performances should constitute another site of 'cross-pollination' in Logan's terms. Therefore, the documents inspire other research paths in an attempt to connect sites of rhetorical education, and to understand the uses given to rhetorical training.

From this first experience at the Archives, I am taking this need to conduct a systematic search, and to do some secondary research first (hopefully) to be able to anticipate findings, or to know

what to look for in the boxes. Combining primary sources, which Logan must have done, arranging them chronologically, and filling in the blanks with informed inferences from other sources are fundamental steps too.

References

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Student/Alumni ‘Production’: Letters and Visual Texts

I began this second search with the aid of a report (‘Negro Students. Location, History and Administration’, 1939–40), written by Albert R. Lee, which is included in the President Willard General Correspondence (1934–46, 2/9/1, box 42), and listed in the [Guide to](#)

[African American Research Resources](#) (Guide). I followed some of his leads (sports, education, religious activity, fraternities, and sororities), which proved the difficulties of reconstructing the life and literate activities of African Americans in campus in the pre-1930s. I found few documents, with little, or indirect references only to our interests and time frame, and scattered throughout several archival sources. Considering Logan's (2008) work on diaries as reflections of their authors' concerns and 'voices', I have chosen two letters—an institutional one written by an African American alumnus, and a personal one written by a white student at the university—and a 'colored' program of the Philomathean Society.

First, I focused on a set of institutional letters, written by an African American alumnus, William Walter Smith—the first African American to earn a degree from the University (1900). Smith wrote this set of letters in 1902, to President Draper addressing the need in campus for a cooperative store (coop), for the benefit of the student body. This set is part of the President Andrew S. Draper General Correspondence, 1894-1905 (2/4/1/; box 17/20, Smith-Swigart; William Walter Smith file), and may have been archived in 1963. No responses to Smith are included, since this file is part of a box containing letters received *only*, all concerning institutional matters.

Information on Smith *in* the Guide, from online searches with an archivist, does not include copies of these letters.

Although the letters do not specifically refer to African American students in campus, their literate activities, or their immediate needs, they could contribute to the Guide, for its implications on the collective improvement of students' finances (access to lower prices for books and materials, and access to gains), and as evidence of resourcefulness and rhetorical skills. It is also reasonable to assume that such benefits may have reached the African American students too. On an individual level, these letters suggest that Smith, despite living in St. Louis, MO, remained connected to campus life, to the extent of being willing to do research, contact people with knowledge (which he did), and propose a plan on coops to the President. In the letter dated January 17, 1902, Smith communicates his intention to resume his education at the University (which he did), and since he is in need of funding, he explains that he has noticed the lack of these business organizations in Illinois. He states its benefits ("much lower prices"), suggests possible locations ("At other universities the business is conducted in some unused basement of a college building,"), and

asks the President whether he would favor such ventures.

The set is also an example on persuasion, for Smith compiles evidence from other universities in support of the advantages of a coop—rhetoric in service of a personal and university goal. In a subsequent letter dated March 10, 1902, Smith composes a four-page piece that provides evidence in support of his “... proposed cooperative store.” He even attaches a letter from the manager of the coop at Cornell, from which he quotes their previous year’s profits (\$50,000). He then moves to his claims on easy access. “[A]t Illinois the nearest store is more than a mile away and street car service is not the best.” Furthermore, Smith seems to imply that the stores do not primarily carry books, but other items, thus highlighting the need for these student supplies in Illinois. He finally reminds the Presidents of previous moves he has made to favor coops, and offers further information if needed.

In terms of future research paths, responses to these letters, and whether these initiatives were ever implemented (subsequent letters suggest opposition from the authorities), might be needed in order to understand the importance of his request. For a study interested in reconstructing individual initiatives, and examples of

persuasion, these pieces, though apparently isolated, should be valuable. They may not have been included in the Guide since apparently they do not seem directly connected to African American concerns.

Second, I focused on a personal letter written by a white student, Jacob Goldstein who attended our campus from 1928 to 1930. Goldstein wrote this letter to Lena Wolkow, a very close friend, living in New York state. In this particular letter, dated on October 28, 1929, he addresses the situation of African Americans in campus, in its beginning segment. This letter is part of the Jacob Goldstein Papers, 1928–30, 1932, which belong to the Student Scrapbooks and Papers, within Student Affairs (41/20/165; box 1/1, Correspondence, 1928–30, 1932; Correspondence to Lena Wolkow, October 28, 1929 file). These papers may have also been added to our collection in 1963, and the letters may have been recovered from Wolkow, since no responses were included in this file. This box contains 87 manuscript letters, organized in files by dates (September 17, 1928 to May 18, 1932), in approximately weekly intervals, written during the academic years, all addressed to Wolkow. Their content involves varied Goldstein's interests—football, extra-curricular activities, classes, Jewish life, and student life in

campus—with the occasional birthday cards, and newspaper clips seeking comments from Wolkow.

The letter chosen should contribute to the Guide for how it might reveal students' perceptions on the abilities of African Americans. It also reveals how Goldstein was exposed to discrimination (according to his account), and provides some insights (though brief and personal) into the attitudes of some people in campus. With some surprise, he begins his letter by reporting on an argument (“pro and con”) held in his residence. “A couple of the fellows in the house went so far as to say that there was not even one negro or negroes that could be admired or was any good.” This quote reminded me of Logan’s (2008) claims on how part of the ‘race work’ involves proving their own value. He then asserts that equality may never happen, for “... there are some negroes who are better than some white people, but they are very few and very far between.” He further comments that his boss “... has told us that if any colored person came in to take our time ... [to] give them poor service because he doesn’t want to encourage their trade.” He adds, “[w]e must serve them because that is the law,” but that he feels sorry when African Americans sometimes “...

wait for fifteen or twenty minutes before they get any service”

While one anecdote is not sufficient evidence, it may be interesting to explore sources with experiences, both of rejection or of acceptance, from members in the community. Therefore, to understand the relevance of this segment, or its potential, one may conceive a project of reconstructing these impressions (oral and written) from individuals engaged in regular campus activities. Letters, memories, or diaries for instance, might constitute safe places for these types of records; public spaces, like the editorials of the Daily Illini, or even self-initiated correspondence to the authorities at the University, might not be as open, or candid, or may have been edited when (if) published. I do however acknowledge the difficulties of implementing such a project. This piece may not have been included in the guide due to classification issues; although a description of the box contents, includes an extract from these exact reflections.

Finally, I became very interested in a collection of programs (240 pages), part of the Philomathean Society Records, 1872–1923, under Student Organizations, Theatre and Forensics (41/75/23; box 2/2; scrapbook). This collection is part of a series of attendance

records, and minutes (both boxes). In particular, I focused on the only 'colored' program ('A Colored Program this week') that I found in those pages, that included African American references for discussion, and which is part of a very fragile collection of several other programs (scrapbook in box 2). An inscription indicated it had been presented to the University of Illinois Alumni Association on June 11, 1941, but it was not clear who the individual authors might have been.

Such a document would be an interesting inclusion to the Guide as an instance of how racial discussions may reflect disinterest and possibly disrespect. The program, just as other programs in the same collection do, lists its activities, which tend to be consistent—stories, declamations, readings of papers, and a debate. Initially, I thought these types of programs might not have been customary in this society, and thus separate events might have been held for African American topics. On closer inspection, I began questioning the piece, and felt intrigued by it. From the list of events, its content deals with education, advancement of the race, and organization; however, certain choice of words stood out ('darkey boy', for instance). The topic for the debate reads as follows "That the US should set aside a state in which the American Negro alone

will be granted suffrage [spelled in this way], and that he shall not receive suffrage in any other state.” Finally, to the right of the content, there is a drawing of an African American man, in what appears to be a service position—service tray in his hand. (I saw a second drawing with a similar portrayal of service in another piece).

This piece raises more questions, than it solves doubts on the life of African Americans in campus or their literacies, which is why it may not have been chosen for the Guide. If part of a serious discussion, it might illustrate attitudes towards integration and civil rights. The connections of this material to Theatre might also explain the tone and content of this program. Therefore, more background is needed in this case to understand the true purposes of this document. I do however think that examining programs from mainstream literary societies, in times of social/racial movement, and observing what their agendas were, and whether they may have discussed pressing social issues for African Americans, might be fruitful.

References

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Question

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Plan: Interviewing a member of the Men’s Bible Study in Bethel AME Church

The Albert R. Lee papers and Logan’s *Liberating Language* (2008) indicate that African American churches were relevant sites of literate and political activities, as well as sites of religious and economic support for African Americans, during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. In particular, the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church organized several African American communities. In Champaign, Bethel AME Church, founded in 1863 (Bethel’s History, 2008), and located in the North East part of the city (401 East Park St.), sponsored rhetorical activities, where the Baraca–Philathea Lyceum stood out as a site of literate and political expression during the 1920s. Archival records—at UIUC *and* Bethel—however, provide evidence of its activities, but neglect to show how this lyceum evolved, ‘declined’, and how its activities were redistributed. Conversations with members of the church suggest that the Baraca ‘club’, as some elderly church members remember it, has been gradually merged into the Men’s Bible Study, held every Saturday. However, this gradual merging, including how the names Baraca and Philathea were dropped, or how the lyceum moved from being

nondenominational to religious (although not exclusively), has not been documented in the records I studied. I am therefore interested in understanding this gap/transition in the lyceum's history; most notably the interview should explore its change in form (lyceum itself for display, classes for training, and the Bible study for devotion and discussion), and the permanence of its practices in Bethel.

Preliminary observations and rationale for interview questions

I approached the Assistant Choir Director at Bethel, with whom I work at the Writers Workshop, and since February 22, I have participated in two Sunday services (February 22 and March 1). I was also part of a focus group (February 25), with nine members of the congregation—their pastor, stewards, trustees, a historian, a member of the Women's Missionaries, and a former choir director. This focus group was a brainstorming session with little direction on my part (following Fontana & Frey, p. 651). I finally attended the Men's Bible Study meeting (February 28), and the Annual Women's Missionaries Luncheon (February 28, immediately following Bible Study). My observations and the documents that they shared suggest that events similar to the programs for the lyceum take place today in other venues in Bethel. These observations support my choices of

interviewee (a steward at Bethel, who works at UIUC, and whose father was head of the Men's Bible Study) and my question design.

At the focus group (February 25), I learned the most about the lyceum from recollections of relatives' stories, and from second-hand experiences—knowing that a meeting was taking place, but not being allowed to get closer, or being scolded for eavesdropping—since members of the lyceum in the area are all deceased now, as I have been told. This was an informal group interview, held in *the* common meeting/dining area in Bethel, which I audio recorded with their written consent. Most members were relatives in some way, and their connections to the community went back to parents and grandparents. The women were the most vocal in the group, and brought to the meeting some of their family records—old photographs, newspaper clips, and old documents produced by the church. None of them concerned the lyceum; however, one newspaper clip from the News Gazette (February 5, 1989) covered some of Lee's accomplishments. My host also found in his father's documents, the Baraca Manual for Sunday School Classes (1928) and a History of Bethel AME Church (1938), from where I later learned that the Baraca term applied to men's classes (devotional and rhetorical training), and the Philathea one, applied to the

women's classes.

Once I introduced the subject—what they remembered or had heard of the Baraca-Philathea Lyceum—participants started sharing and completing each other's memories. Part of the discussion digressed to the church, and to how certain members had been instrumental to the community. Some remembered Lee; some had only heard of him. I learned that the name Baraca came from the Hebrew *braja* (phonetic sound), which means blessing. This choice of name seemed consistent with the location of the 'Baraca Room', as many members referred to the lyceum. (At this point, I had not yet realized that they had been talking about the men's Sunday *class* only, the Baraca version). The room, with its documents destroyed in a fire, was originally located in the *highest* part of the former church, which they compared to the location of the *holiest* room (in the highest location too), in the second Temple in Jerusalem, containing the Arch of the Covenant, according to the Jewish tradition. Access was therefore forbidden to children and women; although women were allowed to bring food to the 'students', since these were prohibited to eat in campus. It did not become clear to me whether members of the lyceum *had* to be UIUC students, although one woman seemed certain about this. They also remembered the meetings (classes)

being held every Sunday, and “... *occasionally* during the week ...” (focus group audio recordings). Finally, when I asked if they knew of the lyceum’s written production, one woman (the historian) remembered the Illini Times, and thought that some of their ‘work’ (never defined here), *may* have been published there.

Once the focus group was over, one of the men told me that the Baraca group continued in the Men’s Bible Study group, and that they were, and have been very ‘political’ despite the religious focus of their meetings. I confirmed this when I attended their meeting (February 28), where Bible concerns were placed within current political affairs. The missionaries’ luncheon that followed became a literate function, organized in ways similar to the 1920s programs that I had found in the archives—poems, songs, prayers, and tributes to African American leaders, by way of monologues composed and performed by the missionaries. This reminded me of the importance of oratorical skills of the early 20th century (Logan, 2008, p. 96). Even the Sunday services, though with a clear religious/ritual orientation, informs the community on their educational projects (‘adopting’ a school) and reminds the congregation that, “Obama needs our help.” It might be too early to pose this claim; however, I do believe that these practices have been sustained in time, and

have taken new forms that replace their traditional lyceum. When asked about the luncheon program as a reflection of past practices, my host responded, “This is what we do; it’s our culture.” (Field notes, March 3).

[Interview protocol](#)

Preliminary observations suggest that I may have exhausted any further recollections (or any inside information) about the lyceum, since original members are deceased. Moreover, my readings of their manual (1928) and histories, as well as how in conversations different labels were given to the lyceum (room, class, or club), point to *three* different forms for this lyceum. First, there is the one described in Lee’s 1920s letters (UIUC Archives), as the Baraca-Philathea Lyceum, an open and nondenominational venue, which I understand was the venue for *display* of oratorical skills. Second, there is the one remembered in the focus group, and which concerns the Baraca class for men only (Sunday school), which I understand as the *training* venue; and third, there is the current Men’s Bible Study, a venue for scripture reading and applied discussion, yet primarily a venue for *devotion*.

Approaching a man for this interview, whose relatives were

connected to the Men's Bible Study—as the apparent extension of the lyceum's male version—could be fruitful, since the forum they remembered was restricted to men (Baraca Class). Therefore, I intend to interview a current member of the study group, who works at UIUC, has held a position related to African American cultural issues, is a distant relative of Lee, and whose father, was head of the Men's Bible Study. I have already approached him, since I met him at the focus group, and exchanged contact information after Bible Study. At this point, he is familiar with the necessary background—my interest in the written and oral production of the lyceum, how it evolved to its current form, and the Albert R. Lee papers that I found in the university archives. I have already indicated my interest in the records he has from relatives, and that might relate to the lyceum. The interview will take place in Bethel, will take the form of an informal conversation, and will be audio recorded. One of my concerns is how effective can certain questions be, if the information depends not on personal, but on relatives' recollections. Therefore, I intend to read excerpts from Lee's letters, and share with him programs and the different venues identified (display, training, and devotion) to see what kinds of thoughts that might prompt, and to elicit elaborations.

Open-ended and more general questions attempt to explore these issues, and should probably move from discussions of the original lyceum to some of its current form(s). My role here should probably be to aid in the reconstruction of the history of the lyceum, since I may hold part of the pieces. In the wording of the questions, I have avoided expressions such as 'rhetorical' or 'literate' activities, and have favored 'reading' and 'writing' work, for instance. I am adding some notes to the interviewer (myself) at the end of each question.

1. You may have heard from your parents or older relatives about the Baraca-Philathea Lyceum. You may also have read any documents describing the lyceum. What do you remember hearing/reading about it? *Note:* At this point, I may not yet bring the distinctions that I have identified (display, training, devotion). The focus is still on the lyceum. He may bring some of his family's records; some of them may be relevant to this project, so he may offer some information from them.

2. The lyceum used to be a nondenominational and open venue for talks and debates, with meetings every other Friday. The women however, remember the Baraca Class, the men's Sunday meeting, with devotional and oratorical training; and its current form appears to be the Men's Bible Study. Can you offer any insights into lyceum itself? How did it evolve into other forms? Where do you see the lyceum's activities in current practices in Bethel? *Note:* I am interested in *official* discourses (if any remain) about why the lyceum 'declined' or changed its form, and in his own impression (less-than-official discourses) of where the genre is now 'located'. I am interested in their 'cultural story' (Silverman, p. 824). I will share portions of the 1920s letters, the lyceum's programs (display focus), and the Baraca Manual's programs (training focus).

3. What were the sorts of reading and writing activities that took

place in the lyceum? *Note:* I will share copies of the programs and extempores ca. 1920–24, go over their content, and point to the political concerns of those times. I am expecting to receive copies of the Illini Times from the historian mentioned above, which may contain some of the lyceum’s written production. If they do, I will bring these to the discussion (specific sections on political activism in Champaign, for instance). The focus here is still on the lyceum.

4. Programs for the Baraca Manual (for men’ Sunday classes) contain lessons, drills on history and exercises. Where can we see these practices in the current Men’s Bible Study? Do we see them elsewhere? *Note:* The focus is now on the Baraca Classes and on rhetorical training.

5. What do you remember reading/hearing about the Women’s Bible Class—the Philathea Class? Are current forms still in existence? *Note:* I will bring to our discussion the History of Bethel AME Church, 1938.

6. In several of the letters and programs, that we have inspected there is a concern for the ‘advancement of the race.’ How is this concern enacted today in Bethel? *Note:* I am not certain how relevant this question might be to the history of the lyceum. I am interested in understanding the types of rhetorical activities that contribute to ‘race work’ today in the church, as an extension of the lyceum.

Reflection

Preparing for the interview turned into research work, and observing and being participant in several activities in Bethel gave me some insights into this culture. Preliminary ethnographic observations suggest that the genre of the lyceum evolved into other practices that retained rhetorical training, display, devotion, and discussion current affairs. I see the interview as an extension of the focus group, but a more informed one, since I have now been able to clarify the different roles that the lyceum and the classes had. Inside information about the lyceum is very limited (or inexistent); hence, I am hoping this design will reveal the lyceums’ new forms, and the locations of rhetorical display and training in this community.

Data: [Interview Transcript](#): A Member of the Men’s Bible Study in Bethel AME

Church

The oral history, which I am attempting to recover on the Baraca–Philathea Lyceum—its literate activities, decline, and task redistribution—asks from members of Bethel, as secondary sources, to recall stories from parents or older relatives, all of whom are deceased now. The lyceum was formed in the early 1900s; interrupted its meetings during WWI; and apparently became a dynamic forum during 1920s–1940s. No document in the Albert R. Lee papers—my main sources—refers to the lyceum’s continuance during the 1940s and beyond. The focus group (February 25) and archival materials (UIUC and Bethel’s) pointed to the lyceum as a site of display, and to two Bible classes, which were gender differentiated, as sites of instruction.

I was however intrigued by how memories focused more on the men’s class (Baraca), and thus, prior to *this* interview (with a member of the Men’s Bible Study) I approached a 95–year old woman (with my host), member of Bethel’s choir, former UIUC student, who had missed the focus group. She offered similar insights on the lyceum to those I gathered in the focus group, but she added that her father—a musician by the name of Scott—was part of the Baraca Class. She did however claim tentatively, that the lyceum’s decline might be explained by the African American

students being less involved, since “... they did not need us anymore” as they were being accepted in campus (Interview recordings, March 10). She also suggested an understanding of hierarchical norms in the church as determining the continuance of certain activities, which aligns with some of the content of my main interview (see Transcript section). She remembered that the women’s class (Philathea) existed—she remembered the *name*. However, her focus was again on the men’s class, since “... it probably lasted longer.” Similarly, as I was working on a documentary on housing in the North End of Champaign for another seminar, I decided to ask my interviewee (a retired historian), who attended the focus group, about the Philathea Class, and she remembered it, since her mother had been part of the class, and had written poetry for *this* and other venues. It did not become clear however, what sorts of reading, writing, and oratorical performance took place there (Interview recordings, March 10).

Therefore, the lyceum’s *decline* might be partially explained by a migration of African American students to campus spaces—not only rhetorical spaces, but also housing, eating and social ones. Logan (2008) would support this interpretation. A further realization stemming from my interview with this member of the men’s Bible

study was that the lyceum may have been both the product of Bethel's higher-order organization/dependence—Episcopal connections—and Albert R. Lee. Most notably, the lyceum's shape and rhetorical force may be attributed to Lee's personality, work ethics, and collegiate exposure. This reminded me of how in *all* instances (focus group, my two brief interviews—choir member and historian—and the main one), Lee is portrayed as “so factual” (this 95-year old woman), very organized, collegiate, and influential. As for the lyceum's *task redistribution*, my initial interpretation of how this genre evolved into current social forms, still stands, but seems difficult to trace, as this interview will suggest.

This last interview (March 13) took place in the university office of a current member of the men's Bible Study, Lee's great-nephew, whose father was at one time, head of this study group. The visit lasted approximately 50 minutes, with 46 of them audio recorded. He was familiar with my archival findings, since he had been part of the focus group. I briefly summarized what I knew about the lyceum, placed relevant sources in front of him (with quotes identified), and redefined for him the lyceum and the two Bible classes (Baraca and Philathea), as different instances of *display*, *training*, and *devotion*. Apart from this introduction, I did not interject very much and hence

allowed him to elaborate. This seemed sensible, since he had questioned twice how useful he could be (when I first approached him, and as a preface to this interview), and since my questions seemed too specific for what he might be able to recall. On my end, I had an updated protocol and excerpts ready in a tentative script (Appendix); I had however prepared more than I needed, and ultimately used. Although I did not cover my questions in order, all relevant issues were addressed—Bethel’s Episcopal connections, the decline of the lyceum, the different venues for men and women, and the different rhetorical functions of Bethel’s meetings, then and now.

Transcription

I have transcribed most of the interview according to these three main themes, which occurred in the following order: first, *Making inferences: The ‘Outside’ Structure of Bethel AME Church*; second, “... it was all Albert Lee”; and third, *Rhetorical activities in service of Political Activism and Social Network*. My interviewee is identified with the initials I4; VR are my initials. Words, or parts of words, in italics reflect the interviewee’s emphasis; and ellipses are used for brief pauses or repair. Capital letters are used for increased volume. Metacomments are indicated in brackets.

Interview 4, Member of Bethel’s Men’s Bible Study, UIUC employee
<i>Theme 1: Making inferences: The ‘Outside’ Structure of Bethel AME Church</i>
[After sharing background information with him, and after he had done some reading of the materials that I have placed in front of him,]
I4: “I bet you’ll probably ... get more information to it ... Bethel AME Church is part of a <i>connection</i> , you probably already know that, but if they’re doing anything like this as early as 1920 that’s coming ... <i>not</i> from

the local people, so I don't know if you've looked into any of that: in other words, whatever their conference is, is the group of people that would have set up this Baraca-Philathea Lyceum ... At that point ... " [he starts thinking aloud: how old Bethel Church is, while skimming through the documents]

VR: "I think this is probably what you mean." [I pointed to a quote from The History of the Bethel AME Church, indicating their national affiliation]

I4: "OK, *this* [the quote], uhm [continues reading], yeah this, the National Baraca-Philathea Bible Study group, which was a white group, I think, wasn't it?"

VR: "I, I, I don't know." [I will look into it.]

I4: "I think it was uhm ... see the ... well, I don't know a lot about this stuff, but I *do* know that Bethel AME Church being a part of the African Methodist Episcopal connection, whatever they *did* came to them *from* the connection, and so the local people ... basically it's a franchise, and so the local people set up their franchise based off of whatever the criteria was for the larger connection, uh but what I don't know ... and well let me finish that thought, and that connection came directly out of ... what is now the United Methodist Church, so I'm thinking that this kind of affiliation is from the United Methodist Church, or what we would now consider to be the United Methodist Church. But I *don't know* that, cause I haven't ... I am just *deducing* though based on the little bit of history that I *do* know ... when it comes to the organization of Bethel, which the founders were really interested in having a correct organization set up, they borrowed from this other model, which had already borrowed from the white Methodist Church that they came out of, so uhm ..."

[He suggests I look into the general AME Church history for a similar term—Baraca-Philathea—and asks if I have already done that.]

I4: "Cause what I've seen, based on how I grew up in Bethel, Bethel is a very structured congregation, but it's not structured from inside, it's structured from *outside*."

VR: "It still is?"

I4: "Yeah, yeah, I would say it still is, uhm but that's just my opinion ... but specifically when it comes to *this*—the Baraca-Philathea affiliation ... " [He asks for one the documents that were passed around during the focus group—I suggest whether it is the Baraca Manual, which I received that same day, but I now know he was referring to The History of Bethel AME Church, 2008.]

I4: “I found out about all of this *after* I was grown actually; so, my parents never talked about any of this kind stuff; as a matter of fact nobody in the church ...; in that generation, they didn’t pass that kind of stuff down to us; so if we got it, it was by happenstance; when I say *us*, I’m talking about *their* children, their offspring. That particular generation just didn’t pass on a lot of information, so if it’s not in their written documents, it isn’t something that I can say ‘OK based on my recollections of the youth, here’s what my parents taught me’. And it is really odd that it is that way because my family was extremely involved in that church, and as you know Albert Lee is a relative.”

VR: “Great-uncle, right?”

[He was hesitant about the *exact* relationship, although some elderly women in the focus group seemed certain that Lee was his great-uncle (a grandmother’s brother). I showed him the part of his family tree that I had drawn from information that I received from one of my interviewees—the 95-year old choir member. He believes Lee was his grandmother’s first cousin, and not her brother. He remained hesitant until the end.]

Theme 2: “... it was all Albert Lee”

[I summarized what I knew, and articulated once more the gap that I was trying to understand: the separation of venues (lyceum and the two classes), and of gender; from his lack of knowledge about the Philathea class, he moved to his claim about the relevance of Albert R. Lee to the lyceum]

VR: “Did you ever ... remember hearing about the Philathea Class?”

I4: “NOT ... again, *not* when I was growing up in the church [he is probably a man in his fifties], now ... which is not to say it wasn’t there uhm, but I know it wasn’t a part of what we call our Sunday School, so whatever happened, happened before we started the Sunday School classes, as *children*. So, I’m thinking, *again*, knowing how stuff happens down there, my sense is, when Albert Lee died, that’s when most of that stuff ceased. That’s the sense that I get, uhm, because had he not been there, I don’t think *any* of that stuff would have happened. I think it was *all* Albert Lee, to be honest with you.”

[Albert R. Lee died in 1948, a year after he retired (1947); he was 73 years old (News Gazette, February 5, 1989); one woman allowed me to photograph her newspaper clipping at the focus group.]

“Because it so huh ... it so, it so fits the personality of Albert Lee, as I have been, ... as I have read about it, and heard other people talking about it. Basically ... he was a *huge* figure, not only in the community, but also on campus as well; and a lot of that stuff that he did, uhm other people benefited from it, but I don’t know if they had his vision; I guess that’s *my*

sense; uhm and I'm not saying that he was the *only* one, but I... what he set up sounds so similar to how the college uhm protocol is; I think he extrapolated a lot from what he was learning out here and put it into practice in Bethel Church; and then he found these vehicles to do that, such as the lyceum. ... uhm but ... if I were to be studying this, what I would want to know about Albert Lee is *where* did he get what he got ... and that's where it goes back to ..., so what was his connection with the African American Episcopal *connectional* organization, because as a lay person, there is a huge chasm between the lay and the ministerial folk, and so, since so much of this is around his personality, I've always wondered what was this other relationship, because traditionally, it hasn't been good; so, it's been ... uhm well, in *my* lifetime, I can't say how it was in *his* lifetime; but in *my* lifetime, there is a huge disconnect between the so-called clergy and the laity—the clergy have their own stuff, the laity have their own stuff. This [the lyceum] seems to be more of what the laity was doing as opposed to the clergy; and ... so, ... that's a question that I've always had that that I'd like to answer at some point ... uh but, ...”

[Thinking aloud, and considering whether his parents had spent most of their childhood years in Bethel, which he said they did]

I4: “... those names [Baraca and Philathea] don't really come up ... they never really came up in my recollection of their conversations [his parents' conversations; now deceased]; so ... I know they had Sunday School classes; I know the Sunday School didn't always meet on *Sunday*, that actually ... the Bible classes met on Fridays from what I understand, so uhm ... and I also know that, ... specially in the 40s when there was a significantly higher number of black students [at UIUC], compared to previous years obviously, that in essence Albert Lee was their *mentor*, so because he was in *Bethel* that's where they came, and that's ... a lot of the activities that you see the students doing was because of the relationship that they had with Albert Lee on campus that continued into the community ... a lot of this stuff sounds collegiate to me as opposed to coming from the so-called community itself .”

Theme 3: Rhetorical Activities in service of Political Activism and Social Network

[I am trying now to move the conversation to the different rhetorical activities—display, training and devotion. We had already talked about this at the beginning of our conversation.]

VR: “So, this distinction between display, training and devotion, do we still see that today? ... Current forms of those today?”

I4: “Yeah, hhh [audible exhalation, possibly signaling some frustration or difficulties in articulating that came next] in a much more diluted fashion, I think there are still remnants of ... well for instance, the connection I was trying to bring back, they are calling it a Bible Bowl, but in essence once a

year, ... they have a Sunday School convention, and so, ... again they have a very detailed, and I would say elaborate protocol that they go through; they give the information to the local congregations; the local congregations then have their children uhm memorize material or learn material, and then they all come together and they recite OK, so yeah that still does happen, it happens once a year; and it's beginning to be more important in recent years, or more popular again in recent years; so that part *yeah*; in terms of ... the actual, ... what was? ... you mentioned ..."

VR: "Display. I'm thinking display because of what I, what I see that the lyceum did, but debates, recitations, readings ..."

I4: "OK, yeah, now the recitations and the readings and the music, are ... really the only time that happens is during a Christmas program and during an Easter program, so other than that, *no*, that stuff is not going on today, which is not to say that it won't resurface, but right now those have sort of fallen in priority as compared to what they were then; but ... it's a completely different time; basically at that time there was absolutely nothing else *to* do but those kinds of activities, so people did a lot more of those activities; so uhm ... it gets to the issue of in the black community, what was the function of the church; it was to uhm to serve a religious function, but it was also to serve an equal amount of time for a *social* function, and certainly ... as a political backdrop too. So, uhm now there are so many other options to do things, the concentration is not there in Bethel at this point."

[I was surprised by this comment ("... not going on today ..."). I commented on the Sunday services' announcements and the reverend's reminder to the congregation that 'Obama needs us'.]

I4: "... see a lot of my memory in that congregation is from growing up, ... and there was a point in time when I was growing up that the political piece was *really* big and ..."

VR: "60s?"

I4: "Uh yeah, in the early to mid 60s, ... so yeah maybe it still *is* happening, it's just that it's seen a little bit differently."

VR: "OK" [It took me 17 seconds to review my questions, and then I moved to current notions of 'race work/advancement of the race'.] "I am also interested in tracing new forms of those expressions today."

I4: "... these conversations are making me rethink some of the opinions that I've had. *Actually*, ...when you talk about the 'advancement of the race' for instance, really, that's kind of why the AME church was founded; it was founded *less* for religious purposes, and *more* for 'advancement of

the race' purposes. So, you know, one of the sayings was, ... 'pick up our buckets here'; or basically this whole notion of self-sufficiency and self-determination, all that was a political focus, and it came *directly* from leadership in the African Methodist Episcopal Church; so even when they left that Methodist Church [possibly the United Methodist to which he had referred before] to start at the AME Church, that was a political statement and it was about how black people were being treated in that church; so you know, I probably ... uhm don't emphasize *that* enough in my *own* thinking; that *that's* of *great* value to the community; and maybe the reason that I don't, is that we are so far from doing those kinds of things now that's it's really disappointing, so what you heard the pastor's talking about is sort of pushing us back in the direction that traditionally that church has had as a strength over the years ... it [political activism] was coming from the pulpit then too ..."

[He explains to me how their ministers are itinerant, with their service periods lasting from two to ten years, but mostly lasting two years lately, with the community and the congregation reinventing themselves continuously. He believes they are now moving back to Lee's times.]

14: "... and certainly one of the predecessors of that kind of thing [political activism] would be a person like Lee, because he saw himself as part of a larger vision, uhm ..."

[He then revisits his observation on how parents did not share this type of information; I suggested they may have been talking about these activities without being explicit about the names (a comment made earlier by my host's husband); he agreed and added that adults talked by themselves, apart from children in *their* culture.]

14: "... those gaps [what adults were not sharing with people in his generation] ... it's hard for people in my generation to *fill* those gaps because they left a huge gap between where we were and people like Albert Lee, so we really don't know what was going on, or at least I don't know ..."

[He suggests that I talk to her sister, who is in town; We start talking about people that I have recently met, who in his view, vaguely remember things, and may not have accurate recollections ('their own way of remembering things'). He mentions people, who he believes must have known about my topic because they were 'engaged'. Others were not; but he clarifies that the does not mean this in a 'critical' way. These people are now deceased.]

14: "... the community of historians, they are not here any more." [I shared with him my talk with this retired historian, where I learned that her mother had attended the Philathea Class; from my mention of how she composed

poetry; he elaborated this:]

I4: “My sense is that the scripture reading and training ... was at the very best on equal footing with the other two areas of focus [display and political activism]. I think really what those groups did to come *together* was to form their own social network I think that’s really what the purpose of those organizations were; and therefore, because they had no meaningful contact with the larger white community, but they still have intellectual prowess, intellectual capability, they needed a vehicle to express all of those things, and so I think that’s what these institutions [black church] were able to help facilitate ... but then *in* the black church, those socially-oriented activities [the lyceum] were extremely important to the well-being of the people, and I’m saying that it was on an equal par with the religious reasons for them coming together; and in some cases, it might have been even *more* important, because again, that was *the* only outlet they had, so if it didn’t happen there, it happened nowhere.”

[I asked him about gender separation today]

I4: “Uhm, there’s still some residue of that. For instance, the Missionary Society [I attended their annual luncheon] is overwhelmingly women; uhm, really the only functioning men’s group is the Men’s Bible Study.” [He then remembers the Men’s Club, which I had read about in my materials.]

I4: “The Men’s Club stayed in existence through my father’s later years, so uh... it hasn’t been functioning for about ten years ... [He remembered their annual program, where they cooked for others. From there we moved to their *programs* for activities, and I reminded him of what I observed at the Missionaries luncheon, which looked so similar the old 1920s programs in the Archives.]

I4: “And that’s what I was saying about the AME *connection*, because all of that comes from the connection, in terms of its structure; it doesn’t come from the local congregation; the local congregation implements what the connection protocol is ...”

[From here I share with him what I had been hearing about the decline of lyceum: how its activities may have been absorbed by the university, or possibly stopped during WWII and did not resume after its end; he agreed with all as possibilities, and reiterated his own claim,]

I4: “... which also supports my hypothesis that ... it [the lyceum] also stopped because he [Lee] was near the end of his life at that time ...”

[When I commented on how this 95-year old woman thought the decline might be seen as a change in the needs of students, he thought this to be

possible too.]

14: “I think there’s some merit to that as well; ... and again without putting a value on that decision by the students ... see, the black community prides itself in saying ‘we took care of the black students when the campus wouldn’t’, and they did, *we* did; but it’s also true because I used to walk that walk, uh that that’s a long way between the black community and the campus, when you have to do that every single way; and so, from the students’ perspective getting on campus would have been like heaven; uh, which I think would then translate into their spending less time in the community, and therefore all of these activities which the community had them engaged in, will slowly over time diminish ...”

[He reflected on how this made sense to him, and how this might explain why he had not seen evidence of the lyceum in the 1950s and 60s. He then asked me what I knew about lyceums. I shared some of my recollections from Logan (2008). When I mentioned the musicals (typical of some programs), he said that may be the reason why Bethel has a band! I then commented on the NPR Program, which I later sent to him.]

Discuss: *Discussion*

During the interview, I had to make quick decisions. For instance, my interviewee began the conversation, as I was getting organized with my documents, so I had press the REC button of my audio recorder, and complete signing consent forms at the end of my visit. (I had already asked for permission to audio tape the conversation, when I first asked to visit him). Similarly, as I was leaving, and was answering his question on what to expect from the Lee’s papers, I indicated that one of Lee’s boxes was devoted to correspondence concerning the Knights Templar, which reminded me of how the women in the focus group had said that some ‘students’ were masons. I added that I had read in those files that the masons met in

the Baraca room. This was enough for his to infer that there was no reason for the Men's Bible Study to be secretive (commented during the focus group), and that the women's recollection of the prohibition to approach the room, must have been related to any of the masons' meetings. This realization may not be that significant, but when the audio recorder has already been put away, taking prompt notes of any usual realization becomes relevant.

Other choices concern the background that I shared with him. I decided to have auxiliary materials, since I was collaborating with the recollections. I shared what I knew, and during the rest of the interview, I tried not to interject. I also had to move fast through my questions, and reformulate them, which was difficult for me, for otherwise the interview might have turned into a dry series of negative answers. The information is useful as the intuitive interpretations from an insider, who grew up in Bethel. When transcribing, my own notes helped me identify main themes, so regardless of an audio device present, there is no substitute for good notes. Intervals (pauses), aspects of speech delivery, and other non-verbal cues (laughter) may not add much to this interview since I am interested in content and not in the particular ways in which information is conveyed. However, in some instances, I

decided to be specific about my interviewee's emotions—frustration, for instance about how the information that I was seeking had not been told to people in his generation by their parents—or his emphases and hesitations, insofar as they were part of his claims. I have avoided CA terminology, and have used instead usual citation devices (i.e. brackets for addition, italics for emphasis, or ellipses for omitted speech or repairs).

What I noticed while transcribing, and that I did not notice when conducting the interview, was how carefully he parsed his responses, since he was making inferences and connections from scattered memories or non-existent ones. He also prefaced many of his responses as 'my sense', or 'my views', or 'my memories'. I also interjected softly throughout the conversation (continuer tokens). He knew his task, and this dynamic was possible because we had participated in several of Bethel's activities, and at that point, he was familiar with my topic. I also noticed that when we moved from the first theme (outside organization) to the second (Albert R. Lee), I articulated my gaps again, and it felt repetitive. In a recent trip to the Archives, I read the name *BarPhilathea Journal*—a paper mentioned in one of Lee's letters, and that appears to be a lyceum's publication (newsletter possibly), since Lee was addressing the editors. I did

however miss asking him about it; but am still expecting a response to an email note that I sent him.

At this point, I do not have any conscious 'feelings' about listening to my own voice. I do not seem hesitant; I certainly came prepared, but I have been considering my follow-up questions, and these seem inexistent. I could have asked him about clergy-laity disconnect, for instance). This ability to prompt for elaboration probably comes with practice. Not so much my voice, but the content that I brought helped him with this co-construction of the lyceum. At the end of our talk, he asked me what I thought of the lyceum, and its mainstream version, which surprised me a little, but I was able to comment on Logan's work. In terms personal/professional boundaries, I have been considering my own position as researcher and as a participant. When discussing modern instances of political involvement, my interviewee referred to me as an *observer*. I have however been part of their services and meetings in a dual position—as both participant and observer. Hence, I am beginning to consider how that may condition what I observe, and how closely I need to pay attention to my involvement with this community as it relates to my work as ethnographer.

Further research could be moved to the Bethel' higher-order

organization, as per my interviewee's suggestion. It would be interesting to explore how Bethel's lyceum aligned with the mainstream lyceum movement, and whether it may have contained elements pertinent *only* to African American issues. His comment on how the lyceum was a strong reflection of Lee reminded me of Ray's (2005) elaboration on how Douglass used the lyceums as "public instruction and public exhibition (p. 142). (Her book is mentioned in the NPR link that I shared with the class.) I think that if this had been the vision of one strong man, it is still worth documenting. A part of my gap is still there—the BarPhilathea—whether it was a formal paper, or a newsletter for announcements. Finally, several claims were discussed as to the *decline* of the lyceum, but the one tied to Lee's demise seems the strongest: although it parallels in time with the post-war period, and the increased UIUC spaces for African American students. Different conceptions of what it means to be politically active might be the lead to an understanding of the lyceum's *task redistribution*, and the location of its genre in current forms.

EUI
Links:

Annotated Bibliography

The Baraca-Philathea Lyceum of Bethel AME Church in Champaign:

Decline in Form as Redistribution of Activities

Background

The main interview with a member of the Men's Bible Study in Bethel AME Church opened three possible channels for further research on Bethel, as a site of rhetorical education, and on the Baraca-Philathea Lyceum (ca. 1910–1940¹), as an instance of evening entertainment and instruction. The *first* channel involves exploring Bethel's decision to form a lyceum, not as a local initiative, but as

part of its overall structure and dependence of the AME congregation. This entails exploring Bethel's ability to appropriate available white structures, and to adapt them to its needs as a local franchise. As an extension of this, the *second* channel concerns exploring the force of a figure in the lyceum's support and maintenance (ca. 1920–1940)—Albert R. Lee, President of the lyceum (1922–23²), and Chief Clerk of the President's Office (1920–42³) at UIUC. Most notably, a research question that stems from this possibility connects the 'decline' of the lyceum in its original form, with Lee's demise (1948). A *third* channel, involves exploring the lyceum's transformative process, which leads to an understanding of its decline (in *form*) as the redistribution of this genre *within* the church's political, rhetorical, and social activities, past and current.

My research question, and my subsequent research proposal, focuses on the third venue—decline in form as *redistribution* of activities. Most research sees the decline of the lyceum, or literary societies in general, in the completion of its purpose, and its activities taken over by formal training offered by public schools, libraries, and universities (Powell, 1895; Bode, 1956; Logan, 2008)—an external redistribution. Powell (1895) asserts “[t]he work is done. The lyceum rose to great power, and fell away and practically died,

inside a single quarter of a century.” (p. 737)⁴. Logan (2008) for instance, observes that literary societies declined “as other social groups replaced them in colleges …” (p. 95)⁵. Thus, lyceums fade due to *outside* sources replacing its rhetorical functions. In the case of the Baraca–Philathea Lyceum, preliminary conversations with members of the congregation point to increasing UIUC offerings to African American students at the time of its apparent decline (1940s), or to the impact of WWII on its continuance (my suggestion), as well as Les’s death. However, the notion of task redistribution *within* the institution that sustains it, and the resiliency of the lyceum’s practices at the same institution, when its supporting form—the genre itself—no longer exists, have not been explored. Therefore, my focus is on *contained or internal redistribution*. Preliminary ethnographic observations of church activities, suggest that there has been a relocation of the lyceum’s activities in Bethel, since current structures parallel lyceum–type activities, such as the organization of its cultural activities, of its Sunday programs, and of its written production.

Annotations

Within this frame, my bibliographic research is twofold. First, it

focuses on discussions of the mainstream lyceum movement, its decline, and its African American variants. Second, it focuses on Bethel's past and current practices, as an illustration of what has been officially recorded about the lyceum, and of what has been retained from it. *Primary sources* include archival material from the Albert R. Lee papers found in the University of Illinois Archives, and from the private papers of a member of Bethel's congregation. *Secondary sources* study the lyceum movement and 'histories' written by Bethel's committees, based on its own primary documents and oral histories. *Interviews* ask from informants first-hand recollections of the lyceum, or of parents' or older relatives' stories. Finally, as part of the *EUI archived material*, a project on the formation of Urbana-Champaign is listed, which I chose for its methodology based on the recovery of oral histories from members of the African American community.

Primary Sources. UIUC and Bethel's archival records provide evidence of the lyceum's origins, activities and purposes, but neglect to show explicitly how it evolved—a gradual merging of tasks into other church venues, since their timelines do not go beyond the 1930s. Current bulletins depict modern versions of extended lyceum-type of programs, inserted in the Sunday services and

culture.

Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church. (2009). *Sunday service bulletins*. Champaign, IL: Bethel AME.

This partial collection of bulletins exemplify current Sunday services, where each program serves as a program for the current session (detailed Order of Services), and as a source of information for the community—weekly services, relevant contact information, and announcements of upcoming events, health concerns, and community involvement. On the latter, these bulletins contribute to an understanding of modern forms of lyceum-type of activities, and frame their weekly work in terms of their social/political concerns. For instance, the ‘Adopt a School Program’ invites members to be tutors, mentors, and chaperons in school activities of the students in their community. The ‘Obama Needs our Help’ initiative invites members to register to vote at the local level (city, county and school board elections) on April 7, 2009, under the premise that a good job was done in electing Obama, and now “it’s time to put people in office to help him, starting on the local level.”⁶ The redistribution question is partially seen in these documents as residues of older forms of civic involvement, and confirms data from preliminary conversations with members that point to political discussions as

part of their culture—a combination of devotion (scripture quotes, prayers and hymns) and social concerns.

Lee, A. R. (Albert Lee Papers), 1912–1928. Bethel AME Baraca–Philathea Lyceum folder (1920, 1922–24); Box 3. Record Series 2/6/21. University of Illinois Archives (1963); Guide to African–American Research Resources (1994).

This 1920–24 collection (folder) documents a period in the reorganization of the Baraca–Philathea Lyceum, when Albert R. Lee became its President (November 1922–November 1923), as part of a collection (Boxes 1– 3) of personal and institutional records documenting Lee’s involvements with the university and student organizations, with Illinois school superintendents, and the NAACP Champaign branch. In a series of communications to the lyceum’s officers (including a 1920 circular from a past administration) and programs, and extempore topics, this folder accounts for the lyceum’s origins. It can be inferred that the lyceum was founded in ca. 1910; it was affiliated to Bethel, but was non–denominational; it met twice a month on Fridays; and it ceased to meet during WWI. This collection depicts the lyceum’s attempts at reorganization through the strength of its programs (entertainment and literary ones), during the 1920s. Its programs exhibit the notion of rhetoric in service of political activism, where discussions, debates, and

journals should promote what is ‘good for the race’ and suggest a rhetorical function of display in the lyceum. This source provides insights into the lyceum’s programs, which serve as models for comparison of later occurrences of literacy activities. The source is however limited in its time coverage, since it corresponds to Lee’s administration only; yet the absence of archival material post 1930s aligns with interpretations of the lyceum’s reconfiguration, or decline, and with some of the letters’ urgent tone concerning attendance, punctuality, and program quality. This source finally includes a mention of the BarPhilathea Journal, whose content, if found, might be compared to current publications and bulletins in Bethel.

Lee, A. R. (1928). Baraca Manual. Ritual for initiation or reception of members, installation of officers, procedure for class meetings and Sunday sessions. In David R. Phillips Personal Papers, *Baraca Classes* (pp. 1–5). Champaign, IL: Bethel AME Sunday School.

This manual seeks to organize and lay out the instructions with which male students are made members of the Baraca class (men’s Bible Study), of the lyceum, in Bethel AME Church. The manual compiles four documents—two of them are the rituals for the reception of new members and for the installation of officers, and the other two are the procedures for Sunday class meetings (programs). The rituals contain formulaic addresses to the class/new members, with

formulaic responses from them. The programs list class activities in sections that move in the following order: ‘devotionals’ (an opening sequence, with singing and prayer), ‘business’ (with communications and reports), ‘good of the class’ (with musical programs, discussions, rhetorical drills and lessons, and a talk by a visitor), and a ‘social’ (a closing sequence, with fellowship and refreshments). In doing so, this manual combines the training venue for this class (lessons, drills on history and exercises), with elements of devotion, and oratorical display. This manual offers insights into past forms of rhetorical/devotional activities, whose residues are seen in current Sunday services (communications and invited speakers), the Saturday Men’s Bible Study, and the Sunday Bible classes, where preliminary observations suggest that rhetorical training may have lost part of its strength, in favor of open discussions, and where devotional elements pervade classes. This source contributes a model for the study of the departure *from* the lyceum-type of Bible classes in Bethel, and a model for an understanding of current forms of Bible literacies, and Sunday services.

Secondary Sources. Publications by third parties cover the lyceum movement and seem to understand the lyceum as a long gone institution. In addition, two histories of Bethel AME Church in

Champaign are included—one edited by Lee (1938), and the most recent one (2008) worked by an ad-hoc historical committee (1990–91), and based on members’ observations, recollections, and on official documents and materials.

Bethel AME Church, Research Committee. (1938). *History of Bethel AME Church*. In David R. Phillips Personal Papers. Champaign, IL: Bethel AME Church.

This document, compiled and edited by Lee, narrates Bethel’s history from records stemming from 1880 and later (including the local press), and from the committee’s recollections. It documents people, decisions, and changes in detail. It establishes a rationale for such endeavor (preservation), and makes claims on its objectivity. Bethel was founded in ca. 1863 and had as members, those who had been holding prayer and religious meetings in their homes (p. 1). The history also describes the ‘old building’ or cottage on Fourth St. (p. 3), and documents its repairs, the purchase of its first organ in 1916 (p. 4), its membership (270 in 1938, p. 5), pastors, choir, its organizations, and a six-page appendix listing all members, current then, and deceased, by position (pp. 8–13). Information on its ‘Organizations and Sunday School’ contributes to the research by recording the existence of “many Literary Societies … featuring debates and programs, …” (p. 6). This history is also

the *only* subsisting document that records, and distinguishes the Bethel Sunday School (ca. 1896), from the men's class (Baraca), and the women's class (Philathea), both created in ca. 1906—an understanding, which is not in Bethel's member's recollections, or in any archival records. Most notably, this history is the *only* document that attests to the existence of the Philathea Class. Moreover, it identifies lectures and speakers attending the Baraca Class, thus signaling an early sharing/distribution of activities with the lyceum. It finally clarifies that the lyceum was organized by the Baraca Class. This content marks a point of departure in this research, since preliminary conversations with members suggest that the Baraca Class has been gradually merged into the current Men's Bible Study, held every Saturday, thus pointing to another redistribution site.

Bethel AME Church. (2008). *The History of Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church*. In Bethel AME Church files. Champaign, IL: Bethel AME Church.

This history extends the previous one (1938), and introduces Richard Allen's (founder of AME) biography, lists the members of the Historical Committee (1990–91), and includes illustrations and photographs of people, places, and old Bethel buildings. This version is more specific in documenting renovations in the building and in reviewing its history in terms of people, leadership, and

finances. In particular, the frequent changes in leadership documented here (and commented in interviews) might account for different priorities and their impact on the reorganization of lyceum-type of activities. This history's description of Bethel's 'Organizations and Activities', helps address my research question by pointing to potential areas where programs can be located (in its reading center, library, or in its meeting places "for Black students attending the University of Illinois"). It finally establishes the existence of a Baraca-Philathea Bible Study national affiliation, thus signaling its dependence on an overall structural organization.

Bode, C. (1956). *The American lyceum. Town meeting of the mind*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Bode organizes/outlines the history of the lyceum, as it was understood in 1956—from its early forms, to the lyceum in a system of random lectures, to more organized public school/library venues. In the book's final section, Bode discusses two positions concerning the end of the lyceum. The first is the traditional one, where it is seen as ending in the 1840s or after the Civil War, which might be seen as an earlier view of when the lyceum itself may not have been a needed venue anymore. The second position "would extend the life of the lyceum system, perhaps indefinitely, ...", due to the

American habit of attending lectures, although its constitutive form may no longer exist (p. 250). However, he claims this is ‘the opposite extreme’ view (opposite to the first one). His contribution to my research lies on his interpretation of ‘rhetorical habit’, which is a venue worth exploring in Bethel, as it might explain the resiliency of certain lyceum-type of practices. In any case, Bode’s view aligns with most scholarship on the decline of the lyceum, where museums, public schools, and public libraries (specifically what he calls the ‘library movement’) received and began accomplishing its tasks. He extends the discussion of transference of tasks to include the entertainment purposes of the lyceum, which he saw in his time as being provided by “the mass media of radio, motion pictures, and television …” (p. 251). In doing so, Bode opens for this research a new frame for the analysis of current forms of entertainment in Bethel, and the residues of its own lyceum.

Logan, S.W. (2005). “By the way, where did you learn to speak?”. In J. J. Royster, & A. M. M. Simpkins (Eds.), *Calling cards. Theory and practice in the study of race, gender, and culture* (pp. 215–227). New York: State University of New York Press.

In this essay, and within her discussion of how African Americans acquired their rhetorical education, Logan points to the lyceum as one black site of such education, which she understands as “those

combinations of experiences influencing proficiency in communication.” (p. 216). While she focuses on women’s initiatives, Logan seeks to document the many ways in which African Americans in general have ‘learned to speak’, which she does not necessarily connect to traditional understandings of schooling. “Douglass never attended school …”, she asserts (p. 224). In addition, Logan claims that the development of black lyceums “paralleled but rarely intersected with … the predominantly white American lyceum movement, …” (p. 219). A significant difference concerns the latter and its orientation to public spaces. These insights are relevant for an understanding of Bethel’s lyceum, as it may have evolved into more internal spaces in the church. The relevance of this essay for my research lies on her depiction of lyceum orators, who understood rhetorical training as connected to social action—elements which I have seen combined in Bethel. Finally, her questions: “What are the sites of rhetorical education today?” and “What new sites have replaced those no longer in existence?” (p. 225), are also relevant, for they reproduce my own research interests.

Ray, A. R. (2005). *The lyceum and public culture in the nineteenth-century United States*. East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press.

Ray’s book is the most recent comprehensive study on the lyceum

movement of the 19th century in the US that I have encountered; although she focuses more on the oratorical. She positions the lyceum, as the scholarship does, in the continuum of education to entertainment, and builds her argument on a progression of lecturers in time, which is one of her contributions to this research—the relevance of speakers to the maintenance of the lyceum. She studies lectures (case studies) such as those given by Josiah Holbrook, Frederick Douglass, and Anna Dickinson, from the 1850s to the late 1860s, thus aligning with modern conceptions of the relevant timeline of the lyceum, which for her ends in 1875 (p. 191). In particular, her critical examination of Douglass' lectures as assimilationist, yet with an inclusion of the humanity of African Americans, and their relevance to the American experience, depicts an idea of the difficulties of public/private representations in those times. In an indirect manner, these notions should provide a framework for the analysis of equal representations of Bethel and its communal ethos. A more obvious contribution is Ray's understanding of the lecturer, Douglass in particular, as one who *uses* the lyceum for instruction and exhibition purposes, which might be extended to one competing understanding of the decline of the Baraca–Philathea Lyceum—that involving the relevance of Albert R.

Lee.

Royster, J. J. (2000), *Traces of a stream. Literacy and social change among African American women*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press.

Royster seeks to redefine and reconstruct African American women's paths to literacy, as situated within their own efforts at social change, which she understands as these women's "desires for agency and authority in the use of written language. (p. 5). She makes a claim for 'variety in the use of literacy' to understand these women in multidimensional ways (p. 6) by means of observing their composing strategies. In doing so, she distinguishes the acquisition of women's literacies, in three distinct frames—the rhetorical, the historical, and the ideological (as her 'thick descriptions'). Pertinent to my research is her analytical model—her understanding of literacy as 'sociopolitical action' (p. 61), within her rhetorical view. Therefore, her contribution to this research is her model to "interrogate the manner and means of African American women's participation within worlds of discourse." (pp. 61–62), that combines the written and the oratorical, as well as the formal and the informal rhetorical training. Preliminary observations in Bethel, point to the specifics of her model such as the creation of an ethos (communal one, in my case), and to production and use of rhetorical expertise.

Her claims on the use of literacy in systematic, yet variable ways, provides a more general framework of analysis, which can be extended to Bethel's context.

Interviews. I conducted three interviews, two brief ones, each with an elderly woman in the community (Informant 2 and Informant 3); and an extended one with a member of the men's Bible Study (Informant 4). These interviews contribute to my research as they point to various reasons for the decline of the lyceum—increased spaces for African Americans at UIUC, Lee's death, and priority changes in Bethel; these reasons however, point more to a fading of the lyceum, rather than to an internal redistribution. In addition, these informants do not explicitly identify current forms for lyceum-type of activities, unless prompted by the interviewer.

Informant 2. (2009, March 10). Interview recording and field notes.

I interviewed Informant 2 in her house, on March 10, 2009; members of the congregation suggested that she could be a source of information, since she has been in Bethel for the longest time. The interview lasted 20 minutes, and was audio taped with her written consent. Informant 2, a member of Bethel's choir, and former UIUC student, offers insights similar to those from informal conversations

with members of Bethel—the lyceum existed, not many comments on their activities were made by parents or older relatives, and Lee was an instrumental figure. She is however, the only member who remembers the lyceum, *as* a literary society, separate from the Baraca Class. Informant 2 remembers the women’s Bible class (Philathea); however, she argues that the men’s class lasted longer, which is probably why it is remembered the most. Her contributions point to traditional understandings of the decline of the lyceum. She claims that the lyceum’s decline responds to reduced involvement of African American students since “... they did not need us anymore” as they were being accepted in campus. She also contends that changes in hierarchical norms in the church determined its continuance—or internal redistribution, as is my own understanding—of certain activities. During the interview, I reminded her of the decision to burn old documents from the Baraca Class (date n.a.), and even when she did not expand on this, this decision could be understood within a ‘decline’ frame for the lyceum.

Informant 3. (2009, March 10). Interview recordings and field notes.

I interviewed Informant 3 in her house, on March 10, 2009; members of the congregation suggested that she could be a source of information, since she is a retired historian. The interview lasted 50

minutes, and was audio taped with her written consent. Most of these recordings concern the accomplishments of her father, a WWI hero, of whom I was composing a video documentary. Informant 3 remembers the Philathea Class, since her mother had been part of it, and had written poetry for *this* and other venues. This is a significant contribution for current forms of such literate activities may be traced to the practices of the Philathea Class, if found.

Informant 4. (2009, March 13). Interview recording and field notes.

I interviewed Informant 4 in his university office, on March 13, 2009; members of the congregation suggested that he could be a source of information since he is Lee's great nephew (there are still doubts concerning the accuracy of this relation). The interview lasted 50 minutes, with 46 of them audiotaped with his written consent. This source opens the research channel of the decline of the lyceum as an internal redistribution of its activities, since his strongest recollections correspond to Bethel's rhetorical activities in service of political activism and social network. This channel becomes relevant too, since he is clear in articulating his frustration that not more of the history of the lyceum has been passed on to his generation, thus suggesting the need to trace its history to current times. Another area, brought up by Informant 4, where internal redistribution is seen

involves the clergy and laity concerns—venues, which had clear boundaries when he was growing up in Bethel, but which appear less separate today.

EUI Archived Student Projects. I found one source documenting the formation of the Champaign–Urbana area, where its recovery of oral histories coincides with my methodological interests (prompting narratives from recollections, with the added component of sharing archival material with informants, in my case). This project aligns with my timeframe (1920s and onward), and has approached at least one of my informants, and so I am including it, for the possibilities that oral histories bring to the reconstruction of a gap in the lyceum.

Historical formation of Urbana–Champaign. (2006, December). *Ideals.uiuc.edu*. Retrieved March 31, 2009, from <http://www.ideals.uiuc.edu/handle/2142/1840>

This essay documents the formation of the complex Urbana–Champaign (history, land distribution, and ethnic composition), by means of studying the displacement of Native Americans, and racial discrimination and civil rights issues in the area. Based on narratives and interviews, collected by the Urbana Free Library, as part of its oral history project, the authors contend that segregation and racism have existed in this area, and do persist, as can be seen in the

demographic composition of Champaign–Urbana. Their methodological approach of making inferences by means of recollections aligns with my research purposes as well. The essay’s section on segregation contributes to my research in a *very* indirect manner, as it documents the experiences with segregation, during the 1920s to 1960s period, of four African Americans in the area. The authors draw on these individual’s narratives on workplace and school segregation, and on their experiences resisting it to support their claims (persistence of segregation). From these narratives, it is possible to make inferences on their abilities to handle/negotiate unsettling circumstances—an ability that must have translated into how they may have negotiated the internal organization of their own activities.

Final Remarks

In the project of recovering the Baraca–Philathea Lyceum’s late history, and locating its genre in current practices, initial ethnographic observations suggest that current practices have retained rhetorical training, display, devotion, and discussion current affairs seen in the 1920s programs, thus possibly signaling an *internal redistribution* of tasks. That is, the genre of the lyceum

evolved into other visible current forms. This is however, a preliminary claim. To explore it, relevant questions are, “Where do we see now lyceum-type of activities?” and “How, and where is the concern for the ‘advancement of the race’ enacted today in Bethel?” These are relevant questions within an understanding that the Baraca-Philathea Lyceum was not a short-lived, church-sponsored venue.

Notes

1. Albert Lee Papers, 1912–1928. Bethel AME Baraca-Philathea Lyceum folder (1920, 1922–24); Box 3. Record Series 2/6/21. University of Illinois Archives (1963); Guide to African-American Research Resources (1994).
2. Ibid.
3. [Guide to African American Research Resources](#)

(<http://www.library.uiuc.edu/archives/guides/afamer.php#bkmrk2>)

4. Powell, F.P. (1895). The rise and the decline of the New England Lyceum. *The New England magazine*, 17 (6), pp. 730–739.
5. Logan, S. W. (2008). *Liberating language. Sites of rhetorical education in nineteenth-century black America*. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press.
6. Bethel AME Church, February 22 Sunday Bulletin, announcements

page.

[Final comment: I will bring my consent forms to class, on Wednesday, April 15; two more interviews will be completed this week, which were not possible earlier due to my informants' schedules.]