RECONFIGURING RACIAL UPLIFT: CHURCH-SPONSORED AFRICAN AMERICAN RHETORICAL WORK IN THE EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY

BY

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DISSERTATION

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This dissertation contends that members of African American communities have asserted their citizenship early in the twentieth century in predominantly white locations via the display of their rhetorical work, which black audiences received with pride and support, but white ones have utterly ignored. I critically examine here the rhetorical work of a Midwestern African American congregation, Bethel AME Church located in a then smaller urban locality, Champaign, IL, and in close proximity to the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Specifically, I claim that members’ uptake of racial uplift entailed a middle-class project—not an economic project, not one stemming from their finances, but a cultural one. Their fraught program of constructing middle-class subjectivities has comprised both distancing behaviors—rejection of lower class membership and resistance to racist portrayals—and cultural (read educational) aspirations and conscious performances of dignity. These seemingly opposing practices—cultural distance and cultural proximity—have therefore carried intra-racial struggles. I further argue that these church members (and others in similar locations), following long-standing traditions of self-reliance, conceived their activist work as a necessary response to the apathy they have encountered in their locales. After Bethel congregants relocated to Champaign from the South, at the turn of the century, they soon witnessed the founding of a university that privileged white men and a city environment seldom receptive, and even openly hostile, to their visibility. They did, however, engage the University of Illinois in productive ways by sponsoring educational initiatives off-campus when comparable campus offerings did not accommodate black students, not at least comfortably. In doing so, they demonstrated too an understanding
(and endurance) of inter-racial struggles, and of what Jacqueline Jones Royster (2000) has called situated ethos—a sense of racial place, tensions, and duties (pp. 64-65).

Using archival findings from university, public, and private black repositories in town, and oral histories that I collected from senior Bethel members, I demonstrate how, through self-sponsored rhetoric, Bethel became a critical activist site for its congregants and, more importantly, for the African American university students who during the interwar years availed themselves of this church’s services—educational, rhetorical and material. When African Americans were granted their rights to citizenship they had to struggle the most against a national, deeply-felt, and governmentally-sanctioned racism. They did, however, imagine, finance, and offer their own educational venues; they did so with a clear sense of self-determination. Bethel was one such instance. In studying this community, my dissertation accounts for local narratives of uplift through activism. The result is what I have called reconfiguring racial uplift, local race work conducted by lesser-known black individuals and black communities. Bethel members have not become figures of national recognition, and their work, and that of their most visible rhetors, when made public, was only discussed in local periodicals. Nevertheless, they have interpreted the national project and crafted their own version of the “talented,” dignified, and cultured African American. We must therefore study these responses to limited citizenship and racism locally because of their contributions to the development of black citizenship. Bethel congregants understood their racial duties as that of a black middle-class uplift ideology by focusing on the moral and cultural aspects of advancement, performing aesthetically, and associating themselves with a university culture. Bethel’s literary training of black students through such activities as debates and parliamentary work, my point of entry into this community, signaled a larger community investment in rhetorical instruction,
historical recoveries, activism, and archival maintenance. Bethel has established the literary, educational, and archival as the core practices my dissertation elucidates.
To my husband, Simon Schocken

To Mom and Dad, and my brother Edo

To Bethel AME Church and its congregants in Champaign, IL

In memory of Mrs. Erma Pauline Scott Bridgewater, Bethel’s “quiet revolutionary”
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

TABLE OF FIGURES ........................................................................................................... xi

PREFACE ............................................................................................................................ xii

A NOTE ON LANGUAGE ...................................................................................................... xiii

INTRODUCTION: LOCAL RHETORIC, ACTIVISM, AND RACIAL UPLIFT ..................... 1
The Mainstream-Alternative Dichotomy ....................................................................... 13

CHAPTER 1: CONSTRUCTING ALTERNATIVE RHETORICS ............................................ 22
1.1 Finding Archival Traces at a University Campus and the Black Home .................. 23
1.2 Imagining, Retracing, and Lingering over Traces—Oral and Textual ................. 28
1.3 Racial and Scholarly Determinations: “Are you a Negro?” ................................. 36
1.4 Campus Racial Climate: “We must serve them because that is the law” .............. 39

CHAPTER 2: AFFORDING COMMUNITY EDUCATION, PERFORMING
DIGNIFIED CITIZENSHIP ............................................................................................... 61
2.1 Race Work, Education, and the African American Input ....................................... 66
2.2 Local Safe Self-Determination or “Who does she think she is?” ......................... 71
2.3 Overlapping Spaces, Overlapping Literacies ............................................................ 91

CHAPTER 3: SPONSORING LITERACIES, INVENTING ETHOS ................................. 98
3.1 Bethel AME Church’s Lyceum: “Everything that … [was] good for the Race” … 101
3.2 Relocating Racial Discourse: “Students ought not to be involved in politics” .... 107
3.3 The Rhetoric of Discipline: Forming Character through Writing ......................... 127
3.4 Decline, Resilience: The Practice of Citizenship Off-Campus ............................. 137

CHAPTER 4: PERFORMING RACIALIZED ARCHIVES, NARRATING
LOCAL HISTORIES .......................................................................................................... 148
4.1 Advocacy from within: Albert R. Lee’s Writing as Activist Work ......................... 157
4.2 Contesting Institutional Memory: Senior Bethel Women’s Collections ................ 172

CONCLUSIONS: RECONCILING COMPETING REPRESENTATIONS ...................... 199
A Model of the Meaning of Local Analysis ................................................................... 207

REFERENCES ...................................................................................................................... 225
TABLE OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Figure 1</td>
<td>“A Pictorial History of African Americans of Champaign County” (1978)</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 2</td>
<td>Albert Lee Papers (1912-1928)</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 3</td>
<td>Albert Lee’s portrait (ca. 1938)</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 4</td>
<td>Bethel AME Church Sunday school class (early 1900s)</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 5</td>
<td>A Philomathean program: “Political Meeting” (1892)</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 6</td>
<td>A Philomathean program: “Colored Program” (1895)</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 7</td>
<td>“In the Restaurant of the House of Representatives” (1893)</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 8</td>
<td>Cover of “Data concerning Negro Students” by Albert Lee (1940, June 25)</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 9</td>
<td>The old church, a “typical rural school house” (1864-1892)</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 10</td>
<td>“Give Concert in First Congregational Friday” (April 1935)</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 11</td>
<td>“Addresses of homes rooming Negro students, Early Years” (ca. 1942)</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 12</td>
<td>Philomathean meeting room and Adelphic meeting room (1884)</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 13</td>
<td>Alethenai Stunt for women’s rights event on campus (1911)</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 14</td>
<td>Blackface student performances (ca. 1911-1934)</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 15</td>
<td>African American student visibility on campus (ca. 1897-1907)</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 16</td>
<td>Extempore topics for lyceum meetings (ca. 1923-1924)</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 17</td>
<td>A report on a Baraca-Philathea program (ca. 1923)</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 18</td>
<td>Annotated programs for the Baraca-Philathea lyceum (1924)</td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 19</td>
<td>Parliamentary work: Form of putting a motion (ca. 1923)</td>
<td>136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 20</td>
<td>Rhetorical habit: Bethel’s programs (1924-2009)</td>
<td>143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 21</td>
<td>“A literary debate in the Darktown Club” (ca. 1885)</td>
<td>144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 22</td>
<td>“Albert Lee, Unofficial Negro Illini Dean, Dies in Champaign” (1948)</td>
<td>161</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 23</td>
<td>Albert Lee “unofficial Dean of the colored students” (1989)</td>
<td>162</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 24</td>
<td>Images of Urbana and Champaign, IL (1912-1914)</td>
<td>176</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 25</td>
<td>Mrs. Carrie Nelson, Bethel member (1985)</td>
<td>178</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 26</td>
<td>Domestic archives: Portraits, photographs, and news</td>
<td>187</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 27</td>
<td>Sadie Barbee’s index card (1931) and Erma Scott’s portrait (1937)</td>
<td>191</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 28</td>
<td>Mixed class at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (1912)</td>
<td>192</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 29</td>
<td>Mixed class: A focused view (1912)</td>
<td>193</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 30</td>
<td>Student Life and Culture Archival Program: Online banner</td>
<td>194</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 31</td>
<td>Student Life and Culture Archival Program: African-American Students</td>
<td>195</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 32</td>
<td>Albert Lee’s signature in a lyceum letter (1923)</td>
<td>212</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 33</td>
<td>At the Intersection of Nelson Court and Phillips Drive</td>
<td>217</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 34</td>
<td>Access “without discrimination”: Senior yearbook portraits (1912-1936)</td>
<td>222</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 35</td>
<td>A focused view of the mural “A Pictorial History” (1978-2009)</td>
<td>223</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In the early twentieth century, African Americans constructed local forms of citizenship through rhetorical practices. I offer here a critical examination of these practices by studying the educational (chapter 2), literary (chapter 3), and historical and archival offerings (chapter 4) of a Midwestern African American congregation, Bethel, located in Champaign, IL, adjacent to an overwhelmingly white university, the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Drawing upon church members’ memories of inter-racial and intra-racial struggles, I argue that this black church interpreted racial uplift as local, self-sponsored, middle-class project entailing cultural and educational aspirations, conscious performance of dignified behaviors, resistance of racial stereotypes, and rejection of lower class membership. In particular, such local activist work was exercised in response to a prejudicial campus climate, neglect and mis-education (chapter 1).

By imagining multiple forms of citizenship, my work reconfigures racial uplift thus extending the recovery of lesser-known rhetors. Hence, my research elucidates Bethel as a critical site of rhetorical education—arguably congregants’ and black university students’ most relevant site for the articulation of black humanity, intellect, and civic involvement. Finally, my work serves as a model of the meaning of local analysis, a case study with larger methodological claims. Specifically, my research explores the intertextuality of archives, memories, and spaces, stemming from a white university campus and the black neighborhood. In doing so, I foreground the domestic as a valid site of rhetorical production, a space from which racialized local narratives challenge simplistic institutional accounts.
A NOTE ON LANGUAGE

In discussing archival texts from the early twentieth century, I have reproduced in this dissertation some descriptive racist terms—darkey or colored, for instance—which I took verbatim from the original sources. I have chosen not to sanitize the terms I found for they serve to illustrate how African Americans, through language, were denigrated and imagined as lesser-citizens on campus venues. Other terms were invoked by senior African American citizens to refer to fellow blacks and themselves. The word Negro is one such instance. Similarly, some images included in this research, produced locally and nationally, are prejudicial depictions of early twentieth century African Americans. These images, which contrast sharply with the dignified ways in which Bethel congregants chose to perform locally, serve to establish how white constituencies represented them in service positions. Alternatively, other images, such as photographs of African American students in classrooms or student organizations highlight a less than comfortable participation on campus.
INTRODUCTION

LOCAL RHETORIC, ACTIVISM, AND RACIAL UPLIFT

Acquiring literacy in conjunction with freedom had the potential to open access to democratic political activity, and that in turn held a promise of enabling African Americans to participate in shaping the civil society in which they had hitherto been considered chattel—insurgent chattel, but chattel just the same.

—Heather Andrea Williams, *Self-Taught: African American Education in Slavery and Freedom*

On the corner of Fifth Street and East Park Street, in Champaign, IL, for over thirty years (1978-2009), a community mural (Figure 1 top), painted by Bethel member Angela Rivers, principal artist, reminded African American residents in the North End of their origins, labor, migration, culture, and dignity (Lenstra, 2010; *Revisiting*, 2010, pp. 16-17). The mural served as a marker of a fraught social history locally, at the intersections of public art and community memory. “Standing in front of the mural you can see Salem Baptist Church and Bethel A. M. E., the two oldest historically African-American churches in Champaign County, both founded before the civil war” (Lenstra, 2010, Cover Art page, para. 1). In 2009, Angela Rivers, the artist, framed the mural as a material representation of the contested terrain of memory (as in a mainstream-alternative opposition) and a black visibility curtailed by the local railroad tracks (Figure 1 bottom)² and racism:

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²Figure 1 bottom has been printed as cover art in the 2010 edited community publication in Champaign-Urbana, Community Engagement: Research and Service at the University of Illinois (Lenstra, 2010, p. 18). The publication names Angela Rivers’ young assistants: L. Nolan, M. Mitchell, S. Brown, and P. Caston; about 30 other individuals helped—high school students and young adults (Lenstra, 2010, Cover Art page, para. 2). This was an initiative of the Comprehensive Employment Training Act-CETA (1978).
My mother’s side of the family [Earnest-Nelson family, prominent in Bethel’s early history] arrived just after the Civil War from Vigo County, Indiana. I grew up with stories about family members participating in numerous wars, building homes and lives, having farms and businesses. A great grandfather was deputy sheriff at the turn of the last century and a grandfather was the first black policeman of Champaign. Because of this it was important to me to show in the mural that we as African-Americans had a history in Champaign; we arrived in the county to help build and maintain the railways, we owned farms and became productive members of the greater community. The mural for me has been a reminder of that history. (Revisiting, 2010, p. 3)

In studying a local venue, this project attempts to contribute to an understanding of rhetorical habit in marginalized locations. But most importantly, I study church-sponsored educational, literary, and archival, and historical practices in a Midwestern location and within the purview of university campus—the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign—to understand a black middle-class formation and its response to both racist systems of oppression in education and its willful failure to accommodate black students and citizens.
Figure 1. “A Pictorial History of African Americans of Champaign County” (1978)

The mural (top) (16 x 64-foot), as it was originally seen at the corner of Fifth Street and Park Street, in Champaign, IL, down the street from Bethel, was created in 1978 by former Bethel member Angela M. Rivers (Revisiting, 2010, pp. 2, 4).

Public educational initiatives for African Americans, regardless of their geographic location, after Reconstruction’s failure and well into the inter-war period, proved to be not only intentionally meager but insufficient as well. African Americans nonetheless, interested in their education (and one of adequate standards), imagined, financed, and offered their own private educational institutions such as schools, churches, fraternal organizations, literary and debate

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3Top (Revisiting, 2010, pp. 16-17); bottom (Lenstra, 2010, p. 18). On the thirty-first anniversary of the mural (Revisiting, 2010, p. 16-17; Rivers, 1978), the artist, Angela Rivers visited Champaign-Urbana and the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign to discuss her work. She visited twice, in October 2009 and during the summer 2010, and participated in community events: memory mapping, radio interview, community talks, and campus lecture (Revisiting, 2010, p. 2). During the summer of 2010, the walls with the fading mural were demolished. Angela Rivers currently lives in Chicago, IL. Reproduced by permission of Angela M. Rivers.
societies, women’s clubs, and reading forums, thus performing a much needed social service and increasing public offerings in the process. Therefore, in view of Carter G. Woodson’s (1933/1998) keen characterization of the post-Civil War years as those where African Americans were mis-educated, we should continue to document these early educational difficulties whose residues are still visible today. We must also study African Americans’ collective responses to offset such neglect and mis-education because despite the granting of their citizenship, they have had to struggle to assert it amid national apathy and racism. In particular, because their responses—their activist pursuits—have typically stemmed from local African American institutions (such as churches or community and activist sites) we must study them locally. Furthermore, given that these locations have also resisted by way of producing and maintaining archives documenting their own educational efforts and rhetorical work, we must also approach these sites to understand their local contributions to the national project of securing equitable, public educational offerings. In doing so, I claim, we will learn local narratives of racial uplift through education, rhetorical training, and activism.

It is therefore within local, self-supported African American settings, and in response to an imperative to become visible citizens locally and to be heard and respected by both a white and a black audience, after Reconstruction and during the interwar years, that my research takes place. This dissertation examines a small community, a Midwestern religious site (not the customary southern or northern locality), which I claim is a legitimate racialized space for the practice of rhetorical habit in the early decades of the twentieth century. I study a type of local activism stemming from an “alternative” site of rhetorical education, and advanced by least

4Race work, the process known as racial uplift or advancement of the race, was variously articulated since Antebellum as the passing from slavery to freedom, from illiteracy to education, from servitude to civic participation (community work and suffrage), and from undignified representations to respectable ones.
visible and known rhetors in a Midwestern location. In the spring of 2009, while looking for traces of African American visibility on campus, I encountered archival evidence from the first half of the twentieth century documenting the rhetorical practices of black citizens in Champaign-Urbana, IL. I have since researched the work of an African American congregation, Bethel AME Church, geographically situated at the northern edge of Champaign, IL, a traditionally black neighborhood known from the 1950s to date as the North End. Since before World War I, Bethel sponsored a lyceum, a monthly public lecture meeting called the Baraca-Philathea Lyceum (ca. 1910-1940). This venue, a community-based rhetorical site, functioned in church premises and was organized and attended by black university students at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, and by church members. Studying Bethel’s lyceum, and its rhetorical work early in my research, however, only called attention to the extended rhetorical and activist work that had taken place in this church; thus, in this dissertation I not only study Bethel’s lyceum, and its literary, rhetorical, and parliamentary training, but also examine such extended habits reflected in their educational, historical, and archival work. My work therefore explores racialized local settings that produce and encourage literate and rhetorical activities in service of race work.

Bethel’s activism is not an instance of the familiar narrative of uplift through education, nor is its racial work dependent on higher education only. Bethel and its most visible members engaged in rhetorical activity by advocating for African American education, reading Illinois’ history, performing a middle-class citizenship, and by arguing, via debates and written texts, for racial matters as a means to demonstrate their critical awareness of national and local concerns for African Americans. I argue that church members engaged in self-supported learning and rhetoric to call attention to how a predominantly white university—circumventing legal
mandates—conditioned their access to higher education and to civic participation. I further claim that these members both aimed to become part of this university culture as students or staff members and supported fellow African Americans’ attempts to do so. The black individuals with whom I have collaborated in an ongoing recovery project of their rhetorical work have reclaimed and repurposed church spaces for secular work (community, educational, and social service), namely for racial uplift, which they conceived as both a Christian and civic duty. From their “alternative” locations (e.g., their homes, black neighborhood, and church), perceived as such by the overwhelmingly white location in which they lived, Bethel members, I further contend, have also engaged in historical documentation and archival work as evidence of their collective understanding of black citizenship.

Bethel members understood their responsibilities as black individuals, and advanced (and displayed) a black middle-class uplift ideology from their vantage points by focusing on the moral aspects of uplift, performing aesthetically, and associating themselves with the literary culture of this university setting. In Bethel’s work there is much to say about class, and class distinctions as modes of social insertion, which these congregants accomplished via behaviors which prompted recognition of similarities and shared cultural values with local middle-class white Americans. Bethel engaged in a collective demonstration of class via the public performance of uplift through rhetorical work, education, civility, and aesthetic tastes. In alignment with the work of literacy scholars (Bloom, 1996; Flower, 2008; Heath, 1983; Pratt, 1991; M. Rose, 1989), my dissertation considers class a critical feature of community writing and rhetoric, and of racial uplift and striving. Specifically, in locations such as the one I study, with a growing African American visibility in the early twentieth century, class, as with cultural or moral class interacts with race so as to breach racial distance. Class has been embedded in
Bethel’s work for, implicitly, church members defined themselves as already uplifted citizens in moral (religious), economic (because of their hard work), and cultural terms. Yet embodying such definition has not been without tensions for, in my conversations with senior members, they have attributed to others’ perceptions of their church as pretentious: “They [other African American folks in their black neighborhood] considered us an elitist church” (E. Rivers, personal communication, November 12, 2009). This observation signals an understanding of intra-racial struggles within the fraught program of constructing middle-class subjectivities.

My work, however, goes beyond the recovery of a rhetorical site and re-inscription of local rhetors, in that I argue that this black community interpreted racial uplift as a local middle class project entailing both oppositional behaviors (a rejection of lower-class membership and resistance to racist stereotypes) and cultural and educational aspirations. Hence, middle class cultural membership and a visibility on campus and in town (Champaign, Urbana, and the North End) became for them a means for their existence locally. By studying this community, and the records and memories left, we should understand how, by demonstrating a collective situated ethos (as applied by Jacqueline Jones Royster, 2000, pp. 65-70), that is, with a mindful awareness of racial climate—national and local—and the exigencies placed on black individuals in the early twentieth century, this community created and performed a dignified and cultural public identity. To Bethel members, performing the New Negro, a late nineteenth century (1895) and a Harlem Renaissance trope (1920s) denoting the already uplifted black middle-class individuals whose duties were to spread their cultural capital, entailed local aesthetic forms, decorum, and norms of writing and oral expression (Carroll, 2005; Gates, 1988; Gates & Jarret, 2007; Locke, 1925/2007; Pickens, 1916/1969; Washington, Wood, & Williams, 1900/1969; Wintz, 1988).
Bethel members extricated themselves, not particularly from a black elite (although they did not imagine themselves as such either), but most importantly, from those prompting anxieties among educated whites (and blacks)—from what they perceived to be a lower, non-urban, uneducated class of African Americans. They were church-going individuals and business men and women. Despite their socioeconomic status, despite the hardships of having to work on nearby fields and in menial jobs on campus, Bethel members had arrived with and created culture, one marked, and still characterized today, by their religious inclinations. They understood how problematic it was in the overall national discourse of the early twentieth century to be, or be perceived as, lower class or uneducated. Even though not every member had economic access to higher education, their “culture” was greatly valued by church members, who had distinguished themselves locally, associated with the religious work of their church, and aimed for “higher” culture through the rhetorical performance of their lyceum meetings. Theirs was a response to having relocated, some from slavery, to an urban, soon-to-be university location.

Understanding their efforts as suggesting assimilation to a predominantly white locality or a mere reproduction of white habits seems too simplistic. What was at stake for this community, I claim, extends survival and civic insertion, suggesting even great self-determination, and opposition to national and local racist stereotypes; most importantly, Bethel members sought to invent a middle class (cultured) ethos in response to a white university authority and to the black working-class identities that had been typically constructed in prejudicial ways. They interpreted their class as sufficient grounds for acceptance by and equal treatment from the white population. I therefore address here how church-going African Americans, in this Midwestern location, during the interwar period (and certainly earlier), have
negotiated and adapted educational structures—literary societies, reading forums, parliamentary work, and archival practices—and have attained rhetorical training for their social benefit, for the advancement of their race and community. Located within the purview of a predominantly white university, theirs was a location that gravitated around the literary culture of this university setting. Their self-supported work aimed to bridge their black segregated enclave across the racial distance imposed by a white educational venue, which was only legally welcoming at best. Yet, their modeling, performance, and display of dignity aimed to reach those who they considered to be in the “Talented Tenth.” They understood that racial uplift (and local racism) leaves individuals behind. Accordingly, the church engaged not only in educational but also in social services for members, and black university students.

I study as well how this church produced its lyceum (and most other offering) not as an “alternative” site as the literature on rhetorical education would rightly conceive of it, but as a much needed primary source of rhetorical training for congregants and African American university students. In its traditional sense, being an alternative site entails being alternative (outside or substitute) to formal and mainstream schooling (e.g., universities) and entertainment sites (Bode, 1956; Holbrook, 1829; Logan, 2008; McHenry, 2002; E. P. Powell, 1895; Ray, 2005). The term has therefore been used to characterize these societies, regardless of their sponsor (white, women, or African Americans), because they coexisted with mainstream educational venues, which later absorbed their work and replaced their functions. Specifically, given the widespread practice of migrating students’ political concerns out of campus premises to provide practical opportunities for discussion and debates, even mainstream (read white) and black student-sponsored literary societies nationally, were deemed substitute venues (Enoch, 2008; Kates, 2001; Logan, 2008;) or auxiliary to academic (Solberg, 1968; Solberg, 2000; W.
Solberg, personal communication, March 29, 2012). That is, their alternative framing responds to their unofficial character, and not to how crucial these sites might have been to the constituents they served.

In this dissertation I therefore move beyond a broad gaze of rhetorical sites and claim as well that for marginalized groups, “alternative” locations are not trivial, but arguably their most significant ones for rhetorical training (and for education). The term alternative therefore becomes pivotal here because my work problematizes its indistinct application to rhetorical sites (sponsored in ethnic locations)—that is, without consideration of racial or gender constituencies. My dissertation conceives of it differently as a way of theorizing the University of Illinois and Bethel’s relationship to each other as racialized engagements. Where institutionally-based rhetorical sites (the University’s) and white student venues functioned as alternatives to core academic curricula for mainstream students, this community-based one (Bethel’s lyceum), by virtue of being African American offering, became a chief source of rhetorical education to African Americans locally, and was only nominally an alternative or secondary one. Indeed, to Bethel members, their lyceum was hardly alternative, substitute, or auxiliary.

While defining rhetorical sites as alternative seems unproblematic for racial groups other than African Americans (namely, white) or gendered constituencies (namely women’s clubs), sites established by black citizens in support of comparable rhetorical need could not, by any measure, be considered alternative options to them. I further contend we should extend this argument to include women as a minority population (though very active) during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. That is, racialized (and gendered) nontraditional sites have been critical ones allowing minority groups to engage in some sort of “alternative” discourse, a novel or radical political offering and in response to dominant, and (truly) alternative
sites. When considering the proximity of this church (Bethel) to university locations, its sponsoring of a rhetorical site for those African American students who were not part of mainstream offerings (as documented in my university archival findings) only highlights the educational aspirations of these middle-class, church-going individuals. We should therefore appreciate how defining a venue as alternative is conditioned by race (and gender), and within constituencies it is further determined by individuals’ economic means of access.

My research meets with the body of scholarship on “alternative” sites of rhetorical education because of its interest in lesser-known rhetorical spaces. However, it is precisely this concern with lesser-known rhetors and their critical citizenship work which is at odds with the designation of their working venues as alternative. The work found in rhetorical sites has been widely documented by Anne Ruggles Gere (1994) in her study of writing groups outside the classroom walls or in Composition’s extracurriculum, and later (Gere, 1996; Gere, 1997), in her research on turn-of-the-century (up to the 1920s) black and white women’s clubs. Jacqueline Jones Royster (2000) has also explored the ways in which nineteenth century African American elite—educated—women have consistently used language with authority, individually and collectively, within their organizations for sociopolitical interventions. Similarly, Beverly J. Moss (2003) has studied literate events, prompted by protestant pastors’ sermons in contemporary black churches (Chicago, IL and Columbus, OH) as a way to understand “literacy as it is practiced in the social contexts of various communities …” (p. 3), typically marginalized ones. Charlotte Hogg (2006) has contributed to the field in her ethnographic study (and memoir) of older rural women’s nontraditional literacies in Paxton, NE, before the 1920s. And Shirley Wilson Logan (2008) has teased out specific instances of nineteenth century rhetorical education where African Americans advanced political discourse from private gatherings to public venues.
such as literary societies or the black press. Individually, and collectively, these studies demonstrate how political self-determination and identities are developed in and channeled through sites of marginalized citizens’ own making.

Following long-standing traditions of self-reliance, Bethel conceived their activist work as a necessary response to local apathy. When its members relocated to Champaign at the turn of the century, they encountered a university that privileged white men and a city environment seldom receptive, and even openly hostile, to their visibility. They did, however, engage the University of Illinois in productive ways, as Deborah Brandt (2001) would say, by sponsoring educational initiatives off-campus when comparable university offerings did not accommodate black students. My dissertation accounts for local narratives of uplift through activism. The result is what I call reconfiguring racial uplift, a foregrounding of local race work as conducted by lesser-known black community members.

The questions that motivate my study have developed out of an interrogation—a bottom-up exploration—of local, racialized rhetorical savvy. How do national uplift discourses play out at the local level (with church-going African American men and women) during the early twentieth century and interwar period? How do local rhetors embody a middle class ideology, cultural separation and educational aspirations, and conduct their activism locally in proximity to influential white venues with which they engaged willingly in conversation? In what ways do the educational offerings from this church disturb university discourses about educational access “without discrimination” for African Americans? How does a church-sponsored lyceum exemplify the literary culture of its time, locally and nationally? In what ways does local rhetorical work necessitate archival and historical documentation habits to record access differentials based on race?
The Mainstream-Alternative Dichotomy

Starting points for the study of local, educational African American self-determination became early twentieth century archival traces of rhetorical habit left by Bethel rhetors in Champaign, IL (at public libraries), at the University of Illinois Archives, and in their homes and Bethel premises. Specifically, Bethel’s literary training of black students through such activities as debates and parliamentary work, my point of entry into this community, signaled a larger community investment in rhetorical instruction and archival maintenance. These archival texts established the educational, literary, and archival/historical as the core practices that my dissertation elucidates. My work is a case study with larger methodological claims—an archival work that explores the incongruity of the institutional and the private narratives of race as informed by embodied memory. Understanding archival research as a lived and social process, my research works at the intersections of community writing, archived texts, and memory. In doing so, not only do I move beyond academic literacies, but I respond, too, to the call for more methodological discussions informing archival work in Composition Studies and for increased historiographic practices in archival work. Specifically, my work contributes to the scholarship on African American rhetorical traditions by foregrounding the domestic—the black homes—as valid sites of history production, and by uncovering new rhetors, thereby increasing African American texts and memories in historiographic work. While I have paid attention to the racial, the gendered aspects of historical documentation highlight, too, the nurturing and domestic spaces that Bethel women have created, purposefully, to sustain community and history.

In chapter 1, “Constructing Alternative Rhetorics,” I position Bethel’s work within the historically contested ideological task of uplifting African Americans in an overwhelmingly white location. Here I advocate a rhetorical and historiographic approach to the study of archival
texts and memories produced in hidden localities. I further set the grounds for my discussions of Bethel’s rhetoric—methodological choices, my positionality, and the campus climate which molded Bethel’s response. Given the dearth of documentary evidence from Bethel’s early twentieth century work, except for the Albert Lee Papers—a collection of institutional, personal, and church records left behind at the president’s office in 1947 by the most recognized African American university employee and Bethel member—I have collected oral testimonies offered by Bethel elders who were either very young during the most active years of their lyceum or whose parents were lyceum officers and contributors of papers, letters, and poetry, for instance. Collecting oral histories became the only means available to interpret and critically imagine (Royster & Kirsch, 2012) the most likely contexts and experiences supporting incomplete documentary evidence. I thus integrate historical texts, which were scarce and had been stored and neglected with senior congregants’ memories of the church’s work in the early twentieth century. These written and oral texts suggest anything but an “alternative” role for this church in the educational and rhetorical training of its members and of the black university students who benefitted from their offerings and social services (board, food, and spiritual support). Such aid, and the increased visibility of some black individuals on campus, became prominent (according to these records and memories) during the interwar period.

Remembering is, by nature, embodied and collective. Hence, in chapter 1, I reflect on the meanings that members derived from places, streets, railroad tracks, and homes in the black neighborhood and on the stories imprinted in photographic evidence and in letters and programs they shared with me. Members tended to my inquiries and curiosities out of their sense of the physical landscape of their black neighborhood and its history— theirs were placed-based memories, and highly-racialized ones. When encountering archival texts (written and pictorial)
supporting their church’s work, Bethel elders lingered around documents, contributed new memories and produced increased private archives in support of our recovery work, thus also making their memories text-based. Accordingly, my three inquiry and engagement tools became strategic contemplation and critical imagination (Royster, 2000; Royster & Kirsch, 2012) and photograph/text elicitation. As for my overall framework, I advocate here a historiographic approach to the study of archival texts and memories produced in hidden localities.

Because I was not racially legible to Bethel (a Peruvian citizen whose native language is not English), members became curious about my racial position, which determined the modes and pace of my access to members’ domestic archives, but most notably, determined senior women’s decisions to mentor me. Our ways of understanding local racial work and my inquiry tools were conditioned by the legibility of my race to members. In chapter 1, I reflect, too, on the multiple locations, racial and scholarly, that I have inhabited while conducting my research, and that I intend to inhabit in my academic life, as an outsider to this African American church and to black history in general. I reflect on how I have been prompted by Bethel members to articulate my racial locations, and with this, my ethical duties—to reveal to them my intended uses and purposes for their stories and texts—as premises upon which access, a gradual one, was to be granted. I have done so—I have articulated and shared my self-determination to the community by initially defining myself as what I am not. I am not an African American; I am a foreigner to them, and a foreigner to this country. Most importantly, whenever they have placed me as a white woman, I was never white American to them. And this particular mobilizing of my identity mattered to Bethel: I could be trusted with documents and memories; I was not a reminder of those who had previously misused them; I could be taught. Through the process of scholarly inquiry and interpersonal relationships, I have developed an affective connection to the rhetorical
work and archival places of these African American rhetors. Through strolls in the black neighborhood, through what members conceived as my much needed mentoring on African American history, I have developed an appreciation for minorities’ enactments of citizenship. My site of research became my adopted home in Champaign, IL, too.

Archival findings documenting the University’s racial climate, though fragmented at best, only strengthened Bethel’s activism. I document the means of black students’ access to white university venues found in formative university texts and historical compilations and campus representations of African Americans (found in student-supported societies). Bethel’s rhetorical offerings should not be understood as completely isolated from the white knowledge site of the University as Bethel’s offerings were purposeful rhetorical moves in response to an early campus (in)visibility, indifference, and occasionally overt racism. It was the law that compelled campus establishments to serve meals to African American students, as an observation made in a letter by a white university student during the late 1920s, and which made reference to a campus restaurant, its white owner, his racial attitudes toward African Americans, and his directive to employers to delay service to black students, makes clear (Jacob Goldstein, 1929, October 28).

The memories I have recorded, however, disrupt a university tradition of ignoring inter-racial struggles, and suggest that even the law could be circumvented with substandard (read delayed) service. I bring memories of the racial tensions on campus before moving to Bethel’s work. I do so because without an understanding of campus climate, the work of these church-going men and women would seem inconsequential. Their modes of being black citizens outperformed the racial attitudes held locally, and on campus.

Bethel, its lyceum, and members’ cultural practices became critical sites for church members and the African American university students who visited and participated in church
events—arguably, their most relevant sites for the articulation of black humanity, intellect, and civic involvement. In doing so, congregants performed work that was to them foremost religious, yet from that frame, became also educational, rhetorical, historical, and archival. Even as these practices coexisted with mainstream university offerings seemingly open to all university students “without discrimination,” Bethel engaged in self-supportive, dignified rhetoric as middle class citizens. It is therefore within this mainstream-alternative dichotomy that the three core chapters (chapters 2, 3, and 4) of my dissertation unfold. I question views on the complete assimilation of practices by mainstream venues (in this case, the University of Illinois) and assumptions of these black locations (with their practices) as simply alternative. Each of these chapters studies a specific practice—educational, literary, and archival/historical—and the individuals exemplifying such habits. The result is what I call reconfiguring racial uplift, a foregrounding of local race work as conducted by lesser-known black community members.

In chapter 2, “Affording Community Education, Performing Dignified Citizenship,” I argue for the significance of black churches and their educational outreach when local conditions prompt no other response than self-determination. I discuss Bethel and its racial uplift through members’ fashioning their church as a black educational institution, with after-school programs, music, history, and theater education and Sunday school work developed in close proximity to campus and by rhetorically framing their community learning as fundamental to their identities as middle-class black Christians. I further situate Bethel as a safe site of black discourse development in the tradition of African American churches (Logan, 2005; Logan, 2008; McHenry, 2002; Porter, 1936) and a source and space for the performing of propriety. Through an analysis of members’ memories of interactions with the public system of education and with the University of Illinois, I demonstrate how they not only acknowledged multiple learning
venues—after school tutoring, for instance—as activist offerings, but they also articulated the literacies necessary for citizenship—academic, literary, religious, and musical, all taking place in church premises. Especially telling is how members conceive of spaces in an overlapping manner—once religious services are completed, pulpit and church pews host political discussions, choir practice, and community organizational meetings.

In chapter 3, “Sponsoring Literacies, Inventing Ethos,” Bethel and its lyceum, the Baraca-Philathea lyceum (ca. 1910-1940), demonstrating an acute awareness of national racial discourses and obligations, constituted alternative sites of rhetorical education benefiting two types of constituencies—church members and black students who attended the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. I regard here white and black societies in a dissimilar manner. That is, they each served populations with dissimilar access to mainstream (read white) venues and dissimilar needs for rhetorical training. While literary society scholars have fully accounted for the decline of lyceum-type of activities as early as the late 1860s (Bode, 1956; Logan, 2008; E. P. Powell, 1895; Solberg, 1968; Solberg, 2000) as a result of their incorporation into larger educational venues (typically universities), my work identifies the societies in this location still functioning early in the twentieth century. At the University of Illinois, white student societies developed later than comparable venues nationally (Solberg, 1968, p. 193; Solberg, 2000, pp. 309-311); hence, their decline took place later as well. Bethel’s self-supported student society, however, remained active until the 1940, but gradually, as members have recalled, students used less of the church’s services. My work does not ignore the external assimilation of practices to university spaces as educational conditions became more comfortable for African Americans on campus, or as fraternities and sports organizations were being authorized. Bethel’s lyceum did
decline; Bethel’s rhetorical work did not; black students, while fewer in numbers through the years, found acceptance on campus, in African American venues.

Bethel’s race work is conducted via representation by displaying a literary character, sponsoring reading rooms, offering parliamentary training and lyceum meetings, and becoming a crucial outlet for political discussion when white university venues were not accommodating to black citizens. I contrast Bethel members’ homes, which displayed dignified portraiture of local African Americans, with white student societies, which printed demeaning racial images on their programs. With the aid of oral histories, I position Bethel’s Lyceum as an affirming site for the development of black political literacies. I re-introduce here Albert R. Lee, Bethel member, president of the lyceum during its most active years in the interwar period, and the example of black dignity on campus, known as the unofficial dean of black students (Albert Lee, 1948, September 11; Guide, 1994). By close reading Lee’s organizational letters and lyceum programs, housed at the University of Illinois Archives, I document an active rhetorical venue that engaged locally in the national racial discourses of its time—black migration, lynching, and education. Lee’s manuscripts also reveal a church culture of uplift through the practice of advocacy during lyceum programs.

In chapter 4, “Performing Racialized Archives, Narrating Local Histories,” I argue that there is a strong relationship between archival practice and rhetorical work. Specifically, Bethel members’ maintenance of archives is a necessary rhetorical move given that their collections constitute a counter-archive—they engaged in historical documentation, created and collected texts, interpreted them for their communities and others interested, and used them to articulate local black histories. I interrogate as well scholarly expectations on the roles played by individuals whose cultures we study. Bethel members, mostly the senior women with whom I
have worked the closest, resisted being informants only and assumed the active roles of archivists and historians. These women, demonstrated, just as Lee had done in his time, an understanding of their racial locations, and the imperative to perform a kind of dignified and educated visibility that would prompt recognition (of values) among whites. Furthermore, they considered their duty to document their experiences with images, manuscripts, and print material, and contributed their memories to argue against a simplistic view of access to town and university venues. I examine how Bethel women understood race work and reconfigured it from within safe spaces—Bethel—and in response to potentially conflictive ones—those that African American students and members in particular, may have encountered in Champaign-Urbana and at the University during the first half of twentieth century as they crossed over racialized educational, civic, and religious boundaries.

Finally, in my concluding chapter, “Reconciling Competing Representations, Access ‘Without Discrimination,’” I revisit what I have identified as Bethel’s core rhetorical and activist practices—educational, literary, and archival work—in light of community activism. My dissertation contends that there is much to be gained by articulating a theory of race work that encompasses local African American rhetors and their middle-class rhetorical choices. As a rhetorical critique of institutional discourses—the University’s—early in the twentieth century, my project is an argument for finding and reading local narratives of uplift given how imposed and lived experiences differ substantially for minority populations and their mainstream counterparts. Specifically, by offering here the trajectory of my research—a methodological narrative of archival work, community engagement, and the fraught terrain of memory—I place my work as a model of the meaning of local analysis. Through shared working and learning sessions with Bethel members, race work emerges, borrowing Jacqueline Jones Royster and
Gesa E. Kirsch’s (2012) inquiry tool (p. 101), as a sustained social circulation of archives and lived histories across racial places and times. By foregrounding race work as conducted by lesser-known black community members, by dismissing the prevalence of histories informed solely by institutional records and imperial archives, and by attending to the intertextuality of space, text and embodied memories, and their fluidity across generations, my project reconfigures racial uplift.

Beverly J. Moss (2003) has asked, “What can make the portraits more complete in their depictions of African Americas’ and other marginalized groups’ interactions with literacy inside and outside school?” (p. 3). If rhetoric and literacy scholars continue to find literacy, rhetorical pursuits, and historical recoveries in smaller but critical locations (only alternative to the mainstream but not to those in the community), we could expand our rhetorical portraits and have a richer understanding of the intersections of race, space, literacy, and middle class citizenship in smaller localities. This practice has in turn larger implications for archival work and for the recovery and (re)inscription of local forms of racial uplift. Yet, my research goes beyond opening up Bethel members’ work; locally, they have already established themselves as rhetors, historians, and archivists. My work explores their past practices to understand the collaborative and highly racialized work they had performed as a way of honoring their ways of being and becoming African American middle-class citizens from their own private, religious sites and within their cultural times.
CHAPTER 1

CONSTRUCTING ALTERNATIVE RHETORICS

The cultural and physical environment in which a school operates will invariably shape the education it furnishes, as will the tone and spirit prevailing within the institution. Good education may not require a teacher and a student on opposite ends of a log, but if the two inhabit private worlds that intersect only in formal instruction, education will at least be incomplete.

—Winton U. Solberg, *The University of Illinois, 1867-1894: An intellectual and cultural history*

“Where there are legacies of subordination,” Mary Louise Pratt (1991) has claimed, “groups need places for healing and mutual recognition, safe houses in which to construct shared understandings, knowledges, claims on the world that they can then bring into the contact zone (p. 40). During the first half of the twentieth century (mostly during the interwar period), Bethel members and black university students developed a local (yet contained) visibility in response to campus racial climate—they performed rhetoric and civility within spaces of mutual recognition (Bethel was one such space), but they brought such dignified knowledges to campus, to white locations. Their rhetorical development was both self-initiated, but responsive too to a hostile environment, which espoused a merit-based visibility where deserving African Americans were “few and far between.” Bethel, and Albert Lee, rejected the inferiority discourse by constructing a politically-engaged collective ethos, performing education, literacy, and archives, and mobilizing in time and place, such rhetoric while demonstrating dignity.
1.1 Finding Archival Traces at a University Campus and the Black Home

Cheryl Glenn and Jessica Enoch (2009) observe, “Not all archival research in rhetoric and composition begins—or ends—on a university campus or at a great library” (p. 326). Mine however did, at the University of Illinois Archives. My archival explorations of the intersections of race and literacy, during spring 2009, were motivated by these inquiries: What traces have black university students left pointing to rhetorical education and activism? And, how have these initiatives been conditioned by race? Hence, as I was looking for evidence of student-sponsored rhetorical work on campus during late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, I found the Albert Lee Papers (Lee, 1912-1928) at the University of Illinois Archives (Figure 2).

![Figure 2. Albert Lee Papers, 1912-1928](image)

Three archival boxes containing Lee’s texts during his tenure at the president’s office.

Albert R. Lee (Figure 3) was an African American man, a Champaign, IL, resident, and Bethel member, president of Bethel’s literary society and choir director during the 1920s as

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5I took this photograph of the Albert Lee papers (Albert Lee Papers, 1912, 1917-1928, Record Series 2/6/21, Boxes 1-3) at the University of Illinois Archives, located in the main library location on campus (Room 19 Library, 1408 West Gregory Drive, Urbana, IL, 61820). Reproduced by courtesy of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Archives.
demonstrated by his records and the local press (Lee, 1912-1928; Mabry, 1989, February 5, p. E3). Lee was the chief clerk at President’s Office (1920-1947). He was the second African American hired by the University of Illinois in 1895, first as a messenger in the president’s office, and next as the chief clerk, also in said office, a position he held from 1920 until 1942 and from 1943 until his retirement in 1947 (Albert Lee, 1948; Guide, 1994). He served for over fifty years, except for when he became a freshman in 1897-1898 (Solberg, 2000, p. 48). Lee died from a long disease a year after his retirement, in 1948 (Albert Lee, 1948, September 11, p. 4).

Figure 3. Albert Lee’s portrait (ca. 1938)

Albert Lee was a Bethel member and a university employee.

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6The first African American man hired by the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign was L. H. Walden, who worked in maintenance for Drill Hall and Gymnasium (“Guide,” 1994, Introduction, para. 2). Walden, whose family history in Champaign goes back to the early 1860s and 1870s, was a Bethel member who is named as a Trustee in 1938 (Bethel, 1938, p.10).

7Sepia-tone photograph of Albert Lee housed at the University of Illinois Archives (Albert Lee [Portrait], ca. 1938). Reproduced by courtesy of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Archives.
In his University of Illinois treatise, composed from university archival records, Winton U. Solberg (2000), Distinguished Historian and Professor Emeritus of History at Illinois, and the leading authority on the history of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, places Lee as a freshman in the College of Literature and Arts during the 1897-98 academic year. Winton Solberg (2000) also identified Lee as one of the ten African American students who attended the university from 1894 to 1904 (p. 48). In this overwhelmingly white educational landscape, Dr. Solberg observed, “A statistical profile of the class of 1896, which numbered 110, including 18 women, illustrates the composition of one cohort” (p. 48). Most notably, Albert Lee, who crossed over the railroad tracks from Bethel premises to the University, nor precisely seeking inter-racial cooperation, was the most influential and known rhetor in his church, black community, and campus during the interwar period. He was even remembered locally, and in other Midwestern venues (e.g., Chicago) as the unofficial dean, de facto dean, or simply dean of African American students (Albert Lee, 1948, September 11, para. 6; Guide, 1994; Scott Bridgewater, 2001, March 22, p. 6). Interestingly, his closeness to and familiarity with University of Illinois presidents placed him, too, at private events, tending to guests and receiving meager payment in exchange (Lee, 1942b, President’s House, p. 33).

The Albert Lee Papers (Lee, 1912-1928) organized in three archival boxes (totaling one cubic feet), is a collection of institutional letters (with Lee as sender and receiver) and of literary

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8Dr. Solberg has also published two books, The University of Illinois, 1867-1894: An Intellectual and Cultural History (1968) and The University of Illinois, 1894-1904: The Shaping of the University, based on archival texts found at the University of Illinois Archives. Prior to Dr. Solberg, Carl Stephens, historian, and secretary of the Alumni Association, who had corresponded with Albert Lee during the 1930s about African American graduates (Lee, ca. 1942b; Carl Stephens, 1938, May 27; Carl Stephens, 1939, June 22; Carl Stephens, 1941, November 22), was the University of Illinois historian who authored of an unpublished manuscript history of the University of Illinois (1943-1947) housed in the University of Illinois Archives (Champaign-Urbana Courier, 1947, June 17; Stephens, 1943-1947). A neglected text, however, one which I claim to be too a historical account of the University of Illinois, through his close work with the presidents is Albert Lee’s 1942 “University of Illinois Presidents I Have Known” memoir.
programs, manuals, and annotated histories and manuscripts that Lee produced, which document Bethel’s religious, educational, rhetorical, and civic work. In particular, these texts speak of his university initiatives including recommendations for prospective black students and their admissions, housing options, and fraternities. There I found Lee’s (and Bethel’s) engagements with the local branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), with Sunday school connections, and with black fraternal organizations. Lee’s texts also include Bethel’s choir work and organizational letters during his tenure (1920s), and black students’ admissions, housing, and placement documents. Most notably, from these few letters and manuscript programs written in the 1920s, I learned about Bethel’s lyceum, the Baraca-Philathea Lyceum (circa 1910-1940), run, under Lee’s strict supervision, by African American university students, some of whom became church members. The Albert Lee collection speaks of an active black church, community, and lyceum whose rhetorical training bridged two worlds—the university’s and Bethel’s—to promote the uplifting of the race.

As I was drawn to these organizational letters and lyceum programs, and started meeting senior Bethel members and recording their memories (semi-structured interviews), Bethel emerged as a site of rhetorical education. Increasingly, archival texts and recollections suggested rhetorical habits that extended their lyceum work and times, and implicated a much larger and sustained rhetorical intent, involving race work, historical recoveries, situated and embodied memories, and private archival practices. My reading and learning locations progressively migrated to Bethel spaces; church members, and senior women in particular, began pointing me to a wealth of other documentary texts on the black experience distributed among multiple black family locations in the North End of Champaign, IL. The Bethel women with whom I have interacted for four years to discuss their history, and who were nurses, high school principals and
teachers, housing activists, members of voting leagues, antique-store owners, choir and church board members, and directors of black community centers, introduced me to their own private archives. They have maintained these documents in their homes, organized in filing cabinets, hanging folders, and in boxes in attics, cellars, and garden sheds. Some historical artifacts are displayed on their walls. I have studied some of their texts on loan; other texts were named, but their disclosure guarded, thus defining for me—the researcher approaching their work and locations—what their own archival policies and management decisions were.

Out of the archival explorations of a local African American literary society (Bethel’s), my work evolved into an examination of the rhetorical means, purposes, and contexts supporting the production of literary events, texts, and images—and their recovery and maintenance—in which this church and its members variously engaged during the early twentieth century. While working to locate archival texts, places, and people, I have found that as my research tools and participants mutually informed each other, so did they disrupt my learning and my participants' recollections. That is, I have experienced moments of productive disruption and spatial tensions, which prompted me to redefine alternative archival and historical work as valid (and critical) practices for African Americans. Bethel members’ private spaces, and church spaces, I claim, are valid repositories of the middle class African American experience in Illinois, as their civic, literary, and archival work was (and still is) practiced in Champaign, IL.

Church spaces were once perceived and certainly devoted to after-school work, reading time, music learning, Bible study, and lyceum meetings. When the geography of its former building allowed, Bethel’s library, which was at one time dismantled, housed its archives (educational, material, and institutional records), part of which are now distributed among members’ homes. Antoinette Burton (2003), in her study of Indian women’s use of memories of
their domestic spaces to articulate their own histories, argues for an expanded view of the home—from a source of memory to a source of historical evidence (pp. 4-5). Private homes become (in Burton’s view) a ‘material archive’ (p. 5) and ‘history-in-the-making’ (p. 26)—i.e. a location storing historical archival evidence relevant to marginalized populations. Therefore, as my work conceives the black home as an archival site—the place which preserves, the material and the memories being preserved, and the black citizen curating them—this dissertation project dismisses false binaries opposing the domestic and the official. That is, Bethel’s archives and members’ testimonies of the African American experience locally become official evidence as well. Hence, I too conduct research by moving back and forth from “location[s] of deliberate institutional cataloguing of memory” (M. Powell, 2008, pp. 115-116) or from the University of Illinois Archives to black localities equally deliberate in their storing of racialized memories.

1.2 Imagining, Retracing, and Lingering over Traces—Oral and Textual

After my preliminary examinations of the Albert Lee Papers (Lee, 1912-1928), and in my initial quest for understanding Bethel’s lyceum and the racialized work it performed, and its possible connections to white university venues in the early twentieth century, I searched for archival evidence of Bethel’s extended work in Champaign, IL, beyond campus. What had prompted a religious congregation to engage in literary work in those years? I realized the church was still very much active and approached it during the spring of 2009 through a university acquaintance (now a close friend)—Debrae A. Phillips Lomax—who is a church member, and whose family (my host family in Bethel) has had a long trajectory of historical and archival practices in their homes. Several senior members and Bethel’s pastor at the time, Reverend Larry Lewis, participated in a focus group meeting where I introduced institutional archival findings—
the Albert Lee Papers that I had found at university locations—and where I inquired about their lyceum. Some members—mostly the senior women who have assisted me the most these years, who became my mentors and the strongest rhetorical figures in Chapter 4—attended our focus group prepared to discuss archives of their own, and offer memories of their lyceum and rhetorical work. Some recollections seemed conflicted as church spaces were variously remembered as hosting Bible classes (separately for men and women), lyceum events and rhetorical training, fraternal order meetings, and music and after-school education. At times, members conflated the Baraca-Philathea Lyceum with the Baraca Class or the Philathea Class—the men’s and women’s Bible study classes respectively.

My archival findings were then incomplete in time and depth, with some dating from 1906 to 1910, and others from the early 1920s and extending, though not continuously, to 1940. Only a few of these senior women’s documents—all unfamiliar to me at that point—overlapped in time with my first university findings. For instance, Bethel’s Baraca Class documents were deemed unnecessary and disposed of at an unknown date during the ministry of Reverend William N. Guy—1970-1971 (D. Lomax, personal communication, February 14, 2013). Other documents were distributed among interested members. Hence collecting oral histories became early in my dissertation a most suitable inquiry tool. This is the case given how testimonies are sound research practices when there is a need to complement archival findings; when approaching spaces and admitting accounts which may not have been sufficiently explored; and when allowing individuals to articulate their own memories and explanations (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994; Fontana & Frey, 1994; Fontana & Frey, 2000; Stanfield, 1994). Moreover, J. H.

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9In its 2008 History, Bethel’s Historical Committee acknowledges “a loss by fire to the property at 405 [405 E. Park Avenue; the main church is located at 401 E. Park Avenue, Champaign, IL] in the summer of 1970” (Bethel, 2008, Bethel Rebuilds, para. 7). Such fire must have claimed some of the documents in Bethel’s library.
Stanfield (1994) has observed that two historical traditions have guided African American rhetorical recovery: work with primary texts during the late nineteenth century and oral histories (and participant observation) during the early twentieth century (p. 178).

To reconstruct and interpret incomplete archival material on this lyceum (and on Bethel), I began collecting detailed oral testimonies from senior members who remembered their early rhetorical work from personal recollections and family accounts and from early historical church compilations. In particular, I began retracing the literate and rhetorical actions associated with Bethel’s lyceum. From a few texts, unpublished manuscripts, and scattered newspaper notes, and what I had encountered at the University Archives, senior members articulated lyceum memories, and revealed their local race work traditions, an activism characterized by educational, archival, and historical practices. Collecting Bethel’s testimonies has therefore been the only means available to explore (and understand) church habits, given that most institutional records were partial, non-existent, or had been even lost.

For a four year period (spring 2009 to spring 2013), I have engaged in long discussions about rhetorical work with senior individuals who have held positions in Bethel, and have been educators, suffrage and housing activists, city board members, school district representatives, high school principals, and university students and officers. These individuals’ older relatives, now deceased or living elsewhere, held similar positions, were very active in their church, and became university workers and students. Some were messengers or campus maids and as such, traversed university (predominantly white) and black locations. Hence, just as some of their relatives had done, collecting memories for my dissertation took place as we strolled along the streets of their neighborhood, crossing over their closest railroad tracks multiple times, in search for places, references, and local histories, thus highlighting the embodied nature of remembering.
More importantly, the modes of learning I foreground here (for the researcher) in my interactions with the community resemble Jacqueline Jones Royster and Gesa Kirsch’s social circulation metaphor (Royster & Kirsch, 2012, pp. 98-109): That is, the encountering, learning, and subsequently representing a history took place through collective experiencing again in the imagination and on site. Performing again members’ past circulations entailed making meaning out of the streets of a black neighborhood, archived texts, and racialized memories. My research is therefore a representation of Bethel’s social circulation.

My encounters with these locations and these walks prompted me to imagine their past geographies—black university students, though few in number, had walked from neighborhood to campus for support (denied or poorly given on campus), housing, and nourishment in a segregated area. They had returned to university premises for their education. For as Jacqueline Jones Royster and Gesa Kirsch (2012) have observed, strategic contemplation—that is, the deliberate and patient reflection and permanence inside one’s research to ponder about the subjects and practices we are studying so as to prompt creativity (pp. 84-85)—is a productive inquiry tool. I have therefore lingered many times deliberately around their neighborhood and church, with a camera in hand, documenting sights and comparing them with similar landscapes in aged photographs. I did so to imagine rhetorical subjects, contexts, and literary events, but most importantly, I did so to imagine “the impacts and consequences of these embodiments in any interrogation of the rhetorical event” (Royster & Kirsch, 2012, pp. 84-85). I have also lingered over primary texts and testimonies pertinent to my dissertation, have read them recursively, multiple times only to find practices and problems that I had missed, and individuals who understand my historical period and campus climate of those times. Because, “With archival work as a prime example,” as Royster and Kirsch (2012) have observed, “we come to understand
[with strategic contemplation] the extent to which historical figures join the living when they become part of us, … or when they serve our internal landscapes as guides or mentors to our lives” and our work (Royster & Kirsch, 2012, p. 85). Given the imperative to understand Lee, senior Bethel women, and their relatives as active rhetorical participants during the lyceum times, strategic contemplation became the first and most relevant engagement tool in this research.

Photograph and text elicitation (my second inquiry tool) also proved to be valuable. In my interactions with Bethel members, examining archival texts in support of members’ recollections became frequent. This is a practice supported by the oral history tradition, which necessitates several informants and sources (archival and published documents) to confirm evidence (Tuchman, 1994). These modes of remembering and articulating have instrumental value as well since archival texts (written and pictorial) and locations served as visual representations of Bethel’s collective memories, which secured and ultimately fostered new ones. Specifically, church members reviewed our collective archives—theirs and the ones I contributed—and referred to neighborhood markers as they articulated their own testimonies of their lyceum, previous literary societies they sponsored, and a reading room they organized (ca. 1910). bell hooks (1995) has reminded us how she had searched in images, in family snapshots which she placed in front of her, “to see if there are imprints waiting to be seen, recognized, and read” (p. 64). So did senior Bethel members.

Building upon what I had learned with limited, but cogent documentary evidence, I began considering (and imagining) comparable locations in the Midwest, given how consistently Bethel members referred to their work as ad hoc, but also as mostly stemming from higher level mandates and habits—educational and rhetorical—in their AME denomination. Therefore,
critical imagination (Royster, 2000; Royster & Kirsch, 2012) became a third inquiry tool in my research, involving an imperative to first gather as much evidence as possible from places, people, and contexts, and next, “to speculate methodically about probabilities, that is, what might likely be true based on what we have in hand” (Royster & Kirsch, 2012, p. 71). Critical imagination moved my research from a university archive to a black (enclosed) location in a predominantly white university town, to a black church, and to the homes of those who had either been early participants/observers or inheritors, curators, and historians. Critical imagination even prompted me to extend the scope of my primary texts, to study early twentieth century, national and local black periodicals for their middle-class imagery and their discussions of women’s clubs, literary societies, educational opportunities, and political events. I further examined these periodicals for their race advertisements (black books, businesses, lectures, and hair products), and overall, for their coverage of race work and local activism. These examinations became relevant in my dissertation because my work had strong historical components, to which the periodicals tended.

I have also gathered archival evidence of Bethel’s work (and writings) in the early twentieth century, in locations where some members and black university students had migrated (e.g., Chicago, IL). The Vivian G. Harsh Research Collection of Afro-American History and Literature at the Carter G. Woodson Regional Library-Chicago Public Library system, and the most comprehensive collection of the African American experience in the Midwest, holds many of Lee’s manuscripts as part of the Illinois Writing Project. Shirley Wilson Logan (2008) has observed how the black press reinforced the work of literary societies in the nineteenth century; similarly, surveying The Chicago Defender Archives offered local periodical references to Bethel’s lyceum with its brief notes about monthly meetings and discussions topics, thus
confirming the relevance of conducting these contextual searches. Furthermore, when news of Lee’s demise (in 1948) reached the Chicago area, *The Defender* also published an article acknowledging Lee’s work at the University of Illinois, and his influence with African American students (Albert Lee, 1948). However, further archival searches—in Springfield and Chicago, IL, in Indianapolis, IN, and even in Philadelphia, PA—were also motivated by a curiosity to understand the ways in which local initiatives such as those found in Bethel might have connected to larger AME rhetorical projects. Hence, I situate Bethel as part of an active network of predominantly Methodist and Baptist black churches in the Midwest, which were too involved in lyceum, religious, musical and theatrical programs, and activist work during the early twentieth century. For instance, Bethel AME Church and Quinn Chapel, both in Chicago, IL, and Bethel AME Church in Indianapolis, IN, are relevant instances of comparable race work conducted in their own locales.

By the end of my dissertation research, I had brought to church premises all archival findings that I had gathered and organized—local and Midwestern archives. Newspaper material from local sources (*The News Gazette*, *the Herald*, and the *Urbana Courier*), the campus student periodical (*The Daily Illini*), and from the alternative press (*Illinois Times* and *Spectrum*) and copies of the Albert Lee Papers are now stored in Bethel. Members in turn have also contributed some of their own private archives to this research. Senior Bethel women have made explicitly available to this dissertation several texts including rhetorical manuals, church programs, newspaper clippings, church files, Sunday bulletins, family manuscripts, and turn of the century portraits. Their contributions include the only existing early 1900s photograph of Bethel’s Sunday school Bible Class (Figure 4), a coeducational venue then with its members formally
dressed in suits and long dresses, posing in front of what congregants refer to as the “new church” (ca. 1892 or 1893 to 1959).

Figure 4. Bethel AME Church Sunday school class (early 1900s)\textsuperscript{10}

Bethel members and university students pose in front of the “brick building with beautiful stained glass windows” (Bethel, n.d., New Church, para. 1), known also as the “new church,” dedicated in January 1893 (Bethel, 1938, p. 4).

This photograph becomes as well pictorial evidence of black university students’ participation in church events and lyceum meetings for an annotated print housed at the Museum of the Grand Prairie (formerly known as the Early American Museum)\textsuperscript{11} in Mahomet, IL, identifies Bethel members Ray Scott, Cecil Pope, Cliff Jordan, Art Woodruff, Woodward Thomas, and (possibly)


\textsuperscript{11}Interestingly, an impressive collection of the African American experience in IL, the Doris K. Wylie Hoskins Archive for Cultural Diversity, was donated to the Museum of the Grand Prairie (former Early American Museum) in Mahomet, IL (11.2 miles south of Champaign-Urbana, IL), at Mrs. Hoskins’ passing in 2004.
Elmer Bracon along with black university students (Vaughn & Hicks, 2004, p. 88). For the first time in 2011, this photograph was made public in the local press and on local television by the Nelson family.¹²

1.3 Racial and Scholarly Determinations: “Are you a Negro?”

In this research, my learning processes were determined by the active, deliberate, and careful ways in which members and I engaged with primary texts, images, and places. Such modes of conducting research prompted me to interrogate my own locations as an outside researcher—one who is not an African American, who is studying a black community whose history I have not lived, and one who is a foreign national to them and to this country. Bethel members and I were all unhurried in parting from an archive we were inspecting in members’ homes. We lingered in strolling around the black neighborhood because of new memories each site prompted. Therefore, early in 2009 I was becoming noticeable near the train tracks closest to their community, in members’ homes and, especially, during the holidays and Bethel functions to which my family was invited. I was perhaps even more conspicuous during church services, for I was not a member, and I was not black. I had conducted community work abroad before coming to the United States in 2003, and understood the importance of pairing texts with people’s accounts of events. Senior members became curious about my interests but did not directly inquire my reasons; most notably, they became intrigued with the texts that I was bringing to them. They knew their history and had only recently produced a historical compilation (Bethel, 2008), but holding early twentieth century primary texts, closely reading them with me, at times

¹²Two of the Nelson sisters—Mrs. Estelle Merrifield Mrs. Hester Suggs, who have the most active participants in my research and whose work I document in Chapter 4, provided the photograph to a local periodical and in support of a local PBS series, “Illinois Pioneers-Champaign” (Next Episode, 2011, February 23, p. B-3).
aloud, mobilized memories and moved them to Albert Lee’s times, when the church was most visible, and when they were young. They saw value in remembering, renewing pride in their rhetorical history, and instructing me; when prompted, I indicated I saw immense value in uncovering their struggles for citizenship. Searching for a research site, I found community.

Early in my research, as I was coordinating further visits with church members, Lucy Gray, then a 96-year old woman, inquired about my racial identity. She had not seen me in church before, and I was brought to her before services, to the second row where she used to sit. She had expressed an interest in my research, which she knew about from a note I had included in that Sunday’s bulletin (September 6, 2009). After we were introduced, she asked, “Are you a Negro?” Before I could respond (“No ma’am; I’m not”), she immediately offered an explanation to her curiosity which entailed her racial self-determination as a biracial woman—the daughter of a Negro (her own term, which she still uses to refer to herself and to other African American folks) and an Irish American (read white) woman. She observed as well how I might not have perceived that she was a Negro woman. She made this remark as she gestured toward her face and was carefully paying attention to mine.

Lucy Gray was implicating her own racial ambiguity through what she perceived was my own. My countenance was not entirely legible to her: Being of Hispanic and European descent, my countenance was ambiguous to her—it did not map neatly onto American white and black racial constructs. She was demonstrating her sense of the arbitrariness of race classifications based simply on countenance perceptions; yet she was still puzzled. So, she asked if I was a Negro. She was, I claim, expecting to meet an African American given the bulletin note about my research and my interest in her lyceum (at the onset of my study). Up to that moment, I had not had to articulate my ethnic identity for my host family knew my origins (a Peruvian national
and a Chilean resident); nor was that question ever posed to me in such a bold but honest manner. I had also not considered how critical my positionality and how visible by contrast I was becoming to these church members. Yet, in the absence of racial bonds, they approached my work with caution, and took on mentoring roles. To them, I needed to learn from their texts, spaces, and experiences from their own accounts and texts; I needed to walk their neighborhood with them to understand. Trust, I further claim, grew gradually out of several strolls and collective text readings.

Lucy Gray’s interest on my racial identity (and mostly likely that of many church members) strongly suggests that she was reading my work as a racialized inquiry pertinent only to those who have experienced black history as direct protagonists. More than just being asked about my racial identity, this was a concern about the credibility of my research place (Royster, 2000, p. 278) and the legitimacy of my interest. That is, to this biracial senior woman, and to this community, particular assumptions about my locations—both racial and scholarly—had to justify my interest to therefore grant me her trust with her own archives and memories. Racial determinations, hers and mine, were pertinent because of her concerns and the community’s about what I would do with their stories, and how I would benefit from hearing them and learning from their archives. Race and racial bonds became critical because of nascent trust, because I am not African American, I have not lived their history but I was building cultural capital with their contributions.\(^{13}\) Despite being unstable to them, and when members constructed me as white, I was never white American to them, and this classification eased our conversations

\(^{13}\)I am thankful to my friend Tisa Marie Trask, African American doctoral student in the College of Education at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, for our many conversations about my racial location and how it mattered in my research.
and their trust. When I was asked if I was a Negro, I was reminded of my ethical responsibility to care about their work and history as a scholar and as an outsider to this community.

As I explore “the multiple functions of emotions and experiences in defining … [my] relationship to [this] research” (Bizzell, 2000, p. 13), I articulate my attachments to Bethel spaces as stemming from an intellectual and, foremost, activist curiosity. I was intrigued by their citizenship enactments found in archival texts, and the sustaining labor of memory—memory binds communities. My outsider position has become marked when, occasionally, members have been intrigued at my interest in their early rhetorical work. Most importantly, my scholarly (and now personal) attachments to Bethel stem from an appreciation of the rhetorical habits and the archival and historical practices that have taken place in church premises and in members’ homes.

1.4 Campus Racial Climate: “We must serve them because that is the law”

Before engaging Bethel’s rhetorical work in the core chapters that follow (chapters 2 to 4), a discussion of campus racial climate in the early twentieth century, during Albert Lee’s most active and Bethel’s most visible years, is necessary. The church’s initiatives, its self-determination, stands in stark contrast to the stern nature of the University’s and white citizens’ displeasure with a black visibility. The University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, originally named Illinois Industrial University (Urbana, Champaign Co., IL), was designed and founded in 1867 for industrial and mechanical education (with its Colleges of Agriculture, Engineering, and Natural Science), but with a place for the classical arts as well (College of Literature). In an advertisement (ca. 1877), the University identifies its goal to “make Education thoroughly practical, without sacrificing its solid and liberal character” (Illinois Industrial, ca. 1877; Illinois
Industrial, 1883). In its early years, however, the University focused on the educational needs of farmers (Solberg, 1968, pp. 80-81). Although its constitutive documents (prior to Emancipation) were explicit about the admission of white Illinois residents, women were not perceived as potential students; yet, those officials supporting industrial training were amenable to coeducation (Solberg, 1968, p. 81). As for African Americans, Winton Solberg observed (1968) that “The authors’ [of the University’s organic acts and bills, 1863-1867] silence on race was significant” (p. 81), while conceding as well that by virtue of the Thirteenth Amendment, “the University would be open to men of all races” (p. 81). This inclination to abide by legal mandates became a significant rhetorical framing of racial access (if not the first one) for the University, one consistently invoked in institutional documents during Reconstruction, the University’s formative years, and later during my period of study (1910-1940). Such framing is characterized by the University’s engagements with African American students and staff as matters of simple access “without discrimination.” Given how this was “an American university not founded avowedly for Negroes” (Solberg, 1968, p. 120), its most likely response to African American presence on campus was a rather lukewarm and shallow application of the law.

John M. Gregory, the first university regent (the homologous to a university president) from 1867 to 1880 (Regent John M. Gregory, 1875), was according to Winton Solberg (1968) a man whose “aesthetic sensitivities must have made him acutely aware of the shortcomings of his adopted home and state” (p. 171). The shortcomings to which Dr. Solberg refers are the limited intellectual motivations, recreational opportunities, and artistic venues in both towns, Champaign and Urbana. John M. Gregory, a man who appeared to have also been seriously concerned with the refinements that come with higher education, set out to change this local educational environment (p. 171), though he had in mind the not so “polished” white university students of
his time. Insights, however, into some of John M. Gregory’s reflections on education, but in particular on Southern blacks and suitable ways to accommodate them on campus, are found in some of his manuscripts housed at the University of Illinois Archives. In an 1882 text which appeared to be his notes for an upcoming address, John M. Gregory discusses his perceptions on the condition of Blacks in the South, whom he thought to be “wholly incompetent voters” (Gregory, 1882a, p. 1). “It is fortunate,” he observes, “that the illiterate condition of these people is attracting so much attention not only among Christian people who deplore the moral degradation and superstitions which their ignorance perpetuates among the ex-slaves and their children, but from statesmen both North and South” (Gregory, 1882a, p. 1). John M. Gregory’s observations, not surprisingly, align with traditional nineteenth century perceptions on the moral and literate condition of lower classes of African Americans, while framing white interest in a patriarchal, yet religious manner. Yet, in a more democratic move, he demonstrates awareness of an increasing African American presence in Champaign-Urbana, and gestures toward their inclusion on campus by acknowledging their “strong desire for education” (Gregory, 1882a, p. 1).

His notebooks reveal his points of concern about higher education at the University of Illinois—beneficiary aid, admissions, attendance, Bible instruction, and rights and duties of the state to educate, for instance. Through a series of guiding questions, which might have aided him in debates and meetings, Gregory considered student admissions and financial aid which he conditioned to students’ demonstration of educational, moral, and religious merits (Gregory, 1882b). He further considered the most suitable type of education, with liberal and scientific courses and Bible education. He pondered, for instance, in his speeches and notebooks, whether young men and women should be taught together; how “colored” (his term) people and churches
could become interested in university education; and what proportion of black teachers should be employed (Gregory, 1882b). These interests, I claim, are the rudiments of a university culture concerned with the place for its black constituents. In an undated manuscript, a draft of an address possibly read at a church event (given how he addresses his audience as brethren) in the state of New York, John M. Gregory (1882c) characterized black people as “a nation within a nation” (p. 10) while expressing interest for how they were growing in numbers faster than whites were “in spite of their greater death rates” (p. 10). But even more troubling is his insistence on the moral discourses which infused the racial characterizations of his time. After Southern black migration had become apparent in Champaign-Urbana, he observed how African Americans “[had come] to us [my emphasis] out of slavery with all its vices, what is more with all the vices of barbarism among them” (Gregory, 1882c, p. 11). It is not clear, however, if Gregory was speaking in local terms, whether his sense of ‘us’ entailed this community (Champaign-Urbana), this university, or if he was reflecting on larger, national racial distinctions.

John M. Gregory, congruent with his aim to lift the sons of farmers, encouraged the development of student extracurricular activities and literary societies for leisure and intellectual life (Solberg, 1968, p. 193; Solberg, 2000, p. 309). In particular, the Philomathean and the Adelphic Society (male student organizations) and the Alethenai (female student organization), known as the “lits,” were organized at the onset of the University’s history (Solberg, 1968, p. 193; Solberg, 2000, p. 309), and remained active into the late 1900s (and later) given “the official opposition to social fraternities and collegiate sports” (p. 299) which claimed the interests of the “lits.” These student organizations initiated then a long tradition of literary societies run by white students (initially male), and of public lecture circuits with their visiting
speakers, as ways of “nourishing intellectual interests outside the classroom” (Solberg, 1968, p. 297). African American students’ initiatives on campus were nonexistent or their contributions to these white venues were minimal prior to the interwar period because of their fewer numbers (W. Solberg, personal communication, March 29, 2012).

From 1894 to 1904, ten African American students registered at the University (Solberg, 2000, p. 48). Their presence increased in time, yet their graduation rates were low, with percentages that range from 10 to 24%, with the highest completion rates taking place from 1925 to 1934 (University, 1940, p. 9).14 From 1900 to 1924, the University conferred between one to five degrees of bachelor per academic year; these figures increased reasonably (and rather consistently) once more from 1925 (eight graduates) to 1934 (28 graduates), with the years up to 1940 showing an average of 12 degrees per year (University, 1940, p. 8). Overall, from 1900 to 1940, 289 degrees of bachelor were conferred (University, 1940, p. 8). The figures for the degrees of master and doctorate were rather moderate: 58 degrees of master conferred from 1910 to 1940, with the Post-Depression years being the most active ones; and five doctorate degrees conferred from 1916 to 1939 (in non-consecutive years) (University, 1940, p. 8). With an undergraduate body population of 525 during the academic year 1894-1895 and of 1,480 during 1903-1904 (Solberg, 2000, p. 47), African American students were in fact a rather invisible cohort15 (W. Solberg, personal communication, March 29, 2012), yet they were noticed in campus, and their presence commented and cause for uneasiness.

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14 According to an unknown periodical source printed at the time of Lee’s passing in 1948, “When Mr. Lee began his work as messenger, UI enrollment was about 800” (eBlackCU, 2010-2012b, p. 8, para. 12).

15 According to Winton Solberg, “A statistical profile of the class of 1896 which numbered 110, including 18 women, illustrates the composition of one cohort. … Most undergraduates were white and of European descent, but ten African Americans [including Albert Lee, 1897-1898] attended the University in the period 1894-1904” (Solberg, 2000, p. 48).
What is more problematic than articulating visibility in terms of enrollment figures, however, is how African Americans were imagined, pictorially and in written texts, on campus societies. Instances of the kinds of articulations, aligning with national damaging stereotypes, and produced by white male student societies are two Philomathean programs—an 1892 program for a political meeting and an 1895 “race” program (Philomathean, 1872-1923), both depicting African Americans in service positions, and in sharp contrast with the dignified and literary characters of black middle-class individuals. The Philomathean Literary Society, whose members were known as the Philos, with the highest membership on campus from 1894 to 1904—an average of 41 male students—typically held recitations, readings of their own essays, musical performances, debates and discussion of current events (Solberg, 2000, pp. 309-310).

In its March 25, 1892 “Political Meeting,” the Philos organized a two-part program with a declamation, an essay on politics, an oration entitled “The Coming Woman,”¹⁶ a campaign story, an essay on political aspirations, and a stump speech (political oratory typical in presidential campaigns) in Part I. These exercises were followed, in Part II, by a series of nominating speeches in preparation for the National Democratic Convention which was to take place in June 1892. Students performed the parts of well-known political figures such as Governor David B. Hill (New York), former President Grover Cleveland, Senator John McAuley Palmer, Governor Horace Boies (Iowa), former Governor Isaac P. Gray (Indiana), and

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¹⁶The “coming woman” was a fairly known trope in active feminist circles during the late nineteenth century. This oration was not a reading of actress, playwright, novelist and suffragette Elizabeth Robins’ fictional and unfinished piece entitled “The Coming Woman.” Nor was this a reading of African American writer Mary Weston Fordham’s poem “The Coming Woman” published later, in 1897, in a collection of her pieces entitled Magnolia Leaves (Fordham, 1897, pp. 74-75).
Governor Russell (The Library of Congress, ca. 2008, p. 10). After these two parts, the program lists a musical performance by “Old Grover,” a student troupe named after former President Grover Cleveland. The featured melody was “We’ll hang Jim Blaine [on a Sour Apple Tree],” in reference to Representative James G. Blaine, the Republican nominee defeated by Cleveland in the 1884 presidential election. The evening ended with a debate on the benefits of political campaigns (Philomathean, 1872-1923).

The program is accompanied by a painted sketch on the left (Figure 5), of several African American men, perfectly aligned, drawn in the manner of blackface characters found in minstrelsy images—round faces covered with excessive dark make-up, and exaggerated lips. These men, dressed as waiters, wear white shirts, red bow ties and red vests, blue coats and white aprons. The first of them wears a vector design of a golden sun (or possibly an enlarged button) on his chest. They all hold trays over their heads, carrying warm casseroles, each directed to a specific political figure, the senators and governors who had been represented in Part II—Russell, Gray, Boies, Palmer, Cleveland, and Hill. While the rhetorical exercises listed here are useful for the students’ learning of political procedures and demonstrate a concern with national and local politics, the image is entirely irrelevant to such training. It is however significant when the illustration implies that the social part of the meeting, typically after all exercises are concluded, is constructed with a representation of those whom these white students perceive, and will allow only in a literary event, as servants. Beyond speaking of the racial hierarchies of the time, this most inauspicious image reveals the anxieties of sharing social and intellectual spaces

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17 Speakers in this Convention were former President Grover Cleveland (1885-1889), Governor David B. Hill (New York), Governor Horace Boies (Iowa), former Representative Adlai E. Stevenson, and former Governor Isaac P. Gray (Indiana) (The Library of Congress, ca. 2008, p. 10).

18 “We’ll hang Jim Blaine on a Sour Apple Tree” had been one of the melodies played by Cleveland voters in Chicago before confirmation of his victory over Blaine (Lindberg, 2009, p. 123).
with African American men; hence, by constructing them as waiters in a rhetorical exercise, these white students exercise racial exclusion locally, from their society.

Figure 5. A Philomathean program: “Political Meeting” (1892)\(^{19}\)

A painted sketch of a political theme drawn by Philomathean members accompanying an annotated list of events in the program.

“Programs faithfully mirrored student interests,” Winton Solberg (2000) has observed. “Sometimes an entire evening,” he continued “was devoted to a theme” (p. 310). In one of such themed evenings in November 1895, the Philos organized a “Colored Program” (Philomathean, 1872-1923a), also referred to in their Minute Book (Philomathean, 1872-192b) as “darkey program” (Figure 6).

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\(^{19}\)Painted sketch in a meeting program found in the Philomathean Society Records, part of the Scrapbook of Program announcements, most likely distributed (made public) among students or society members or posted in their meeting room before the event (Philomathean, 1872-1923a). Anonymous artist. This image is in the public domain. I took this photograph at the University of Illinois Archives. Reproduced by courtesy of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Archives.
Figure 6. A Philomathean program: “Colored Program” (1895)\textsuperscript{20}

A painted sketch of a racial theme drawn by Philomathean members accompanying an annotated list of events in the program.

This was an instance of white student discussion of what was nationally known as the “Negro Problem”—that is, a determination of the suitable place for African Americans after Emancipation. Their annotated bill of fare outlines its features—stories, declamations, biographies, readings of two papers, news, and a debate. The stories, possibly narratives about African American characters told by white students, frame their offerings in problematic ways by naming the narrative a “darkey story” or referring to the character as a “darkey boy,” thus both

\textsuperscript{20}Painted sketch in meeting program found in the Philomathean Society Records, a part of the Scrapbook of Program announcements. This program was most likely distributed (made public) among students or society members or posted in their meeting room before the event (Philomathean, 1872-1923a). Davis [presumably the artist]/Anonymous. The Archives has not been successful in identifying a student by the name of Davis as member of the Philomathean Society (W. J. Maher, personal communication, July 10, 2013), who at this time has been deceased most likely for nearly forty years. This society has long disbanded—for over seventy years (Turning Heidelberg, 1933, April 22). I took this photograph at the University of Illinois Archives. Based on an analysis of the four factors of Fair Use and on Kenneth D. Crews’ Fair Use Checklist (http://copyright.columbia.edu), I am asserting Fair Use provision for the inclusion of this item. Kenneth Crews is the Director of Copyright Advisory Office at Columbia University Libraries. Reproduced by courtesy of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Archives.
invoking racist labels—darkey—and diminishing the dignity of African American men—boy.

While the paper “The Past, Present and Future Education of the Negro,” might have been discussed in more affirmative ways, the second paper suggests a strong separatist call—“Should the American Negro organize in town and nation to protect and advance his race.” The evening ended with a debate posing a question which contributed to the theme of that event—racial distance: “That the US should set aside a state in which the American Negro alone will be granted sufferage [sic], and that he shall not receive sufferage [sic] in any other state.”

A painted sketch on the right accompanies this program (Figure 6)—an African American man shown in profile, wears a colorful uniform, dark pants, blue-and-white striped shirt, blue bow tie, black vest, and red-and-white striped jacket, with a matching driver’s cap. The man stands in a service position—service tray in his hand, carrying drinks. Once more, he is imagined in ways that curtail effective citizenship. Furthermore, he is drawn with noticeable darker features—hands and countenance—and thick, round, pale lips. “Perhaps the most insidious aspect of minstrelsy, well into the twentieth century,” Kevin K. Gaines observes (1996), is “its mockery of African American’s aspirations to equal status, its accusation that such aspiration meant a futile desire to be white” (p. 67). Hence, such specious illustration, accompanying a discussion of the place of African Americans according to white citizens, codified race in ways similar to national discourses. That is, representing African Americans pictorially as servants becomes an instance of a widely-recognized national practice and genre invoking racial (read physical) differences with its attending class hierarchies.

Rhetorically, these two images produced by the Philos, late in the nineteenth century, reiterate the places conceived for African Americans in the white imaginary. These two dismissive (even comical) images further regulate the extent of African Americans’ civic
participation in Champaign, IL. They serve as frames for disavowal rather than admittance on campus venues. I read them as white student representations of the “Old Negro”, as local reproductions of images already circulated nationally about the “uneducated” or “uncivilized” African. One such instance of national recognition is the following visual segment which I have chosen from a halftone image, originally published *Harper’s Weekly*, on August 12, 1893—“In the Restaurant of the House of Representatives” (Figure 7). While inspecting the news and a menu, two white men, dressed formally in suits, sit at a table (right half of Figure 7). An African American waiter is seen standing next to them, wearing service clothing, carrying a towel folded around one arm. As his hand touches his chin, he appears pensive; yet, a grin on his face suggests the amusement typically depicted in minstrelsy illustrations. He serves white men, just like the other three black waiters in the dining area (also with noticeable darker faces). Produced nationally after “Political Meeting’ and before “Colored Program,” this image serves as a “model” for the kind of visibility constructed for African Americans by white individuals, be it locally at a campus literary meeting or at the restaurant of a legislative assembly.
Figure 7. “In the Restaurant of the House of Representatives” (1893)


Private student musings have revealed as well how national discourses on the capabilities and value of African Americans permeated white students’ lives on campus, and were matters of concern as they too considered what integration with an “inferior” race meant. The Jacob Goldstein Papers (1928-30, 1932), part of the Student Life and Culture Archival Program at the University of Illinois Archives, provided more insights into campus climate and attitudes toward African American students during the interwar period. Jacob Goldstein was a Jewish, white university student who attended the Urbana campus of the University of Illinois from 1928 to 1930, and completed his education in the Dental school at the Chicago campus from 1930-1932.

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21Original halftone was published in *Harper’s Weekly* on August 12, 1893. Unidentified artist [Charles S. Reinhart, photograph by William Kurtz]. This image is in the public domain. Reproduced from the Art & History Home webpage of the United States Senate (“In the Restaurant,” 1893, August 12). The image has also been published in Bridget R. Cooks’ article Fixing race: Visual Representations of African Americans in the World’s Columbian Exposition, Chicago, 1893, published in *Patterns of Prejudice*, Vol. 41, No. 5, 2007 (Cooks, 2007, p. 463). This article first exposed me to this image.
The Goldstein Papers contain a series of manuscript letters that Jacob Goldstein sent to his friend, Lena Wolkow from New York, with whom he corresponded during academic years (September 17, 1928 to May 18, 1932). The content of these exchanges include varied interests—football, extra-curricular activities, classes, Jewish life, and student life—with the occasional birthday card, and newspaper clipping which Goldstein typically included seeking Wolkow’s comments.

Jacob Goldstein’s accounts reveal how he was exposed to racial discrimination on campus. With some surprise, he begins one letter dated October 28, 1929 by reporting on a dispute held in his residence hall. Goldstein says, “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” (Jacob Goldstein, 1929, October 28, para. 1). Even as he recognizes the severity of this appreciation by fellow students, he is disinclined to see equality ever happening for African Americans for, so he believes, “there are some negroes who are better than some white people, but they are very few and very far between” (Jacob Goldstein, 1929, October 28, para. 2). His ill-informed, ambivalent at best, frame of mind about African Americans, demonstrated in this line, points to the controversies that emerged in white student venues, and which stemmed from a black visibility on campus, though limited as it was in the late 1920s.

Goldstein’s remarks are a reflection of his time, the result of national prejudicial discourses about black America. Most notably, they exemplify what Jacqueline Jones Royster (2000) has called systems of deep disbelief “which go beyond the doubts rooted in mere ignorance to those seemingly more deeply rooted in arrogance” (p. 254). His observations are not entirely the result of a campus community not used to sharing spaces with a growing African American population. To Jacob Goldstein, few African Americans are better than some whites;
hence he seems to be operating within systems of racial arrogance in which an outstanding African American is only an extraordinary occurrence. Jacqueline Jones Royster (2000) further notes, “Deep disbeliefs seem so ingrained they actually short-circuit a more inclusive knowledge-making process and limit the impact of challenges, however large or small, to predominant interpretive frameworks” (p. 254). I argue that within a knowledge-making setting, that of the University of Illinois, exclusionary knowledge-making processes moved by racial prejudice were taking place in the early twentieth century. Jacob Goldstein finally recalls that his boss had told him and other white employees at a campus cafeteria that “if any colored person came in to take our time about waiting on them and give them poor service because he doesn’t want to encourage their trade” (Jacob Goldstein, 1929, October 28, para. 2). He adds, “We must serve them because that is the law,” but comments with some regret that African Americans sometimes “wait for fifteen or twenty minutes before they get any service” (Jacob Goldstein, 1929, October 28, para. 2). This practice of delaying service strongly demonstrates that African Americans were not perceived as rightful patrons, thus highlighting the social services that Bethel offered to black university students—meals, for instance. As Goldstein invokes “the law,” as he articulates legal and not racial equality, much is implied about how ineffective a legal right to eat on campus could be when such a mandate is easily circumvented with “poor service.”

A rather lukewarm intervention in support of black students during the first half of the twentieth century has characterized the racial approach of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. An official document, a University of Illinois text written in 1940, “Negro Students” (1939-1940) (University, 1940), and stored in the General Correspondence of President Arthur C. Willard, exemplified neutrality—as in “not much could the University do for the housing or dinning needs of black students.” It characterized also black alumni, as a different “class” of
African American. A copy of this text is also stored in the Chicago Public Library system, at the Carter G. Woodson Regional Library, in the Vivian Harsh Research Collection, as part of the Illinois Writers’ Project (IWP) documenting the Negro in Illinois Project. This seven-page typewritten text, with a statistical three-page addendum on admissions and graduation records, documents black students’ engagements in academic, professional, social, and religious venues, in and out of campus during the early twentieth century (Figure 8).

Figure 8. Cover of “Data concerning Negro students” by Albert Lee (1940, June 25)

Evidence of Lee’s participation (shared authorship and editorship) in the composing of the “Negro Students” report.

22The Illinois Writers’ Project (IWP) is the state project of the national initiative called the Federal Writers’ Project (FWP), part of the Works Progress Administration. This initiative was developed during President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s term (mid 1930s) in support of writing and data collection—oral histories, essays, pictorial texts, and interviews (DeMasi, 2012). The Negro in Illinois Papers, housed in the Carter G. Woodson Regional Library in Chicago, although conceived for a book which was never finished, is a significant collection documenting the African American experience in Illinois.

23Cover of the “Negro Students” report found in the Negro Matriculants List, 1887-1937, President’s Office, Arthur C. Willard (Lee, 1940, June 25). I took this photograph at the University Archives. Reproduced by courtesy of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Archives.
Positioned against the official archives I have discussed and this report with its purported neutrality on visibility, access, and participation, Bethel’s memories and their private archives challenge the University’s simplistic accounts of the black educational experience in Champaign—as having taken place “without discrimination.” The text’s rhetorical significance, I claim, lies in its multivocality. The repositories holding it list Albert Lee as its author, even though his name only appears on the cover of a report copy (Figure 8)—the one stored with the Negro Matriculants List (1887-1937)\(^{24}\) (Lee, 1940, June 25).

While Bethel’s most active rhetor and the University’s most conspicuous employee might have authored this piece (or segments of it), the “Negro Students Report” (or the “Data concerning Negro students at the state university”) was designed to represent the University as a law-abiding educational institution. It was meant as an affirmative report on the experiences (and outcomes) offering higher education to African American students. As such, the text remained within university premises, but supplied to the Illinois Writers’ Project, proof of the University’s efforts to welcome black students. Hence, editorship becomes as important as, if not more than, Lee’s contributions. I thus read this text as multivocal, with both Albert Lee and the University as authors. I do, however, assign the University of Illinois with the rhetorical agency of commissioning such a text and establishing the work and history of a particular class of African Americans in ways which justify the University’s admission and acceptance of these individuals. Furthermore, the University validates such experience by constructing a narrative of gradual racial integration through the eyes of the most respected African American on campus—Albert Lee.

\(^{24}\)The Negro Matriculants List is a compilation typically requested from and produced by Albert Lee (1929-1942) (Albert R. Lee, 1938, May 26; Carl Stephens, 1938, May 27).
While seemingly a favorable depiction of African American accomplishments locally, the “Negro Students” report (1939-1940) is in fact a problematic narrative at once framing emphatically the University’s openness to its black students in legal terms and alluding to a prejudicial academic location and climate. The report argues for the visibility of African American students based on their increasing enrollment numbers and their right to participate in university events. Asserting that African Americans are present on campus, and increasingly so, was insufficient, however. The University was invested in demonstrating in this text that its administration had a non-discriminatory practice concerning African American students. At every turn, black students’ access to official events and institutional texts (e.g., yearbook) was characterized by the expression “without discrimination.” By right, black students had access to university services, schools, and functions (e.g., Commencement ceremonies), to education, “without discrimination.” The report, stated, “All curricula are open to Negro students in all Colleges and Schools without discrimination, both at Urbana and Chicago” (University, 1940, p. 2), which I read as a defensive, explanatory, (or even bragging) assertion. No comments are made about the quality of access. Thus, in the manner of Jacob Goldstein’s racial articulations (in his private letters), African American students were served on campus because that was the law.

Access, however, to any university program, did not guarantee labor for black graduates, not at least on this campus and town, for the report conceded that there were few employment openings at the University (University, 1940, p. 3). Nor does access secured an educational path free from observations about the pertinence of certain educational choices for black individuals. The “Negro Students” (1939-1940) observed, “In spite of [the] lack of proper vocational guidance in past years, Negro students have shown good judgment [emphasis added] as a whole
in entering into curricula which leads to fields open to them after graduation, and avoiding those which showed less opportunity for them” (University, 1940, p. 2). That is, the University fulfills state and federal mandates on equal access to higher education for all races. Yet under its paternal view, rather than questioning the conditions that lead to fewer labor options for African American graduates, the University identifies a need (“proper vocational guidance”), undertakes to supply it, and praises a self-regulating behavior on the part of these black students (“good judgment” about their choices). In articulating this kind of visibility, and containing it within discernment (e.g., the College of Education at the University of Illinois), vocation on campus is to be subjected to the overall national practices of the time, to maintaining African Americans in particular kinds of labor—those less threatening to the status quo.

In its living conditions section, the report admits that accommodations for black students were at “some distance” from campus. It further admits that “theoretically” the women’s residence halls were open to African Americans, and that there was overcrowding in some the black organized houses (University, 1940, p. 5). In an attempt to place black students on campus with such vague descriptors (“some distance,” “theoretical access,” or “overcrowding”), the University of Illinois fails to acknowledge that “some distance” must have meant at least a one-mile, roughly an eleven-block walk from the University Quad to Bethel, for instance. We know now from senior Bethel members’ accounts, that families in the black neighborhood hosted black students, who had to cross over the railroad tracks on their way to campus, and back, for their education and living accommodations (L. Gray, personal communication, September 18, 2009; E. Rivers, personal communication, November 12, 2009; H. Suggs, personal communication, November 12, 2009). While limiting the reach of its authority and its ability to intervene in decisions made by white women’s houses on campus, the University fails to see that
overcrowding is not an acceptable living condition and “theoretical” access entails null access. It fails to see, at least in this text, that integrated spaces were both unavailable and undesirable for African American students thus suggesting that segregated housing was in place.

University authorities’ concerns with housing took place years after Lee and Bethel senior women had been conducting their own race work—in this case, housing support for African American students. When such concerns were put forward, they were mild. The earliest official articulation against housing discrimination toward racial minorities is a 1946-1948 University of Illinois Board of Trustees report (University of Illinois, 1948), housed at the University of Illinois Archives. In its “Statement on the responsibility of the University for the Housing of Racial Minorities,” the Board of Trustees acknowledged that there are “race tensions on and near the campus and … actions which might appear to be discriminatory” (University, 1948, p. 54). The University offered no explanation on what these seemingly discriminatory actions might have been, and, most importantly, proposed no intervention. It did, however, offer a disclaimer. The statement asserted that it is the responsibility of the University to provide facilities when possible and “without duplication” (p. 54). Such disclaimer is rather significant rhetorically. Once more the University presented its administration in a favorable light, invoked the economic efforts behind offering new accommodations, and found its administration unaccountable for racial tensions around housing when there were already women’s facilities on campus. Hence, in its customary neutral mode, the University reasoned that there was no need for a duplicate offering for African American students. The Statement ended nonetheless with a proposal to add new university-owned housing.

The “Negro Students” report is significant in my discussions of racial uplift for it asserted class distance (within a race) and invokes norms of public conduct to both characterize its black
students and alumni and distance them a “particular” (read lower, uneducated, rural, perhaps) class of African Americans. In doing so, the University once more is justified in its admission protocols toward certain black constituencies, implies success in its educational impact on black students, and frames this particular population as deserving. In its next to the last section (Alumni), the report introduces the achievements of its African American alumni with the following observation, “None have been confined to prison or convicted of crime” (University, 1940, p. 7). Such an introduction only demonstrates a collective awareness of the national discourses about black men’s criminality and the alleged threats they posed to white citizens, hence the need for class distinctions. William S. Scarborough (1905), Head of the Classical Department at Wilberforce University in the early twentieth century, an African American scholar, argued that criminality could not be ignored because it weighed down “other” African Americans. “The criminal Negro,” Scarborough (1905) further observes, “is one of the heaviest burdens that the race has to carry today. Not that the Negro criminal is worse … nor that it can be proven that there is a large proportion of criminals in this race” (p. 803). The University and Lee were not ignoring such “need” to articulate class distinctions. However, when such disclaimers are accompanied by assurances that the University’s reputation has not been damaged by its black graduates, and when these assurances are placed prior to discussions of its alumni’s true accomplishments, I find it relevant to revisit official narratives portraying this University as a comfortable educational location for African Americans during the first half of the twentieth century.

Rhetorically, the “Negro Students” report with its multivocality, served the University in its claim about non-discriminatory practices and support for African American students and the black community. It further served Bethel make a claim of class (moral and cultural) distinction.
The difficult circumstances of completing one’s college education and being an African American individual locally cannot be argued away. In light of campus climate during the early twentieth century, there is virtually no portrayal for Bethel but that of a survival network for African Americans in their black neighborhood, and for the black students visiting Bethel or commuting for board and food from the university premises to Bethel members’ homes. Furthermore, given how institutional spaces and discourses (the University’s) and black locations and experiences (Bethel and its rhetorical practices) were mutually relevant, yet likely incompatible in terms of their representations of African Americans, I examine hereafter the complex ways in which notions of educational access “without discrimination” may have unfolded. I do so by turning now to Bethel’s core rhetorical practices as activist responses to local indifference. By not being accommodating, the University shaped Bethel’s rhetorical practices by creating a need that Bethel supplied.

The institutional archives that I have discussed here are representatives of a history taking place in liminal times, when African Americans in the early twentieth century were still establishing their identities and visibilities among white citizens, and when the latter were too articulating the unexplored (and not pleasant) landscape of racial integration. Seeking rhetorical inclusion for African Americans in smaller locales entailed a self-supported middle class racial uplift project, one whose imperatives were cultural distance from those of lesser status, a distance from character and not from race, and cultural proximity to literacies. Such project further entailed public performances, locally, seeking for mutual recognition and collaboration from the white audiences with whom they co-existed. For Bethel members such public visibility entailed the kind of propriety, dignity, and literary interests that the campus community could have easily
recognized and accepted. I now turn to Bethel’s middle-class rhetorical constructions—
educational, literary, and archival/historical—which directly implicated their wish to assert their
own citizenship in this location. These initiatives were their necessary cultural and survival
moves in Champaign, IL, at times deemed elitist or imagined as simple reproductions of white
middle-class work by African Americans.
CHAPTER 2
AFFORDING COMMUNITY EDUCATION, PERFORMING DIGNIFIED CITIZENSHIP

Historically, the African-American church has been more than just another institution. … It is because of its place as the center of Black culture that African-American churches cannot easily be separated from secular institutions and that sacred-secular distinctions are complicated.

—Beverly J. Moss, *A community text arises*

When I first graduated [in 1937, with a bachelor’s degree in Sociology from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign], my first job was a maid at Newman Hall. But that was for about a year, but I was determined that I would stay in Champaign. … So, with the help of some other people, when the city of Champaign established the department of recreation, they were looking for someone with a degree.

—Erma Scott Bridgewater, “University of Illinois Student Life 1928-1938”

Espousing uplift ideologies has always been since the end of the Civil War a core rhetorical move mostly stemming from organized African American venues such as political affiliations, churches, academic journals, the black press, literary societies, educational institutions, libraries, and recreation centers, which have typically paralleled, but functioned separately from, those found in white communities (Brandt, 2001; Gaines, 1996; Gere, 1994; Gere, 1996; Gere, 1997; Logan, 2008; Royster, 2000; H. A. Williams, 2005). African Americans have effectively designed these venues for the provision of socially recognized services and its
delivery to multiple audiences. Organized African American venues have also worked around self-supported forms of education from which black citizens—those with the means to avail themselves to some form of cultural capital and in urban locations—have performed, not without struggles, dignified and cultured visibilities out of a need to engage in sociopolitical action and challenge long-standing racist depictions of themselves (Anderson, 1988; Lerner, 1972/1992; Logan, 2004; Logan, 2008; Miller, 2003; Woodson, 1933/1998). African Americans have further valued multiples forms of cultural advancement—rhetorical, literary, musical, theatrical, and religious—all taking place in spaces with overlapping functions (e.g., music instruction or political literacies developed in after-service church assemblies or at the workplace) (Logan, 2008). They have valued as well group education as a suitable form of enlightenment and fellowship, which they have designed in ways that restored their individual dignities in private and public (Logan, 2008).

Bethel AME Church has been one such instance of an African American self-supported, religious, and educational site. Located (still is) in what was then (mid to late nineteenth century) a small urban locality, Champaign, IL, Bethel has been concerned with local racial uplift since its early years. “Bethel A.M.E. Church is the oldest African-American led Church in Champaign County. It has existed longer than the University of Illinois” (Bethel, n.d., para. 1). It is even older than the Illinois Conference (Bethel, 1938, Preface) and grew out of a congregants’ prayer circle (Bethel 1938, p. 2). Indeed, founded in 1863 (Bethel, 1938, p. 1; Bethel, 2008, Early History, para. 1), four years before the University of Illinois (1867)—a fact that congregants have emphasized multiple times in written and oral testimonies—the church has crafted for itself a cultured identity locally. Such identity was solely dependent on the church’s own means and
initiatives, its Methodist network and affiliation, and congregants’ decisions and possibilities to engage fully (or not) in higher education at the University’s establishment (and later).

I contend here that Bethel congregants have constructed a collective ethos based on the cultural practices which they have taught, designed, and chosen for themselves—Biblical, musical, literary, historical, civic, and, when possible (and available to them), collegiate. Their culture was anything but monolithic, and entailed a myriad of literate practices organized in programs, lessons, cultural events, and social assistance, some public, most of them private, but announced in the local press, and all offered in church places. As church-going African American citizens, they have nurtured a hybrid place in church premises, at once sacred and secular, from which they have demonstrated their uptake of local racial uplift: Dignified and deserving (by their own perceptions and discourses), Bethel members engaged in cultural and educational projects as aspiring middle class citizens while functioning within a local economic system where a college degree for African Americans might not have led them to social mobility (not at least immediately), and where opting for a college education faced some intra-racial resistance.

Given how race work has been a historically contested ideological task (for blacks and whites), I claim here that we should understand black communities’ representations of uplift as both cultural distance (from lower or rural classes), and cultural proximity (to educational venues). That is, lesser-known African Americans, in their own locales, have distinguished (or attempted to distinguish) themselves from lower and rural classes and, when educational forums were available (most likely in their own communities), they have managed to acquire the status that comes with any form or level of education—religious, literary, and academic—thus fashioning their own middle class educational sites. Hence, I characterize Bethel’s work as
marked by both cultural contrasts and cultural immediacy. Church members wished to
demonstrate their middle-class earned visibility as clearly distinct from previous (and ongoing)
prejudicial images of African Americans; they wished to distance themselves from a new
development of their time, the “Negro criminal” or the class (as in *moral* class) of individuals
who posed or were perceived as a threat to white citizens. That is, they articulated themselves as
upcoming citizens and at times as a “better” class of African Americans—a moral, religious, and
hardworking class that is. They articulated themselves beyond economic classifications, because
of their Christian work and self-sponsored educational initiatives.

Alternatively, Bethel’s culture touched on the work done in middle schools, high schools,
and at the University: Church performances demanded reading, debating, and historical
knowledge, so Bethel offered such instruction, and in doing so, the church drew closer to
institutional forms of education. In doing so, Bethel members engaged as well in public policy
and educational discourses locally, albeit privately. They reconfigured race work this way.
Specifically, members crossed over the railroad tracks which marked the limits of the black
neighborhood, and performed dignity and culture. While being geographically contained, they
traversed racial spaces to demonstrate their civility; while choosing or not higher education for
themselves, members offered material support to black students at Illinois, some of whom
struggled for accommodations and meals on campus. They have further defined this work as
their “culture,” their imperative, an aspect of their uplift initiatives. Hence, applying a broad
definition for education, becoming responsible for their own cultural choices, members have
designed multiple forms of uplift out of their discussions, safely from their own church circles,
about what it meant to advance the race. In spite of their proximity to higher education and
academic texts, they have made distinctions among educational opportunities, offered concrete
instances of valuable learning for the black community, and decided what ought to be part of their character—religious, musical, historical, and literary education.

Bethel and its congregants, like other citizens in the black neighborhood, had witnessed foundational moments in the creation of an African American middle class existence. Some members had forged their own middle class projects by becoming university students, local activists, educators, and business people. Members had come from Arkansas, Georgia, Kentucky, Mississippi, and Tennessee (Bial, 1985) searching for better (and safer) opportunities—searching for economic freedom. The congregation grew steadily at least until the 1940s. “Figures for the membership from the beginning are unavailable but it must have been very small as the number of Blacks in the community was small. In 1888 the membership was sixty-two. In 1938 it was approximately 270” (Bethel, n.d., Membership, para. 1). Some original members, founders of Bethel, had been slaves (e.g., Albert R. Lee’s father, William Lee)25 (William Lee, 1908, March 3). Others have recalled older relatives working as farmers in the church’s formative years, and in their youth, some of the senior women who have contributed to my research held service positions on campus. Lee, too, intervened in university policy—black students’ admissions and campus housing—but worked for tips at university functions (Lee, 1942b, President’s House, p. 33). They were, however, familiar with the dignified pictorial representations of African Americans in national and international forums (e.g., the New Negro of the turn of the century and the interwar period, and the work of W. E. B. Du Bois in the 1900 Paris Universal Exposition). They were familiar too with the epideictic work advanced in black

25I have introduced Albert Lee, Bethel member and university employee, in chapter 1, Finding Archival Traces section. He is a crucial figure throughout this research. William Lee, his father and former slave, had come to Champaign County in 1863, with his wife Katherine Dyson Lee who died in 1869 (William Lee, 1908, March 3, para. 2). He is listed in the appendix to the 1938 History of Bethel as having lived in Champaign, IL, in 1863 (Bethel, 1938). Margaret Ann (Smith) Lee, Albert Lee’s mother, who married William Lee in 1872, is listed too in the same appendix (Bethel, 1938, p. 13).
periodicals, so they printed too—programs, church histories, and photographs. Bethel members were acutely aware of the racial landscapes of their times and the discourses around education as a vehicle for racial uplift.

2.1 Race Work, Education, and the African American Input

The multiple passages from one (perceived) condition to an uplifted one has entailed, in the white and black imaginary, rhetorical affirmation—an epideictic move to restore the image of African Americans, establish their humanity, and praise their intellect and economic achievements. Being a process, and a performative one, and given the hardships (racism, segregation, disbelief, educational barriers, and violence) experienced by African Americans of any status and at any geographic location, race work ideologies have not been stable notions among educated blacks—their expected (already uplifted) and most compelling endorsers because of their access to public forums. Race work also remained a contested articulation (written and pictorially) in the black press, in magazines and journals, and in fiction well into the Harlem Renaissance years (Gaines, 1996; Gates, 1988; Gates & Jarrett, 2007; Locke, 1925/2007; Survey, 1925). Its fluidity was part of national shifting definitions of the most suitable educational modes to accomplish such uplift: industrial or liberal. But most importantly, its fluidity stemmed from its espousing of middle class ideologies, at the height of the Harlem Renaissance and during the migratory moves of the 1930s, typically advanced by black elites (publicly known African Americans)—an ideology which obscured pathways to material access in Jim Crow South, in rural, and in urban disenfranchised locations.

African American slaves were denied formal education; however, their furtive educational systems formed in bondage, their own abolitionist societies, and self-help
associations of the 1800s assisted their abilities to effect ‘advancement of the race’ (Lerner, 1972/1992; Logan, 2004; Logan, 2008). While displaying self-determination and civic engagement, their educational initiatives were not always safely—as in racially supportive—delivered or even adequate, since their own African American instructors might have had basic literacies themselves (Lerner, 1972/1992). Segregated schools of the late 1800s and those in the inner cities of the mid 1900s appeared not to have changed this landscape substantially, despite efforts of African Americans—most notably, from the South—to establish their own educational systems, most of them independent from other white educational institutions (Anderson, 1988; Brandt, 2001; Logan, 2004; H. A. Williams, 2005). However, they did so in a climate that scholars and historians have perceived as unwelcoming, segregated and one where accommodating them was deemed a charitable or even a problematic endeavor by white public educational institutions (Anderson, 1988; H. A. Williams, 2005; Woodson, 1933/1998).

In its most traditional sense, racial uplift has been understood as conditioned by the attainment of multiple forms of education or cultural capital—formal (as in higher education), technical, rhetorical, and religious—thought to be productive “civilize” African Americans. Uplift was achieved through favorable racial self-representations, through a dignified visibility in photography (private and public), the press, and in public performances. Overall, racial uplift was achieved through class distance (understood more as a cultural than an economic distinction), where literary, political, religious, and economic characters were the key markers of a black citizen—or of the New Negro, which was also a fluid construction about the proper (thus harmless) black individual. Self-help, a critical component of this uplift ideology, entailed (even before Emancipation) a disposition and creativity to devise and sustain venues which would safely support religious, educational, literate, rhetorical, and legal pursuits (Gaines, 1996; Logan,
2008; Royster, 2000). “Barred from white churches, schools, and public and social facilities,” Kevin K. Gaines (1996) has observed, “free blacks in the North, including Canada, and the urban South, formed their own institutions, providing for themselves a space for fellowship, solidarity, mutual aid, and political activism” (p. 31). Therefore, literacy and education scholars conducting research for the second half of the nineteenth century and the earlier years of the twentieth century document black citizens’ concerns with education and with rhetorical education as the major contributors to racial uplift (Leeman, 2008; Logan 1995; Logan, 2008; McHenry, 2002; Porter, 1936; Ray, 2005; Royster, 2000; F. B. Williams, 1900/1969).

The delivery of and access to these modes of education, as well as their content, have nonetheless been much disputed matters, given the fluctuating nature of race work, but also because traditional white educational systems allocated meager resources (during Reconstruction and later) to accommodate the needs of black individuals, while those in charge of their education showed little concern for their advancement. As the economic paradigms supporting the Antebellum South remained in existence after the Civil War, that is, as black citizens continued to be the main labor input in rural economies, “discriminatory practices around race, class, and urban (versus rural) sites continued to operate, however, well into the twentieth century” (Royster, 2000, p. 159). These discriminatory practices were dominant in schooling venues, even as white discourses asserted how non-threatening African Americans would become with educational uplift (Anderson, 1988; Thornbrough, 1968). The benefits of “civilizing” blacks in the white imaginary (and in public educational policies), however, were not forceful enough to counter the economic act of maintaining them as inexpensive labor. For African Americans, as Jacqueline Jones Royster (2000) has observed, “Education was
considered a necessity for good citizenship” (p. 133), thus turning all of their educational choices into political acts, and rhetorical ones too.

The post-Civil War years were nonetheless characterized by a noticeable shift in the educational opportunities afforded to middle class African Americans (Anderson, 1988; Funke, 1920; Newkirk, 2009; H. A. Williams, 2005; Woodson, 1933/1998), opportunities that reached less fortunate economic segments in more feeble ways. According to Heather Andrea Williams (2005), African Americans, who had already been acquiring literacy secretly (during Antebellum), actively engaged in establishing schools for blacks and whites (during Reconstruction and post Reconstruction) in rural areas. Jacqueline Jones Royster (2000) documented as well a class of educated women, who emerged during the mid to late nineteenth century. She used the term ‘elite’ to characterize these women as well respected because of their families, the men they married, and the occupations they chose (e.g., teachers or journalists) to elevate themselves and others. These educational opportunities meant that by the turn of the century, a class of educated African Americans (men and women), actively producing texts (written and pictorial), and making themselves known in their own books, periodicals, organizations, and educational institutions, had emerged.

Education for African Americans, however, did not deliver the promise of active citizenship (Anderson, 1988; Funke, 1920; Holt, 1990; Newkirk, 2009; H. A. Williams, 2005; Woodson, 1933/1998)—not at least for those less competent (or fortunate). Carter G. Woodson (1933/1998), African American educator, historian, editor of the *Journal of Negro History* (1916-1950), and founder of the Association for the Study of Negro Life and Culture and of the *Negro History Week*, had a highly critical judgment of education (after the Civil War and into the 1930s) even for “educated” blacks. He was not only less hopeful about those most competent
black individuals given that their education was the result of white choices and standards, but he was also deeply distrustful of census figures seemingly representing race progress (pp. x-xi).

“The educational system,” he reasoned, “as it has developed both in Europe and America [is] an antiquated process which does not hit the mark even in the case of the needs of the white man himself” (p. xii). For according to Woodson, “the battle of words” (p. 13) or what had been constructed as a liberal-industrial dichotomy in education was not a productive discussion since most African Americans were nonetheless poorly trained on either side of the specialization end (pp. 13-14).

Out of the multiple standpoints around race work (from the early Postbellum years to the interwar years), and out of African American demands for participation (civic, economic, and educational), two exigencies have emerged—the need for supportive institutions and to be heard in favorable ways. These two have defined (and prompted) African Americans’ self-help initiatives in their quest to restore a race’s image for themselves and a white audience whose approval would determine their full integration, participation, acceptance, and even their physical safety. Far from being entirely dependent, Heather Andrea Williams (2005) has downplayed claims on the full reliance of African Americans on white missionaries’ services, while positing how their self-education initiatives (adult education for instance) progressively led to black political involvement. Equally compelling instances on African Americans’ self-reliance (also in response to white inattentiveness mostly in rural locations or small urban ones) are given in Shirley Wilson Logan’s (2008) work on nineteenth-century black sites of rhetorical education—plantations, workplaces, sites of self-education such as literary societies and lyceums, and black periodicals.
It is therefore within these histories, discourses, expectations, and images, that I situate Bethel’s tradition, as the customary social, religious, and educational hub for the black community in Champaign-Urbana, IL, in the early to mid-twentieth century. While national discourses on race work were articulated in public by recognized African American rhetors (Frederick Douglass, Booker T. Washington, W. E. B. Du Bois, and Mary Church Terrell) whose work and visibility had been discussed in the press, and while well-known scholars, educators, lecturers, writers, and activists (W. S. Scarborough, Alain L. Locke, Charles S. Johnson, Arthur A. Schomburg, and Mary McLeod Bethune) had become the representatives of race work, here I turn the gaze to smaller and lesser-known locales. The black church has been a crucial instance of self-supported race work, where members have become acutely aware of their economic circumstances, and have conceived church ‘auxiliary movements’ in support of black youth and church members. Bethel, therefore, opens the space for new rhetors who, even as contained in their community, at times recognized beyond those limits, actively engaged in their understandings of racial uplift. I turn to Bethel’s educational choices, beyond institutional classrooms settings and their attained degrees, to examine this community’s cultural development as race work.

2.2 Local Safe Self-Determination or “Who does she think she is?”

Performing dignity in Bethel interacted in complex ways with the meanings members have variously attached to performing an educated character. For younger members, the church functioned as a school, intensive in reading, history, and performance; for older members, it functioned as social place, and as a historical, oratorical, and rhetorical training one. Some congregants chose to pursue higher education in Illinois at a high economic burden.
Nevertheless, a desire to project dignity in their presentation of self, edifice, and performance, which I discuss in this section, has characterized Bethel’s educational efforts. Yet, the church has endured (but not entirely rejected) an allusion of elitism because of the “average” member’s reading habits (E. Merrifield, H. Suggs, & E. Rivers, personal communication, November 12, 2009). “That reputation was put on us by Mr. Lee [Albert Lee],” Estelle Nelson Merrifield, senior member, has observed emphatically (E. Merrifield, personal communication, November 12, 2009). She thought so because of how he had bridged two worlds—the black community and a white university—and how he came to signify African American uplift locally.

Albert Lee, the most influential instance of self, in both the white and black worlds, a Bethel congregant and a university employee—office boy, messenger, and the Chief Clerk at the President’s Office (1895-1947)—was instrumental in Bethel’s visibility. Lee was a representative of the economic difficulties of becoming a college student locally. Having enrolled in 1897, he interrupted his formal studies in 1898 (Lee, 1942b, Andrew Sloan Draper, p. 1; Mabry, 1989, p. E3). “Even during that year [1897-1898],” Lee recalled, “I served as University mail carrier, receiving one dollar and a half per week! This ended my formal education as I returned to the President’s Office the next year” (Lee, 1942b, Andrew Sloan Draper, p. 1). While not entirely clear if his economic situation prompted his withdrawal from school and while nowhere in the archives that I have examined has he articulated his decision more openheartedly, Lee exemplifies self-reliance, an attribute found in the church and in other visible members too. “For a number of years thereafter [after 1898],” he continued, “I studied

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26 Lee served fifty-two years in the president’s office, with two brief (partial) interruptions—the 1897-1898 academic year, and the summer of 1942 when he first retired (Lee, 1942b).

27 Based on the annual average consumer price index, I have calculated that an 1897 $1.5 dollar payment had a 2012 approximate purchase power of $41.39 (The Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis, http://www.minneapolisfed.org/community_education/teacher/calc/hist1800.cfm).
privately textbooks used in University curricula, extending into the Junior year in content” (Lee, 1942b, Andrew Sloan Draper, p. 1). Such was his notoriety locally and out of the Twin Cities, that his name, prefaced by the title of professor, was printed on the commencement exercises program of Dunbar High School in Chicago\textsuperscript{28} (unknown date) as the guest offering an address on the “University of Illinois” (Commencement, n.d.). Such was the strength of his character that after his passing in 1948 (Albert Lee, 1948, September 11), members have perceived the church as “less rigid” (E. Rivers, personal communication, November 1, 2009), which suggest a diminished reliance on protocol and parliamentary procedure, which Lee was so accustomed to.

Congregants’ cultured identity and outreach to black students were further enhanced during Lee’s most active years as the church grew (in membership and physical arrangement), and as it remained within the purview of the University of Illinois. As the church’s most recognizable figure both on campus (because of his unofficial interventions on behalf of black students) and in the black community at the turn of the century and up to 1947 (when he finally retired), Lee became the embodiment of a cultured black ethos locally, an individual with a composite of interests, activities, skills, and responsibilities (as will become apparent in later chapters)—literary, civic, educational, artistic, and religious—and a representative of Bethel’s non-monolithic culture. Lee subscribed to reports produced by Southern race organizations.\textsuperscript{29} He corresponded, directly and indirectly, with such national figures as Carter G. Woodson (on

\textsuperscript{28}No records in Champaign-Urbana, IL, document the existence of a Dunbar High School. There is however one in Chicago, IL.

\textsuperscript{29}Two of these organizations were the American Federation of Negro Students (whose location, sponsors, and years of operation are unknown) and the Commission on Interracial Cooperation (Atlanta, GA). He was an active participant in the Champaign-Urbana branch of the NAACP, and had become a member of the national headquarters of the Association for at least a year in October of 1923 (NAACP, 1923, October 3).
qualified African American graduates for fellowship opportunities)\textsuperscript{30} and W. E. B. Du Bois (on enrollment and graduation records to be included in The Crisis’s annual report on African Americans in college).\textsuperscript{31}

While proud of their habits and educational histories, senior members identified in them a tension, one determining new membership and establishing allegiances, and the construction of an elitist self, at times too explicit with a collegiate culture. A concern for what they have perceived is a reduced membership today (E. Merrifield, H. Suggs, & E. Rivers, personal communication, November 12, 2009), and an aging trend (N. Banks, personal communication, September 12, 2009), has prompted members to consider the reasons why Bethel does not seem as attractive today as it had been in their youth, during Lee’s times. Following a discussion on the apparent decline of Bethel, which not all of the Nelson sisters agreed upon, Estelle Nelson Merrifield, Hester Nelson Suggs, and Eunice Nelson Rivers, senior women whose work I examine in chapter 4, ultimately settled their debate by observing that the church was not dying, but it was not growing either. It had been aging for some time, they admitted. Yet the Nelson sisters constructed this trend, and the elitist label that the church and its members have carried since Lee as a response to their cultural work and to members’ educational interests. “We have so many people who are in the fields of education,” Eunice Rivers has contended (personal

\textsuperscript{30}When Carter. G. Woodson, Director of The Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, asked President David Kinley (1920-1930) to recommend a qualified African American graduate for a fellowship at the Journal of Negro History in January 1923, Kinley entrusted Lee with such inquiries. Lee contacted the Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Tau Chapter, at the University of Illinois (Albert R. Lee, 1923, January 23), but the African American fraternity could not recommend any candidate since at the time, according to its representatives, most of its members were “graduates of the School of Engineering and other such schools” (Arthur E. Woodruff & Harold H. West, 1923, January 31, para. 2).

\textsuperscript{31}Albert Lee had corresponded with W. E. B. Du Bois during the time Du Bois had been collecting information nationally about African American enrollment in mixed colleges (Albert R. Lee, 1927, June 10; Albert R. Lee, 1927, June 13; Albert R. Lee, 1930, June 4; Assistant, 1931, June 23; W. E. B. Du Bois, 1930, May 14).
communication, November 12, 2009) as she reflected on the incentives (and tensions) placed on joining a cultural place when in search for a religious one.

Indeed, Bethel has engaged in a variety of learning modes, which implicated its broad definition of education, and its cultured ethos. Given their proximity and relations with the University—an influential contact in Albert Lee at the President’s Office, and their work on campus as maids, stenographers, or mail carriers—Bethel congregants were keenly interested in organizing comparable cultural venues, even though these did not need to be collegiate, and in engaging with cultured individuals. As good Methodists, and following the AME philosophy (N. Banks, personal communication, September 12, 2009), Bethel members sponsored a reading room and debate and literary societies (e.g., the Baraca debate society and the Baraca-Philathea lyceum, ca. 1906-1940). The church produced Biblical theater (e.g., “A Dream of Queen Esther” in 1923) and choir concerts on- and off-site (e.g., a performance at the university gymkhana in 1941). Bethel hosted lectures by well-known orators (e.g., Marshall A. Hudson, founder of the national Baraca Bible class affiliation, who visited Bethel in 1907), and offered

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32 The Urbana Daily Courier documented the work of Bethel’s debate society (Hard on Working Man, 1907, October 4, p. 4); while a 1938 Bethel history (Bethel, 1938, p. 6) and the University of Illinois have documented Bethel’s lyceum (University, 1940, p. 6). In chapter 3, I develop Bethel’s history of literary and lyceum work.

33 On December 6, 1923, Bethel Bible School Social Committee offered “A Dream of Queen Esther,” a play in three acts as a benefit of the Coal fund. Known Bethel family names are listed in the program—Thornhill, Stringfellow, Hines, Lee, Louis, Breckenridge, and Scott (Bethel Bible School, 1923, December 6).

34 On May 4, 1941, The Sunday Courier commented on the enthusiastic responses to “the singing of ‘Swing Low, Sweet Chariot’ by a Negro chorus from the Bethel church” at the university gymkhana on May 2, 1941 (Gymkana [sic], 1941, p. 5, para. 2).

35 The Urbana Daily Courier documented Marshall A. Hudson’s visit to Champaign, IL, and especially to Bethel, in 1907 (Will hold reception, 1907, September 13, p. 8; Heard Marshall Hudson, 1907, September 15, p. 5). Bethel’s 1938 history documented too the visits of Booker T. Washington and Mary McLeod Bethune (Bethel, 1938, p. 6). I have not found any records of such visits in local periodicals or The Chicago Defender, even as senior women distinctly recalled Bethune’s visit, and placed it at some point in the late 1930s and before 1941 (E.
lectures too (e.g., a celebrated talk by Lee at a Sunday school rally at the Presbyterian church in March 1905). Most notably, in private, in its everyday self-supportive work, Bethel developed after-school reading for their youth, oratorical practices, and sustained Bible study (E. Rivers, personal communication, November 12, 2009; N. Banks, personal communication, September 12, 2009). “We learned how to read at school, but we learned just as much at church,” insisted Estelle Merrifield (personal communication, November 12, 2009). Members recalled too their church after-school program, in addition to Sunday school, as a social service to African American parents, with reading, music learning, elocution, and Bible studying. Beyond this learning discipline, they have asserted, “Our youth was expected to be home by five o’clock in the evening” (E. Rivers, personal communication, November 12, 2009).

Bethel’s cultural work, though denoting only a fragmented reality for African Americans, invoked the tensions of their early self-representations amidst a white location and their molding of an African American middle-class epistemology, whose uptake in smaller locales is worth studying. Members reinforced cultural distance when they had to remind a white university and city audience that they were not to be confused with those African Americans who had caused shame. The “Negro Students” report and Albert Lee, Bethel’s foremost rhetor, had reminded the university community of the “civilizing” force of higher education, or of the already good character of those African American citizens choosing to educate themselves at Illinois. In a reassuring manner, and in reference to a long history of black participation on campus, the report noted in 1940 that the University’s black alumni had not had encounters with the law (University, 1940, p. 7). Cultural distance, however, had been a persistent survival practice; it

Bridgewater, personal communication, September 17, 2009; E. Merrifield, H. Suggs, & E. Rivers, personal communication, November 1, 2009).

36 The Urbana Daily Courier reported on Lee’s talk (Colored man, 1905, March 17, p. 8).
had already been established and reinforced with imagery—middle class portraiture
demonstrating how Bethel members were a “better” class of people. “Generally,” Kevin K.
Gaines (1996) has observed, “black elites claimed class distinctions” (p. xiv) to demonstrate
progress. Bethel had tended to class, but defined it in moral terms—in Christian ones. They had a
responsibility toward propriety and service. Furthermore, while the black economic elite
nationally “sought to rehabilitate the race’s image by embodying respectability, enacted through
an ethos of service to the masses” (Gaines, 1996, p. xiv), Bethel saw its work less as charitable,
more as cultural.

Collectively congregants have framed their beginnings with distance to economic class
(and advantages), and with proximity to work. Bethel’s 1938 history, has offered insights into
members’ collective identity and origins, humble individuals who brought themselves up:

Founded in an early period of the Civil War, in a pioneer community built upon virgin
prairies in a young Commonwealth; organized by a handful of Freedmen—just released
from the chains of slavery, and a few other free Negroes; with only a few of their group
to draw upon; with an economic handicap inherent in a situation of a settlement of
impecunious emmigrants [sic], with little work—at small wages, … with a little financial
assistance from their white neighbors, who too were struggling to erect churches, schools,
and a College. (Bethel, 1938, p. 1)

Such framing only highlights their efforts at self-determination (and identity), and their
anticipation for the opportunity of higher education at the University of Illinois’ establishment.
Yet the elitist label has intervened, invoked, rejected. They claimed humble beginnings, brought
with them a religious and civic culture, and continued to develop it in Champaign, IL. Bethel
members have translated education into civility habits which is immaterial to their completion
(or not) of higher education. Yet theirs has been a fraught project, a transition from a common modest existence to a cultured one, equally modest, but dignified.

Like Lee, Bethel women were, by way of example, publicly articulating a cultural ideology and applying it to some of their most pressing social concerns: education, lynching, women’s suffrage, and the color line. In writing, some of which has been made public, these women were articulating cultural distance by presenting a unified image of self—of the church’s representative citizen. In her documents saved from early church archives, Estelle Nelson Merrifield, a senior Bethel member and crucial contributor of texts and testimonies to this research, and whose archival work I discuss at length in chapter 4 (Contesting Institutional Memory section), pointed me to a letter sent to the editor of the Urbana Daily Courier in August 1909 by Florence Louis Mileam, Bethel member, stewardess and Sunday school secretary, and co-author of Bethel’s 1938 history. Florence Mileam had written:

> Once again we, the people of the Negro race are asking the citizens—all citizens of Champaign and Urbana to cooperate in bringing about a condition of equality in civil rights and justice. The problem that has and is confronting us in regard to prohibiting a color line at Crystal Lake Park. We are asking that the Park Commissioners to let a man have concession at the City Park who will treat all alike, regardless of race or creed.

(Mileam, 1909, August)

The park had opened in 1907 (Crystal Lake Park, 2011) and Bethel members were becoming increasingly aware of plans for segregation in its use. An extended version of this letter written by both Florence Mileam and her husband Edward Mileam (Bethel member and church trustee) published twice in the Urbana Daily Courier, on August 14 and 15, 1909 (Mileam writes, 1909, 37

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37Crystal Lake Park, the oldest park in the Urbana Park District, opened in 1907 (Crystal Lake Park, 2011).
August 14; Mileam writes, 1909, August 15), offered insights into cultural distance via the couple’s observations on race, class distinctions, the “lawless members of the African race,” and the color line drawn at a local public good.

The Urbana Daily Courier captured the Mileams’ argument in its headline: the unfair measuring of a “better class of colored people” through the doings of the “lawless members” of the race. “Let better elements control,” the newspaper’s headline had called for (Mileam writes, 1909, August 15). And the Mileams claimed to be “speaking for the educated African” (Mileam writes, 1909, August 15, p. 4). Having noted the possibility of access differentials based solely on race at Crystal Lake Park, with a clear sense of situated ethos (of self and place), and after stressing to the editors how their “class” had not been denied service in the South (hotel or transportation), the Mileams announced “We, the better element will either avoid getting into such a situation [the possibility of being discriminated] or will consider it wisdom to accept what we can by no means change” (Mileam writes, 1909, August 15, p. 4). That is, they would not partake of the park if segregation prevailed. The class differences they had invoked spoke of an orderly visibility, good manners, civility, and culture. Class for them represented an aspect of their character, not their finances. No longer would “a long coat and silk hat” be markers of respect, they thought as well, while reflecting in their letter how “For a negro to be a leader now he must be respected and law abiding, must do something and do something” (Mileam writes, 1909, August 15, p. 4). The Mileams, with their positions in Bethel, were indeed “doing something” of value, but more importantly, they were invoking the kind of dignified visibility—the kind of self—church members were already performing, the one tied to church’s constructions of an “educated African.”
Rhetorically, the Mileams foregrounded their economic citizenship—one attained through hard work and not privilege or higher education. It troubled, them, Bethel, the “better” blacks to be denied equal access “after taking their hard earnings to pay taxes on a park to which they might have the pleasure of taking their little children out from their humble cottages to get a breath of nature’s free air” (Mileam writes, 1909, August 15, p. 4). Asserting their citizenship, they wrote this letter to a newspaper editor. The letter is an argumentative piece—a persuasive one on the differences among blacks—with epideictic elements—a blaming of the unruly—a much needed rhetorical moves given the times they lived. Through reason, the Mileams demanded not to be compared with lower classes of African Americans, offered race cooperation (with whites) by the better ones, and moved toward equality and empathy as they declared their common nature. “Such conduct [lawlessness],” they observed “is by the lower elements of both races” (Mileam writes, 1909, August 15, p. 4). The couple signed their letter—Mr. and Mrs. Edward Mileam. I have not encountered any memories about segregated areas in Crystal Lake Park—not in the local newspaper archives or my participants’ collections and memories.

Class distance, of the type articulated by Bethel members, was initiated too by those not choosing (or not able to choose) a college degree in Illinois or elsewhere—it was mutual. It was a source of race tension at church. Who could choose higher education? And who would define her/himself in in collegiate terms? Lucy Gray has recalled how not very many African American students attended campus (L. Gray, personal communication, September 18, 2009) but she has not offered an explanation. The “Negro Students” report has noted how “Poor economic conditions of parents caused by low salaries and wages, as well as non-employment, reflects

38On the Negro Matriculants archives which Lee compiled (1887-1937), I have not found Edward Mileam’s or Florence Louis’ names. Their families, however, are listed as those black families who had established in Champaign-Urbana, IL, in the early 1860s and 1870s (Bethel, 1938, p. 13).
itself in the financial condition of Negro students” (University, 1940, p. 7). And on a rhetorical move, which prompted me to immediately consider Albert Lee (the report’s co-author), other African Americans like him, and the economics of restricted choices, the report reflected, “One cannot do his best work when worrying about life finances” (University, 1940, p. 7).

Employment locally was inexistent, limited at best, on campus or the business district. “One serious handicap is the lack of business places conducted locally by Negroes” (University, 1940, p. 3), because self-employment, as in other self-initiated African American venues, appeared to be response.

Supporting first generation college students in Champaign-Urbana, IL was economically taxing for these African American families. Not only had the Depression years determined any local family’s resources, but breaking the patterns of menial jobs for the younger generation of African Americans came with double shifts from the older at menial jobs. Their choices were not supported by an already attained middle class (in economic terms), but by a willingness to advance the race. Remembering how her parents had decided that she was going to college, Erma Scott Bridgewater, a senior member who has just recently passed away, and one of the most prolific contributors of archives and testimonies to this research, noted:

My mother took in bundles of washing from some of the fraternities. You know boys would … gather up their clothes … and there were people in the town who would wash them. So she did that, and of course my father was working at the University, and he also

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39During the time Erma Scott (Bridgewater) was a student at the University of Illinois (1933-1937), her tuition, according to her recollections, increased from $35 to $50 (Scott Bridgewater, 2001, March 22, p. 3). I have calculated the average for those figures in 2012 terms: A $35-tuition (1933) is equivalent to $618.1 (2012), while a $50-tuition (1937) is comparable to $797.2 (U. S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, ftp://ftp.bls.gov/pub/special.requests/cpi/cpi.txt).

40Erma Bridgewater’s parents had completed first year of high school (Sarah “Muddy” Wilson Scott), and eighth grade (Raymond Mac Scott) (Scott Bridgewater, 2001, March 22, p. 2).
waited tables, out in the community. At country clubs. (Scott Bridgewater, 2001, March 22, p. 3)

A customary practice then, racial traversing carried with it the markers of economic class differences. The daughter of a mail carrier on campus who served in country clubs opted for a college degree. Erma Bridgewater’s educational and career paths, however, demonstrated that a college degree in her time, did not secure immediately a corresponding job—a professional one. Having graduated with a degree in Sociology from the University of Illinois, in 1937 (The Illio, 1937, p. 116), she recalled “My first job was a maid at Newman Hall. But that was for about a year” (Scott Bridgewater, 2001, March 22, p. 3). Later she became a community activist, director of the Douglass Community Center\textsuperscript{41} in Champaign, IL, and housing activist for the Urban Renewal Program\textsuperscript{42} in Champaign as well (Bethel, 2013)—another dignified image for Bethel.

Reflecting too on her transition from high school to the University of Illinois’ campus, Erma Scott Bridgewater further recalled the hardships of “commuting” from the black neighborhood to campus. “You almost lost friends when you did go on to college,” she said (Scott Bridgewater, 2001, March 22, p. 2). ‘Who does she think she is?’ was the attitude she perceived at her decision to become a college student—her parents’ decision rather. “They [her peers in high school] sort of distanced themselves a bit from you. But since we all attended the same churches …” she concluded by leaving her thoughts unfinished (Scott Bridgewater, 2001, March 22, p. 2). How much distance could there have been? African Americans in the Twin Cities were part of a segregated community and some had to see each other during church services. Far from being a hopeful site like it had been at its founding, the University’s proximity

\textsuperscript{41}The Douglass Community Center became the most important community hub during the 1950s.

\textsuperscript{42}The Urban Renewal Program in Champaign, IL, also taking place in the 1950s secured better homes for a segment of the African American population in the North End.
to the black community carried its tensions. Identities were questioned; an educated *self* was a matter of class distance. Hence, Bethel and its most distinct members, those connected to campus via a degree or not, carried the elitist label.

Racial solidarity has not always accompanied racial uplift because educational choices (or possibilities) could be fueled by inter-racial struggles. Most of Bethel’s recollections have mobilized events and images of racialized solidarity, crafted as strategic, rhetorical, and as imperatives to demonstrate a collective educated character. These memories have been the strongest and the most frequent. But the distinctions that come with education (and higher education) fueled intra-racial struggles. The complexity of perceived class differences within the unified place of a congregation, when by virtue of sharing that place their moral qualities are comparable, have marked Bethel’s educational choices. Not surprisingly, her high school peers, African Americans too, thought of Erma Bridgewater’s enrollment at Illinois, “Who does she think she is?” With fewer opportunities available in town after the graduation, what advantages could college education have possibly brought to them in Champaign-Urbana?

Beyond these instances of dignified (and educated) self, choice of adornment features for the church (members’ edifice), and the seriousness and formality of their rhetorical, religious, and artistic performances have been markers too of Bethel’s culture. Congregants’ early concern with the size, appearance, comfort, and safety of their building revealed a vision of growth. Their edifice represented them as much as their poise, countenance, and demeanor. Champaign-Urbana, IL, had not yet fully developed into an urban locale; Bethel was too developing within the cities. A member of the 1938 Committee on Church History[^43] remembered the site of the old

[^43]: Albert Lee was the chairman of this recovery initiative, Bethel’s first documented historical pursuit. Lee worked alongside Bethel leading women of the time, who just like the main women participants in this research, had also then been equipped with their texts, memories, and newspapers. I discuss these particular attributes—historical-documentation habits—of Bethel women in chapter 4, Contesting Institutional Memory section. The women in this
church in these terms: “[Park Street] … was an unpaved street, fringed by two wooden sidewalks, whose protruding nails and splinters, were a constant menace to the barefooted urchins… The street when unfrozen, was often a mudhole [sic] in the winter, and early spring, contained two lanes, of rough and uncertain surface” (Bethel, 1938, p. 3). From memory too members have produced a drawing of the “old” church (Figure 9) in its 2008 revised history.45 “The Church building [the “old” one] resembled the typical rural school house” (Bethel, 1938, p. 3), members recalled. Soon after its founding in 1863, members had built a frame building on the lot on 405 East Park Street (Bethel 1938, p. 1) in Champaign, IL.

44In the revised 2008 version of the church’s 1938 history, the expression “barefooted urchins” was removed. This editing could have been a simple omission not unlike some other revised misspellings which I noticed. Any nails or splinters on an unpaved street then had posed a threat for any pedestrian, not just children. On the other hand, being barefoot at that time might have reminded readers of some of the customs of black rural locations; while being an urchin might have invoked raggedly clothed individuals with whom Bethel members have never associated.

45Bethel has functioned on three buildings placed on the same site (Park and Fourth streets)—the “old” church, the “new” church, and the current one.
Built in 1864, a year after its founding, Bethel members inhabited a small building (the “old” church) until they could afford in late 1892 (early 1893) a much enlarged and dignified one.

Invoking their meek origins once more, early members reminded their church community that Bethel had not started with material advantages. “The history of Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church may not be one of brilliant achievement viewed from material standards,” members had written, “but when all factors are taken into consideration, its lustre [sic] remains undimmed” (Bethel, 1938, p. 1). The aesthetic became a matter of concern for this community; it was therefore an important development in their history to display a building suitable to the kinds of activities taking place there, one which would fit their dignity too. Throughout the years, the “old” building—its first one resembling a small school—was modified, expanded, and slightly moved. In ca. 1880-1881, the frame was relocated (down the block) to Park and Fourth Streets (Bethel 1938, p. 2)—its current site.

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46 This illustration was included in the 2008 edition of Bethel’s history (Bethel, 2008, Early History, n.d.), revised from the 1938 version (Bethel, 1938). The illustration was done from memory; the illustrator or the congregant offering the memory is unknown. Reproduced by permission of Bethel AME Church.
After securing a loan in 1892, the “new” church, the building previous to the modern one today, was dedicated early in 1893. The “new” church is remembered as the building with “beautiful stained windows” (Bethel, n.d., New Church, para. 1). It was designed too with “an auditorium, lecture room, choir room, often called the Baraca room because of its use as a Sunday School room for the Baraca class,” Bethel’s men’s Bible group (Bethel, n.d., New Church, para. 1). Not thirty years had passed since their prayers meetings in private homes, and Bethel members had already conceived rhetorical, political, and musical literacies, in addition to biblical ones—the church had become an educational place within a site of worship. Soon after, in 1895, Bethel’s trustee board, of which Albert Lee was member, had agreed on yet another loan to finish the church’s interior (Bethel, 1938, p. 4). That is, while walking around dusty and unfinished roads locally, Bethel members enjoyed in their new building a carpeted religious place at the turn of the century. Repairs done since the completion of the “new” church (1895) included an organ installed in 1915 and a parsonage built in 1919, which “added much to value and appearance of the Church property” (Bethel, 1938, p. 5). In a location with nine churches (early in the twentieth century), with two of them being African American (a Methodist and a Baptist denomination) (Bethel, 1938, p. 2), Bethel had crafted (and funded) its own material progress to align with their visibility.

Material development of place has therefore always responded to Bethel’s educational initiative—it has been a logical response to their need to learn beyond scripture. The church continued to exercise self-support in their expansion projects, even those sites they organized on

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47 In a photograph of Bethel’s Sunday school (Figure 4), which I included in chapter 1, the “new” church, the brick building, is seen in the background.

48 Salem Baptist Church, formerly Second Baptist Church, co-founded by a relative of a Bethel member in 1867 (About Salem, n.d.), located on the corner of Fifth Street and Park Street in Champaign, IL, was the second African American church which members remembered.
separate locations. In 1907, Bethel opened an evening reading room for African Americans in the extended community, only a few blocks away from the church.\footnote{A local periodical and Bethel’s historical records document this effort (Bethel, 2008, Organizations and Activities, para. 1; Champaign, 1907, May 13; For the colored man, 1907, May 9, p. 4). In my discussions of Bethel’s debate society in chapter 3, the room emerges as an occasional site hosting Bethel’s debates.} The room was short lived; no records document its existence beyond 1909, but despite its proximity to the University Library, and two community libraries, Bethel’s choices—identifying a need for evening reading for working adults and offering such a place separately—is very telling of local race relations. It is further an act of political determination too. “The reading room project affords an unusual opportunity to assist a struggling race in its efforts to help itself,” the Urbana Daily Courier had announced (For the colored man, 1907, May 8, p. 4, para. 5). Accustomed too to equipping their own facilities, the Courier note served as a public service call for “books or current magazines as will be suitable for a public reading room under Christian management” (For the colored man, 1907, May 8, p. 4, para. 4) and for donations to furnish it—furniture and reading material.

Performance within place became a crucial habit in Bethel, and while mostly performing in private, and for the race, Bethel offered receptions for black students, and its members spoke and sang for a white audience too. Used to celebrating the beginning of college careers for black students, the Urbana Daily Courier announced, “The Baraca Bible class of Bethel A. M. E. church on Friday evening of last week gave a reception to the male colored students who are attending the University of Illinois this year” (Champaign News, 1904, September 27, p. 5). The Courier noted too that “Eleven colored people are registered at the university, of which two are women” (Champaign News, 1904, September 27, p. 5). The church was used to announcing its events as well in the Urbana Daily Courier. In a brief article about an upcoming reception (on evening of September 13, at 8 pm), organized by the Baraca and Philathea Bible classes to honor
Marshall A. Hudson, founder of the national Baraca-Philathea Bible study affiliation, the
*Courier* had named Thomas J. Burrill (University of Illinois Vice-President), Reverend
Andrew T. Jackson (Bethel’s pastor), and Marshall Hudson from Syracuse, NY, as speakers
(Will hold reception, 1907, September 13, p. 8, para. 2). Performance in this occasion involved
having a university official as a guest in church premises. Hudson was also booked to speak to
the workers of Bethel’s reading room earlier that day (7 pm), before the reception (Will hold
reception, 1907, September 13, p. 8, para. 3). Since the guest too must have had to walk to each
point in his program, such organization of the evening necessarily entailed a display of the
neighborhood, the church, and its reading room—another performing of difference. The
reception “was largely attended and proved a very entertaining event” (Heard Marshall Hudson,
1907, September 15, p. 5, para. 1).

Bethel’s choir, of over thirty congregants during the interwar period kept itself active,
and was another crucial source of local visibility and of self-trained musical literacies for
members. Formally organized in ca. 1908-1909, the choir had as its president the man with “the
wonderful bass voice” (L. Gray, personal communication, September 18, 2009)—Albert Lee.
Other good voices have characterized this choir; their lack of technique was not a particular
concern; the quality of early member’s voices is remembered. During the pastorate of P. M.
Lewis (1894), some choir members had learned to read and sing by note; Reverend Lewis had
also organized performances in white churches and the local opera house as fundraisers toward
the church’s debt (Bethel, 1938, p. 7). Realizing the need for formal training, however, for two

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50 Thomas J. Burrill was Professor of Botany (1868-1894), Acting Regent (1891-1894), and Vice-President
of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (May 1901-October 1909) (Thomas J. Burrill [1], ca. 1890s).

51 Reverend Andrew T. Jackson is listed as Bethel’s pastor from 1905 to 1910 (Bethel, 1938, p. 9).
years (1896-1897), Bethel’s choir hired the vocal female instructor at the University (Bethel, 1938, p. 7).

Its most active years occurred during the tenures of Ernest Harlan Scott (ca. 1908-1922), \(^{52}\) Cecil Pope (from 1922 until at least 1938), and Albert Lee (ca. 1908-ca. 1938) (Bethel, 1938, p. 7). Bethel’s design of both place and self for its choir has also been an early concern. As the new building was being developed (1892-1893), choir members assumed the expenses for the enlargement of the church’s loft (second floor) and for their organ; in 1916, the choir bought its vestment robes and caps (Bethel, 1938, p. 7). Such a display—a suitable learning place and formal clothing—mostly nurtured the race, for members were singing on their Saturday socials and early on Sunday, after Lee had taken attendance, they prepared for services. Beyond entertainment and worship, senior women have consistently discussed Bethel’s choir when imagining their visibility locally, or when recalling the choir’s visits to military men stationed in Chanute, IL, for instance (E. Bridgewater, personal communication, September 17, 2009; E. Merrifield, H. Suggs, & E. Rivers, personal communication, November 12, 2009; L. Gray, personal communication, September 18, 2000).

Invoking members’ common past and bringing it to bear in its performances, Bethel’s choir was known locally for its Negro spirituals—an interaction of music, Christian faith, and the memory of slavery—performed publicly, not in hiding anymore. In its first public presentation in 1935 (Figure 10), Bethel’s choir visited a white church—the First Congregational church of Urbana, IL.

\(^{52}\)Ernest H. Scott was Bethel member and university employee (stenographer) whose papers have also been stored at the University of Illinois Archives (Ernest H. Scott Papers, 1909-1920); he passed away in 1922 (Bethel, 1938, p. 7).
On Friday, April 26, 1935, Bethel’s choir offered its first public appearance in the First Congregational Church, Urbana, IL (Negro choir, 1935, April 27, p. 3). The customary newspaper note in the Urbana Daily Courier had announced, “Negro spirituals will be sung by the Bethel African M. E. church choral society at 8 p.m. Friday in the First Congregational church of Urbana” (Bethel A. M. E. choir, 1935, April 22, p. 1). A marker too of their dignity, Bethel member had carried history in their performances and their self-supported learning of music. “An offering was taken and turned over to the colored church” (Negro choir, 1935, April 27, p. 3, para. 2), the note had ended. Their collective memory articulated its visibility in religious and social terms:

The Choir has featured Christmas and Easter Cantatas; indoor and outdoor picnics and other socials; participated in Songfests; sang in other churches—both white and Negro;

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53 Newspaper photograph printed in The Evening Courier on April 25, 1935 (“Give concert,” 1935, April 25). Reproduced by permission of the Champaign County Historical Archives, The Urbana Free Library. A copy of the newspaper image was originally provided by Erma Scott Bridgewater in 2009. She was featured in this photograph and had kept it along with other newspaper clippings about Bethel’s choir.
maintain records; kept the organ and pianos in repair; purchased its own music, robes and equipment. (Bethel, 1938, p. 7)

The choir bore fruit to musical organizations which were actively making themselves visible too with performances. Such organizations included the Dramatic Chorus, the Gospel Chorus, and the Sunday School Chorus (Bethel, 1938, p. 7).

2.3 Overlapping Spaces, Overlapping Literacies

“Bethel has a history which includes activity in the [black] community as well as in the church. During the early part of the century when segregation was a fact of life,” Bethel sponsored a multitude of venues (social, religious, civic, and literate), either functioning or meeting in church premises (Bethel 2008, Organizations and Activities, para. 1). It is within this fact for African American lives locally, that I define Bethel’s overlapping of spaces and literacies as a habit. Overlapping has become a mode of inhabiting a space, a segregated one, and a mode of imagining the multiple place-functions that such a space could take in service of race work. It has become too a mode of imagining their multiple modes of self-asserted citizenship—civic, religious, literary—and the many educational choices such citizenship(s) have demanded. Overlapping has been a necessary response to limited material space: A common location, at separate times, has served as a site for the development of political literacies or musical ones, where worship had just taken place. With relative ease, members have inhabited their church and assigned overlapping functions to pulpit, pews, and lecture rooms, and have performed accordingly. They have variously behaved in a religious, secular, educational, rhetorical, and activist mode. The location of rhetorical display, training, and devotion has been one and the same; the location of oratorical and written practices has shared its site with the location for
music, debates, and masonic meetings. Their collective definition as a cultured community has taken place within the fluidity of their places; the tensions too of overlapping interpretations of their work—meetings were socialization instances, never political, some members have claimed—have molded too their constructions, then and now, of culture.

Bethel’s first building, the “old” church which resembled a school house, was a modest and small building. At their place of worship, congregants have held business meetings, children’s Bible learning, socials, and conventions, which have also defined their multiple cultured selves. Members recalled the old building’s pulpit being enclosed by a railing. Within this fence “set a table, which served as a desk for the Superintendent and Secretary of the Sunday School during the school hour” (Bethel, 1938, p. 3). Their most important teaching and learning moments have shared a place with religious rituals, such as preaching or communion. Directly facing the altar on its right, a set of benches “were used by the Choir during service, and by the ‘Infant Class’ in Sunday School” (Bethel, 1938, p. 3). Adult and young members overlapped places too. “When entertainments were held the benches were piled up and some were moved to the outside” (Bethel, 1938, p. 3). Socialization had to occur in church premises; yet, at times, a social gathering had a benevolent purpose too—fundraisers for Ethiopia when Italy invaded it in World War II (E. Merrifield, personal communication, November 12, 2009).

At the new building (since early 1893), a more dignified and spacious one, and as members engaged in more initiatives, the Baraca class (men’s Bible class), the Independent Order of Good Templars (a temperance lodge, established in ca. 1890-1894), and Bethel’s choir had functioned in one room, on the second floor (Bethel, 1938, p. 6). Accordingly, the room is remembered as the Baraca room or the choir loft. Bethel’s lyceum business meetings had used that room as well (E. Merrifield, H. Suggs, & E. Rivers, personal communication, November 12,
2009). Such sharing of place has interfered at times with senior members recollections. Interestingly, and because they were young then, some senior women framed the men’s Bible study as quite private, when in fact, these women, or any children then, had been forbidden to approach the room as the lodge was in session (N. Banks, personal communication, September 1, 2009). Yet, during their after school evenings, they had enjoyed the room, had acquired musical and vocal literacies with self-taught adults, and had been socialized there for services. In the new building, “The Church … has entertained the Sunday School Conventions a number of times. The Illinois Annual Conference has met here in 1897, 1922 and 1936” (Bethel, 1938, p. 5). Being known beyond the Twin Cities, Bethel was chosen for AME events.

The overlapping of literacies accompanied that of spaces. School-level reading has been one of the most remembered practices. “The early Sunday Schools taught the primer used in the public schools as well as the Bible (Bethel, 1938, p. 6). Senior women recalled their first-, second-, and third-grade readers, and their question-and-answer periods (E. Merrifield, personal communication, November 12, 2009). Not only were children prepared for Sunday performances, for biblical understanding, but in teaching their youth, Bethel was fulfilling a social service for black parents too. For adults overlapping training was a significant aspect of their cultured identity too, and one which caused certain tension in how members have defined their work. “Because they [church members, and other African American citizens] had no meaningful contact with the larger white community, but they still … [had] … intellectual capability, they needed a vehicle” (N. Banks, personal communication, March 13, 2009). They devised what members called “socially-oriented activities” and have associated beyond their religious bond (N. Banks, personal communication, March 13, 2009).
Their cultured ethos demanded a politically-aware venue (not a partisan one). While some members were both explicit about their race discussions and critical of their living conditions locally in the early twentieth century, others have distanced themselves from a characterization of their work as political. Lucy Gray, for instance, firmly resisted characterizing Bethel as political (or “organized” in her terms) and foregrounds the social aspects of their church meetings. To her, church socialization appeared to be a natural consequence of a segregated life (L. Gray, personal communication, September 18, 2009). Not surprisingly, Bethel’s activism has stemmed naturally from a duty in her view—that of providing essential support to those who wished to uplift themselves with education. She has seen the overlapping functions in Bethel, but did not qualify them as political. She has positioned Bethel’s activism, rhetorically, as an aspect of race solidarity which did not explicitly questioned the University’s neglect (in its provision of full and comfortable access to campus services), thereby exemplifying (with the church’s habits and narrative) long traditions of self-help ingrained in black middle class, and cultured communities.

Conversely, other activist women supported memories of service for black students, yet they also articulated their political structure (based on their identification of public interest) and rhetorics of blame directed at the University. Hester Nelson Suggs, former principal of an African American high school, Washington School, in Champaign, IL, shared these memories of social activism from within Bethel members’ homes and church premises. She has said, “My mother [Mrs. Carrie Nelson] had to feed the campus students, so that they would have some place to go to eat because they couldn’t get [food] on the campus, or they couldn’t get in the dorms; they couldn’t get their haircut” (H. Suggs, personal communication, November 12, 2009). Hester Suggs articulated her mother’s work as her responsibility toward black students:
“Somebody” had to provide shelter and food given that these needs were not met on campus—at least not satisfactorily. The black home, an extension of the church, served multiple functions too—the private and the public. She further insisted, “Somebody had to work so that they could have those kinds of opportunities.” Accordingly, she conceived members’ activist work during Lee’s times as preparatory, and mostly critical to the Civil Rights efforts which took place locally, at Bethel’s premises years later.

As she reflected on Bethel’s work during the 1960s (outside the scope of my research), she remembered addressing the university representatives on organizational and race matters, and clarifying that (from the early twentieth century and up to the 1960s) Bethel, some of its members, and Albert Lee “[had been] getting Champaign ready” for the movement (H. Suggs, personal communication, November 12, 2009). In a reversal of roles, she recalled how Bethel members had to instruct the university folks on Albert Lee and his work on campus on behalf of black university students. Hester Suggs therefore affirmed their activism on church places, and established the University’s agency as secondary only to Bethel’s initiatives. Bethel had done the instructing when needed. Rhetorically, she positioned herself as one who can rectify facts about race work in Champaign, IL, during Lee’s tenure and before the Civil Rights years. Having extended the overlapping metaphor of Bethel’s educational work to include the homes of Bethel members, I end this chapter by including a list of African American families hosting black students (Figure 11), which Albert Lee had compiled in ca. 1942.
A list of black families compiled by Lee as part of his Negro Matriculants collection.

Overwhelmingly, the families on this list are Bethel congregants—Walden, Penney, Brewer, Watson, Woodruff, Scott, Foulks, Thornhill, and Chavis—as listed in the church’s 1938 history (Bethel, 1938, pp. 10-13).\textsuperscript{55} That is, at church, in their homes, Bethel members were conducting race work in support of black university students, of those deemed part of the Talented Tenth, as conceived by W. E. B. Du Bois.

\textsuperscript{54}List of homes (Lee, A. R., ca. 1942) filed in the Negro Matriculants files compiled by Albert Lee for 1887-1937 (President’s Office, Arthur C. Willard, Negro Matriculants List, 1887-1937, Record Series 2/9/16, Box 1, Sources Data folder), and which he updated for the University’s records (Carl Stephens, 1938, May 27; Carl Stephens, 1939, June 22; Carl Stephens, 1941, November 22) and as a source of information delivered to \textit{The Crisis} journal for its annual report on African Americans in college (e.g., \textit{The American Negro}, 1947, August, pp. 239-246). Reproduced by courtesy of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Archives.

\textsuperscript{55}In Bethel’s 1938 history, Benjamin Nash and his wife Sophia Nash are listed as early (1861) black residents of Champaign, IL, with a business. While Benjamin Nash might not have become a church member (Bethel, 1938, p. 13), Sophia (written as Sofia) Nash is listed as a stewardess (Bethel, 1938, p. 12).
Having to perform at the intersections of race, class, education, and national discourses on black criminals, Bethel congregants have fulfilled a myriad of educational functions. They have educated the soul, but foremost, they have imagined multiple citizenships from multiple self-supported training interests. They have developed a complex cultured ethos, at once active and prudent/strategic. The Mileams had argued for the erasure of the color line for those “better” members. Lee, cautious in his blending on campus and aware of the privileges that his position afforded, had been judicious in his race work. At times demanding better services or blaming university authorities for housing and eating conditions for African American students, Bethel was always organizing, securing funding, expanding and learning.
CHAPTER 3
SPONSORING LITERACIES, INVENTING ETHOS

The shallow and undiscerning may be pleased by a speech which is all wit and sophistry; but the men who lead, the thinking men, whom the orator wishes to convince are not deceived by such weak devices. Such men want character in a speech,—sound logic, clear reasoning.

—Charles W. Chesnutt, *The advantages of a well-conducted literary society*

“The last meeting of the Lyceum,” Albert R. Lee observed in a 1922 letter to lyceum officers “was a very successful one” (Albert R. Lee, 1922, November 28, para. 1). “The attendance was not as large as the October meeting,” he added, “but the cold night, the many social events which caused many of our people to work, was the reason” (Albert R. Lee, 1922, November 28, para. 1). Literate, dignified, and church-going men and women in Bethel’s premises while service people elsewhere in Champaign-Urbana, IL, Bethel members held monthly lyceum programs (public lecture meetings) during the interwar period for the uplift of the race via readings, recitations, parliamentary training, musical performances, debates, and social events, all of which were highly rhetorical—thoughtful demonstrations of literary character and civility, and occasions for a community’s and young black students’ deliberations on the racial issues of their time. This letter is only one instance of the many missives that Albert Lee—Bethel’s most visible member during the first half of the twentieth century, and whom I introduced in chapter 1—composed to the black university students whom he taught to manage the lyceum, some of whom participated in Bethel’s Sunday school and became church members. His letters and their accompanying programs characterized Lee’s organization of and vision for
such literary events, for he was the rhetorical force behind a “well-conducted” lyceum, its president during most of the 1920s, and the black rhetor who with his personality, work ethic, and collegiate exposure, constructed its identity and by extension Bethel’s as dignified, disciplined, religious, cultured, and civic-minded.

Nineteenth century literary societies (and those few still active in the early twentieth century), “the most clearly defined examples of rhetorical education” (Logan, 2008, p. 7), were inexpensive sources of self-education, oratorical training, leisure, morality, and socialization developed in urban settings (Logan, 2008; Ray, 2005). These sites offered regular literary meetings in public and community locations. Such meetings, unlike contemporary book-club meetings, took the form of public lectures, debates, elocutionary and parliamentary training, dramatic readings and recitations, stage representations, and musical performances. These societies funded reading rooms and hosted orators in their lecture circuits (Bode, 1956; Logan, 2008; McHenry, 2002; Ray, 2005). Among these societies, lyceums were instances of evening entertainment, practical education (e.g., in the sciences), and community information (Bode, 1956; Logan, 2005; Logan, 2008; McHenry, 2002; Ray, 2005). Their interests ranged from trade training, civic participation, and biographical writings, to the deliberation of community needs for educational resources: libraries, schools, and teacher training (Logan, 2008).

African American lyceums were safe sites (racially supportive) where African Americans obtained and displayed their rhetorical education, invoked economic and intellectual improvement, and discussed race issues (Logan 2005; Logan, 2008; McHenry, 2002; Ray, 2005). They were extensions of former abolitionist societies, typically sponsored by black churches, and seldom intersected with their mainstream (white) counterparts. Earlier lyceum scholars had already recognized such venues as major contributors to racial uplift (Holbrook, 1829; E. P.
Powell, 1895). Like their white counterparts, black literary societies could not remain apolitical. From discussions of slavery and freedom, African American societies engaged in the articulation of their contributions to the American experience (Ray, 2005), their roles following emancipation, and their schooling, religious, and civic needs (Logan, 2008). Most notably, these societies served as sites for positive identity-building and the articulation of black humanity, as, increasingly, public signs of African American eloquence and literacies (e.g., the work of the black elite) emerged and challenged notions of black inferiority (McHenry, 2002; Ray, 2005). In doing so, these societies demonstrated an understanding of literacy as a critical aspect of sociopolitical action: Black communities’ long-standing efforts in support of these sites have therefore effected (or attempted to effect) social change through literacy and rhetorical astuteness, even when facing disbelief, resistance, and violence.

In this chapter, I study Bethel’s local sponsoring of political literacies and invention of a literary ethos off-campus via dignified oratorical performances. I situate Bethel’s work within the American tradition of sponsoring cultural and educational institutions (Brandt, 2001) for adults in a community and within the African American tradition of organizing mutual-aid and self-sponsored fraternal, religious, and instructional societies. I examine Bethel’s most known literary venue during the interwar period (and earlier), the Baraca-Philathea lyceum (ca. 1910-1940). Bethel’s lyceum was a literacy marker for this community, though, by Bethel’s own acknowledgement, only one of the “many Literary Societies [which had] flourished featuring debates and programs” (Bethel, 1938, p. 6). More importantly, it was an instance of early twentieth century racial traversing, as members and black university students moved back and forth from campus to the African American neighborhood in support of their education.
I contend here that this lyceum, far from being merely a playful and agonistic setting or model of participatory citizenship for Bethel’s constituents became a crucial site for the articulation of black humanity, civility, and literary character and an integral part of African-American community life. More importantly, Albert Lee crafted the Baraca-Philathea lyceum as a site for the modeling, deliberation, and development of political consciousness. Bethel’s work was a necessary and sustained rhetorical response to neglect and, more importantly, to the locally nurtured imperative to be involved in what Bethel congregants have variously called “civic,” “political,” or “racial” affairs. The Baraca-Philathea lyceum might have been Lee’s response to university literary societies, but its tradition in the black community precedes campus initiatives (or at least took place alongside white societies); it is the result of Bethel’s overlapping civic and religious initiatives, its long history of community associations, and its interest in intellectual discussion, theater, music, and literature. More importantly, Bethel has not allowed such rhetorical habits to decline in time, and its work continues to be structured around literary programs, collective memory, black history, and current racial events.

3.1 Bethel AME Church’s Lyceum: “Everything that … [was] good for the Race”

In the Baraca-Philathea folder (1920, 1922-1924), part of the Albert Lee Papers housed in the University of Illinois Archives (Lee, 1920-1924a), about twenty-five texts only—letters, invitations, programs, and lists of extempore discussion topics—document the activities of the Baraca-Philathea lyceum (ca. 1910-1940) during Lee’s administration (early to mid-1920s). Bethel’s lyceum, not its first literary venue, was a non-denominational (although some rituals

56Bethel has had a long tradition of mutual aid associations, most of which have been social, religious, or charitable—Sewing Circle, Church Aid, Band of Hope, a temperance lodge, and Helping Hand, for instance (Bethel, 1938, p. 6). The closest in nature was the debate society of the Baraca Bible class, the men’s study group (1906-to date) (Bethel, 1938, p. 6). The debate society met in the Baraca Reading Room, once this library opened in May
included an invocation and a closing prayer) and a co-educational literary society. It was open to the public, “old and young, whether church member or non-church member or of whatever religious belief” (Harold D. Gray & Walter R. Thornhill, 1920, January 6, para. 3). Anyone sitting in on lectures did not have to pay (para. 4). It was also most certainly attended only by a black audience. Yet the lyceum’s purpose was achieved, for uplift in African American literary societies had as its imperative the elevation of black histories and memories for African American spectators. Events, which included “live wire discussions, civic betterment, debates, enjoyable programs, and a worthwhile journal” were held the second Friday of each month, at 8:30 pm (Harold D. Gray & Walter R. Thornhill, 1920, January 6, para. 4), in the Baraca room (men’s Bible classroom) of the “new church” or in Bethel’s educational community center.

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57 Harold D. Gray, President of Bethel’s lyceum in 1920, was an African American student whose name is recorded in the 1931-1932 “Colored Students” List, as a Kappa Alpha Psi member (Lee, 1932). Walter R. Thornhill, Secretary of the lyceum in 1920, was also an African American student whose name is recorded in an undated (most likely early 1930s) compilation by Lee (Lee, ca. 1931) as an M. A. student in 1929. Mrs. Erma Scott Bridgewater, after seeing Thornhill’s name as secretary on a lyceum letter thought this was a most suitable choice.

58 What is remembered as the “new church” is the brick building on 401 E. Park Avenue, Champaign, IL (ca. 1892-1959)—the building prior to the current one (Bethel, 2008, The New Church, para. 3). Figure 3 in Chapter 1 shows the outward appearance of the old church. The Baraca room, located in the second floor, the highest room (L. Lomax, personal communication, February 28, 2009), served as choir hall (also known as choir loft) and Sunday school room for the Baraca class (Bethel, 2008, The New Church, para. 3). The name Baraca was chosen from the Hebrew brakhah (transliterated) which means blessing (Baraca, 1924, August 7; L. Lomax, personal communication, February 28, 2009).
which the church had opened in 1908, closer to the black neighborhood and in Champaign’s business center.\footnote{Bethel had expanded and moved its reading room to a new community center on the third floor of the Kuhn building, on East Main Street (Baraca, 1908, March 13, p. 6, para. 1), in what is now a historical site, and which continues to be the core of Champaign’s business district (Hard on Working Man, 1907, October 4).}

The Baraca-Philathea lyceum, sponsored by Bethel’s Bible classes—the Baraca class (for men) and the Philathea class (for women)\footnote{Such denominations come from the National Baraca-Philathea Bible Study group. Bethel was the first church in Champaign-Urbana, IL, to affiliate herself with the national organization (Bethel, n.d., New Church, para. 1). Furthermore, on September 14, 1907, Bethel held a reception to welcome Marshall A. Hudson of Syracuse, NY, founder of the national association (Champaign, 1907, September 14, p. 8; Heard, 1907, September 15, p. 5). A photograph of Bethel’s Sunday school in the early 1900 is printed in chapter 1 (Figure 4).}—was originally organized in ca. 1910 (Bethel, 1938, p. 6), “but just as it was entering on its fourth successful year, along came the World War and tore it asunder” (Harold D. Gray & Walter R. Thornhill, 1920, January 6, para. 1). The lyceum interrupted its monthly programs during World War I and sustained meetings intermittently since the end of the war until its official reactivation in 1920 (Harold D. Gray & Walter R. Thornhill, 1920, January 6, para. 1). Student participation and interest in the lyceum were crucial for its continuance, given that Lee had had imagined for them the responsibilities of organizing programs and designing events with parliamentary law. The lyceum’s hierarchical government included a president, first and second vice presidents, a secretary and a treasurer. At Lee’s behest, these lyceum authorities and other offices held by black university students formed a program committee, procured literary or musical events, and invited guests (Albert R. Lee, 1922, November 15, para. 2). A critic was appointed to evaluate performances, and an editor to record observations in the Bar-Philathea journal. No records of the journal minutes have survived.

During Lee’s tenure (early to mid-1920s) and well into the interwar period the Baraca-Philathea lyceum became a dynamic forum in the black neighborhood with news of its programs...
being published locally (Reception, 1914, October 2, p. 2; Twin City, 1928, June 28), even reaching Chicago, IL. *The Chicago Defender*, for instance, documented a debate contest in which the Baraca class had defeated the Philomatheans. “A. R. Lee, teacher of the Baraca class,” said the note, “presented class pins to the most active workers in the contest” (Baraca, 1917, April 7, p. 7, para. 1). The lyceum’s predecessors—Bethel’s reading room and the debate society sponsored by the Baraca class (men’s Bible study)—had also received attention locally in press notes (Baraca, 1908, March 13, p. 6; Champaign, 1907, May 13, p. 8; Champaign News, 1904, September 27; For the colored man, 1907, May 9, p. 4; Hard on Working Man, 1907, October 4, p. 4). On May 9, 1907, in anticipation of the impending opening of Bethel’s reading room (mid-May 1907), the *Urbana Daily Courier* announced that “the colored men of the Twin Cities [Champaign-Urbana, IL] will have a place to spend their evenings under conditions favorable for their mental and moral advancement” (For the colored man, 1907, May 9, p. 4, para. 1). Campus and city libraries were not then “favorable” places for African Americans, or perceived as such by the black community; hence, Bethel offered its own “within easy walking distance of the residences, churches, and businesses of the colored people” (For the colored man, 1907, May 9, p. 4, para. 2).

Bethel’s lyceum had run its course by the early 1940s, with the last mention of its work found in the University’s official “Negro Students” report (University, 1940, p. 6), which Lee co-authored and co-edited (see discussion on agency in chapter 1, Campus Racial Climate). In its Organizations section, and alongside references to African American fraternities and sororities on campus, the report stated, “Bethel AME Lyceum which has functioned for about thirty years, is now managed and attended almost entirely by Negro students” (University, 1940, p. 6). No archival evidence and memories—in Bethel, at the University, or in local periodicals—document
this lyceum’s existence beyond 1940, through the end of World War II, nor after 1948, the year of Lee’s demise. Interestingly, a second mention of the Baraca-Philathea lyceum is made in the report’s Welfare section (“Negro Students”), in its Religion subtitle. Classifying Bethel’s lyceum in these terms confirms that black students’ rhetorical training was supplied off-campus, as opposed to white students’ rhetorical learning. However, such classification recognizes the work of Bethel, in support of the oratorical, social, and spiritual needs of black students. What is problematic, however, is that placing the lyceum under the Welfare section, suggesting it is a service for disadvantaged social groups, acknowledges African American students’ minority condition but does not accord the lyceum equal educational status to offerings to students enrolled at the University.

This second mention, in particular, portrayed the lyceum as “laboratory” and venue for the expression of repressed ideas (University, 1940, p. 6), thus suggesting that only trial efforts at rhetoric—possibly not relevant or professional—characterized its work. Such characterization minimized the lyceum’s educational contributions. While it aligns with commonplace understandings of student societies as sites for playful rhetorical training (Logan, 2008; Solberg, 1968; Solberg, 2000), the characterization is difficult to reconcile with that emerging from Albert Lee’s letters and programs which suggest a sense of urgency about racial themes (alternatively read as civic or political). Bethel’s lyceum was designed as a site, a crucial one, for the rhetorical development of congregants and African American university students. And while remembered as an “outreach” to black students (N. Banks, personal communication, September 12, 2009), it afforded African American citizens a space for racial advocacy, one in which rhetorical practices overlapped with Bethel’s historical, civic, and religious pursuits, and one not offered at the University.
The few texts in the Baraca-Philathea folder (mostly covering Lee’s tenure), combined with local newspaper notes about lyceum meetings, and more importantly, interpreted by senior women’s memories, reveal a history of rhetorical, parliamentary, and racial engagements that took place in close proximity to “comparable” white student offerings on campus. Its focus centered on “Everything that … [was] good for the Race and the community” (Harold D. Gray & Walter R. Thornhill, 1920, January 6, para. 2). Positioned against some of the most prominent white student literary societies at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, such as the Philomathean Society (1868-ca. 1933), the Adelphic Society (1868-ca. 1936), and the Alethenai Society (1871-ca. 1937), with which the lyceum had coexisted (albeit separately) but outlived, the Baraca-Philathea was no different. It had a similar structure given its reliance on programs—ordered outlines of features and participants—as organizational tools, and its blend of reading, discussion, music, and fraternization. But beyond the obvious differences in location, with white societies operating on campus (in a student building), although deemed extracurricular by the University’s administration, and the Baraca-Philathea lyceum functioning in the black neighborhood, I have encountered fundamental contrasts dictated by race. Race work as performed by Bethel demanded a separate location, environment, audience, and range of topics.

Indeed, Bethel’s lyceum experience was necessarily different. As Shirley Wilson Logan (2008) has remarked, university societies, whether sponsored by white or black communities, provided students with “the opportunity to apply what they were learning in discussions on a variety of topics” (p. 92). Yet, while white university students were practicing citizenship

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61 The decline of these three societies is reflected by the dates of their last mentions in The Daily Illini: For the Philomathean Society, Turning Heidelberg, 1933, April 22; for the Adelphic Society, Adelphic, 1936, November 4; and for the Alethenai Society, Another tradition, 1937, January 28. According to archival holdings, the last meetings and minutes sent to the University of Illinois Archives record the following dates: for the Philomathean, 1923; for the Adelphic, 1927; and for the Alethenai, 1916.
through rhetorical extracurricular exercises, adult church congregants and black university students were performing a cultured identity via racially-motivated themes while developing oratorical skills in service of their own self-determination locally. The debating and socializing that took place in Bethel and its lyceum mattered because no other outlets for such crucial citizenship habits were available; but the outcomes—the deliberation of racial themes—mattered to these African American citizens the most. The lyceum functioned as a literary service offered in Bethel’s premises, along with boarding, food, and spiritual support, which prompted black university students’ flow across the railroad tracks to a neighborhood where members were better represented. More importantly, Bethel’s lyceum served as an educational bridge, a racial traversing which disrupted segregation locally and made African Americans visible citizens and students despite being few in number.

3.2 Relocating Racial Discourse: “Students ought not to be involved in politics”

University students were nevertheless involved—in discussions of local and national policies and governments, on campus and in the African American neighborhood. But one kind of political rhetoric, the one which seemed of interest to white students on campus, prompted the Baraca-Philathea lyceum to challenge it in the safety of the black neighborhood, in a separate location. The racial tensions of campus climate (discussed at length in chapter 1) and the imperative to produce an alternative discourse maintained the Baraca-Philathea lyceum, its student officers, and Lee’s parliamentary training off-campus. Even more significant is Lee’s decision to relocate racial discourse to where it was indeed supported, in spite of his undeniable influence and ability which he almost certainly could have used to secure a meeting room for black students on campus, had he wished. Because Bethel used rhetoric for racial uplift, the
tensions of bringing “politics” into lyceum discussions, present at this college environment, was immaterial: Practicing advocacy, learning how to debate, and discussing current (racial) affairs saw no dissent in church premises.

As Winton U. Solberg (2000) has observed, “The habit of forming voluntary associations to advance a common cause was deeply ingrained in the American character” (p. 309). “By second nature,” he added, “students were joiners” (p. 309). In university towns, literary societies and lyceums flourished, and especially so, in rural towns or smaller communities (such as Champaign-Urbana, IL) where socialization needs were most pressing for students. Colleges were deemed “incomplete” if they lacked Greek-named student associations, which typically competed against each other in public events (Solberg, 1968, p. 193). Student literary initiatives at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign were no different, even though such “pattern of extracurricular activities lagged about a generation behind its prototype on the Atlantic Coast” (Solberg, 1968, p. 192). With few opportunities for recreation offered locally, even fewer houses and community members in the surrounding areas (Solberg, 1968, pp. 169-170), and the University’s initial resistance to sports and fraternities (Solberg, 1968, p. 299), students rushed to establish their own associations only a few days after the University had opened (March 7, 1868)—the Philomathean Society (1868-ca. 1933) and the Adelphic Society (1868-ca. 1936), for men (Solberg, 1968, p. 193).62 Years later (October 1871), newly admitted women organized the Alethenai Society (1871-ca. 1937) (Solberg, 2000, p. 309). These student organizations, however, remained divided by gender because “[President] Gregory vetoed the idea of intermingling the sexes” (Solberg, 1968, p. 193).

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62President Gregory encouraged such venues and might have even named one—the Philomathean—after his own Union College society (Solberg, 1968, p. 193). At the national level, many other organizations (including college associations) had already chosen these names for their literary societies. Examples are the Philomathean Society of New York or the Adelphic Union of Boston.
At university environments, the tensions between education and entertainment, which had been documented early in the history of literary societies (Holbrook, 1829), were present in Illinois too. Given how political engagements were perceived as distractions from education, literary organizations offered an important space for two key educational features of the late nineteenth century—the practice of oratorical skills outside the classroom and the deliberation of the contemporary issues that mattered to students. Such practices were therefore considered extracurricular. Winton Solberg reflected on the significance of the “lits” (slang, then, for campus societies) and on university authorities’ wish to sever politics from instruction. Dr. Solberg has observed:

In the … late nineteenth century … and into the early twentieth century, university officials had the, I think, curious attitude that students ought not to be involved in politics, and therefore political candidates couldn’t come on the campus … and you didn’t deal with current issues. So the literary societies are the students’ way of talking seriously about all the issues that really mattered to young people but are not touched on in their classes. (Solberg, personal communication, March 29, 2012)

Hence, to avoid an unsolicited community interest in university affairs but, more importantly, to prevent students from engaging in politics, “In December 1890 the Board of Trustees [at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign] prohibited the use of University buildings and grounds for political purposes” (Solberg, 2000, p. 49). What might have been considered “political” at the time is not entirely clear. Whether the administration’s concerns might have arisen only during electoral periods is not clear either.

The literary societies at Illinois, nevertheless, continued to meet and organize programs on university grounds at established times and locations (Figure 12, top and bottom).
These two meeting rooms, located in University Hall known today as the Illini Union (the student community center), accommodated the first two, and most prominent male student societies on campus, the Philomatheans (top) and the Adelphics (bottom).

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63 Top: photograph of the Philomatheans’ meeting room in University Hall (*Philomathean Society meeting room* [Photograph], 1884), north end of the Quad. The room is adorned by Lorado Taft’s sculpture “Excelsior” (back), created for the society. On its right wall, the society displayed its motto, “Come up Higher.” Lorado Taft was a “great American sculptor” (Solberg, 1968, p. 172) and Illinois student who received his master’s degree in 1880 (Solberg, 1968, p. 366). This image is in the public domain. Reproduced by courtesy of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Archives. Bottom: photograph of the Adelphics’ meeting room in University Hall (*Adelphic Society meeting room* [Photograph], 1884). This room is also adorned, on the back wall, by “David and Jonathan,” another of Lorado Taft’s sculptures. This image is in the public domain. Reproduced by courtesy of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Archives. Both rooms were located in University Hall on the grounds of what is now the Illini Union, the students’ community center located on the north end of the university Quad.
The societies met on Friday evenings (just like the Baraca-Philathea members), in their designated meeting rooms at University Hall\textsuperscript{64} (Solberg, 2000, p. 310), which was then the student community center. Their rooms were dignified and almost regal, adorned with imposing sculptures and epic-looking reliefs. They were comfortable and spacious, designed for hosting orators addressing an audience and for musical performances. The Philomathean meeting room (Figure 12 top), for instance, reminded members of their aspirations: With good oratory and debates, the Philos would “Come up Higher.” Beyond the railroad tracks, the Baraca-Philathea lyceum was also holding meetings in the Baraca room, an upper-level meeting room in the church, also implying the elevating nature of their business (L. Lomax, personal communication, February 28, 2009). Alternatively, the lyceum met in Bethel’s public reading center, a rental space turned in 1908 into a religious, social, and educational venue prior to the lyceum’s opening, and which the church had designed for “devotional, literary, educational meetings, socials and lectures” (Baraca, 1908, March 13, p. 6, para. 2). Rather than making use of a campus facility, Bethel’s literacy places became community projects funded by black citizens. They had not been imagined without dignity either, for at the time of the furnishing of the rooms, donations had been requested on the local press for “chairs, tables, lace curtains, crokinole boards, a large stove, carpets, rugs, dumb bells, Indian clubs and an organ or piano” (Baraca, 1908, March 13, p. 6, para. 3).\textsuperscript{65}

On campus, the “lits” were indeed aware of political figures, current national and local events, and matters of civic participation, whether they conceived of these concerns as political

\textsuperscript{64}University Hall, at the north end of the Quad, which functioned as the heart of campus, was replaced by the Illini Union in 1938 which continued to be the student (socialization and study) center.

\textsuperscript{65}Little is known—memories and local press—about the life span of Bethel’s community center; most likely, it was short lived.
or not. The Philos, for instance, demonstrated in their illustrated programs an interest in debating such issues as the benefits of political campaigns, the setting of geographic boundaries to African American suffrage, the correlation between a republican form of government (or a monarchical one) and patriotism, railroad ownership and control by the government, tenability of trials by jury, the convenience of allowing foreign capital to be invested in American industries, the acknowledgement of Cuba’s independence by the US, and the race “problem” (Philomathean, 1872-1923a). The activities of these societies were evaluated in the student newspaper (Solberg, 2000, p. 310) which further extended their civic awareness to the campus community. In its February 7, 1896 edition, for instance, *The Illini* reported on the Philos’ latest debate: “The question of uniting Champaign and Urbana [two cities and two administrations in what could be considered one geographical location],” observed the critic, “was ably discussed by Capron and Gulick [students] on the affirmative, Burt and Dull [students] on negative. The irregular debate brought out several clever speeches; also a parliamentary discussion that would have made Tom Reed turn green with envy” (Philomathean, 1896, February 7, p. 264).

Out of their meeting rooms, campus societies were equally “politically” active, but while some initiatives are commendable and demonstrate early awareness of citizenship (e.g., women’s rights), others, meant to be amusing, demonstrate lack of racial sensibilities—typical of the times. In a display of levity and civic consciousness, the Alethenai women performed in 1911 what they called a morality play (Figure 13).

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66 Two of the late nineteenth century illustrated programs produced by the Philomatheans were printed in chapter 1 (Figure 5 and Figure 6) as instances of the kinds of problematic representations of African Americans produced on campus by student societies.

67 Thomas B. Reed (1839-1902) was a Republican and speaker of the House of Representatives (1889-1991 and 1895-1899) (Thomas B. Reed, n.d.). Known as a strong and even “dictatorial” speaker, Reed “arranged for the control of the Rules Committee by the majority party in Congress” (Thomas B. Reed, n.d., para.2).
The women in this literary society dress for a May festival event held outdoors in support of women’s rights.

This performance was organized to call attention to women’s rights; women marched with such (for the time) edgy posters reading “I am a candidate for foot-ball manager,” and invited other women’s associations such as the YWCA and the Women’s League to join them. These particular women demonstrated an early understanding of women’s roles and capabilities by suggesting that women could perform male-imagined functions. Yet other public demonstrations or dramatic and musical theater representations by other student societies which had been proliferating on campus (e.g., the Dramatic Art Club, the Illiola Literary Society, the Women’s League, or The University Theatre), were less civic and rather demeaning toward African Americans (see Figure 14, top and bottom).

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68Photograph of a women’s performance during the 1911 May Fete Stunt Show (Alethenai Stunt [Photograph], 1911). Author: Lloyde, who has been deceased for more than seventy years according to the University Archives. This photograph is in the public domain. Reproduced by courtesy of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Archives.
Figure 14. Blackface student performances (ca. 1911-1934)\textsuperscript{69}

Female students—the “Burnt Cork Minstrels”—perform in blackfaces at a homecoming stunt show (ca. 1911) (top), while male students perform, also as blackfaces, in a minstrel show (1934) (bottom).

Blackface student performances had been taking place on campus and in city parades,\textsuperscript{70} occasionally, as early as 1911, and as late as 1934 (according to university archival records).

\textsuperscript{69}Top: photograph of female university students performing in blackface (Girls Homecoming Stunt Show [Photograph], ca. 1911). Reproduced by courtesy of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Archives. Bottom: photograph of student minstrel performance (Minstrel Show [Photograph], 1934). Reproduced by courtesy of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Archives.
Even when such representations were meant as “entertainment,” they invoked well-known national discourses on the inferiority of African Americans, who were not only ridiculed on campus, but were not imagined as valid citizens thus making these performances, and Bethel’s responses, highly political and certainly rhetorical—at once hostile and strategic reminders of who was denied civic participation and who was rightfully claiming it. Collectively, these images—the Alethenai stunt and the two blackface performances—demonstrate the complexity of mixed displays of “political” engagement by white students at Illinois.

Although scholastic ability played a key role in determining access to campus societies, race further complicated it: By foregrounding those “infrequently” met African American students (those “talented” ones), the University (e.g., the “Negro Students” report) and middle-class African Americans (e.g., Lee) built a discourse of access (and therefore lack of discrimination) based on perceived merit. Merit (and consequently character) was, however, a measure of access applied to all students regardless of race. “About a third of all students,” Winton Solberg (2000) has found, “belonged to one of these groups [literary societies], which enlisted most of the seniors and the ablest, most prominent students” (p. 309). Hence, exclusivity characterized these venues, but given the “debatable” character of African Americans, their participation in campus societies was variable, fluid, and restricted. More importantly, I claim African American participation was also a matter of choice—a rhetorical move to counter their vulnerability and likely harassment on campus societies, black students chose to attend Bethel’s lyceum with Lee being the decisive voice in such relocation. Most likely, Lee wished to avoid campus scrutiny of racial themes, too.

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\[ ^{70} \] A photograph of the Y-minstrels 1914 float is printed in chapter 4 (Contesting Institutional Memory section), an instance of a town and political parade in Champaign-Urbana, IL.
Since black student enrollment at the University was not high, their participation in student clubs and societies could not be substantial either: African American students did not have the critical mass to influence the activities and debate topics of mainstream societies. But as their enrollment increased, a few “remarkable” ones were admitted (or chose to belong) to campus publications, musical associations, theatrical clubs, and literary societies. But beyond their minority status, the conditions of their access to mainstream venues determined student choices (led by Lee) to relocate to the black neighborhood. With black citizens’ visibility being a matter a “political” concern for campus societies, Bethel’s sites offered the most steadfast and dignified images of African Americans, thus prompting a flow from campus to the black neighborhood. Access, as a virtuous quality, should therefore be understood as a matter of racial selection and individual capability. While membership for both campus constituencies, white and black, depended on demonstrated scholarly talent, the national discourses regarded African American talent with disbelief, deeming participating African Americans “exceptional” (Logan, 2008; Royster, 2000). In Bethel, of course, were not exceptional but the norm.

Race work discourses were conditioned too (and might still be) by educational attainment and credentials. Racial uplift via rhetorical work is often broadly conceived as the work of “talented” black individuals or well-known rhetors (Du Bois, 1903/2003; Miller, 2003; Moon, Albert Lee, who was commissioned in 1936 by the Alumni Association (and its secretary, historian Carl Stephens) to compile the names of African American students, by studying university directories and aided by his “compiler’s memory” (Lee, ca. 1942b, p. 1, para. 3) recovered the names of 983 African American students for a period of fifty years, from the 1890s to ca. 1937 (Lee, ca. 1942b, pp. 1-2, para. 4). The result of his unpaid recoveries is a collection of names, enrollment and graduation dates, and names and addresses of families hosting black students (Lee, 1942a).

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In chapter 1, Campus Racial Climate section, I discuss some insights into local systems of disbelief, and observations which reproduce national discourses: A white students observed, “there are some negroes who are better than some white people, but they are very few and very far between” (Jacob Goldstein, 1929, October 28, para. 2).
1972). In order to have access to an organized society for rhetorical training at all, one must, as Shirley Wilson Logan (2008) has observed, live in an urban location and be able to afford a middle or upper class education. Shirley Logan has further noted that “only a small percentage of nineteenth-century African Americans participated in [lyceums and literary societies]” (p. 69). Her research into these sites has consistently rendered the most visible and known black rhetors such as Samuel E. Cornish, Frederick Douglass, Mary Church Terrell, or T. Thomas Fortune. Her archival explorations have rendered as well the most influential northeastern cities such as Boston (MA), New York (NY), Philadelphia (PA), and Washington (DC). African Americans in smaller localities, however, conducted comparable work.

The extracurricular activities in which black students engaged on campus, as documented by the “Negro Students” report (University, 1940), included *The Illini* (campus newspaper),73 the Philomathean Literary Society, the Illinois Inter-Collegiate Debating Team, the Honorary Debating Fraternity, the Class Dramatics, WILL radio station, Orchesis (student dance society), the Varsity Debating Team, the Spanish Club, the Glee Club, and the University Band, for instance (University, 1940, pp. 3-4). Not surprisingly, only a few black students were named in the report (which meant to cover late nineteenth century black student history, since the first enrollment of black students in 1887 until 1940) as participants in these student organizations: George W. Riley75 and William Walter Smith76 (Figure 15, left and right) have been the most

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73*The Illini* began as a campus monthly newspaper in 1871, and became a biweekly publication in 1880 and “a literary journal with some local news” (Solberg, 2000, p. 275). During 1899-1900, during the editorship of an African American student, William Walter Smith began to be published on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays (Solberg, 2000, p. 276). In September 1947, it became *The Daily Illini* and has continued operations to date (*The Daily Illini*, 1874-to date).

74The first African American who enrolled for one academic year (1887-1888) was Jonathan Rogan (“Guide,” 1994, Introduction, para. 1).

75The “Negro Students” report (1940) acknowledged George W. Riley as a snare drum player for the University Band during his years as a student, 1894-1897 (p. 4). The “Guide” (1994) remembered him as “a special
remembered. Also listed in the report were William Jasper Prince, Reginald F. Fisher, Audrey Benton, Marian Bartlett, Celeste Emma Cantrell, and Matheus L. Porter Jr. (University, 1940, pp. 3-4). Of these students, only William Jasper Prince is recognized not as a church member (steward, or class leader, which would have been positions offered to young congregants), but as a participant in the Baraca Bible class (Bethel, 1938, pp. 10-11). Few who could join (or were admitted) to extracurricular venues, possibly by virtue of a recognized and desired talent; fewer were part of both settings, Bethel and the University.

student in Art and Design from 1894 to 1897” (Introduction, para. 1). The Illini (1896) noted as well how the band was “proud of its colored member, George W. Riley. He is quite an artist on the snare drum” (The University Band, 1896, February 7, p. 264). The Illini (1897) documents Riley’s life, his university accomplishments, and his decease of typhoid malaria in 1897; funeral services were held in Bethel (George Washington Riley, 1897, September 24, p. 6). Riley (October 26, 1874-June 11, 1897) was interred in Mt. Hope Cemetery in Champaign, IL, on June 14 1897 (Mt. Hope, 1998b). He had also repainted a mural at Bethel’s new (not the modern one) church ca. 1894-1897; his name, not listed in the 1938 History’s appendix, is however remembered as one of “Bethel’s finest products” (Bethel, 1938, p. 7). He was the son of Louana Riley (Bethel, 2011), Bethel member, stewardess, contributor of Bethel’s memories during Lee’s times (Bethel, 1938), and the woman after whom the Women’s Missionary Society is named today.

William Walter Smith has been recognized by the University of Illinois in more than one medium. In the “Negro Students” report he was acknowledged as an editor for The Illini and president of the Philomathean society (1899-1900) among other posts (University, 1940, p. 3). Smith was also recognized by the University of Illinois Archives, with his portrait heading the “Guide to African-American Research Resources,” an online list of archival resources documenting the history of African Americans at the University of Illinois (“Guide,” 1994). “The first African-American to graduate,” the “Guide” observed, “was William Walter Smith with an A.B. in Literature and Arts in 1900 and a B.S. in Civil Engineering in 1907” (“Guide,” 1994, Introduction, para. 1). Smith was “an African American from Homer [IL], a student in Literature and Arts, and a member of his class football team, the rifle team, the YMCA, the student Republican Club, and the Philomathean Literary Society” (Solberg, 2000, p. 276). Winton Solberg (2000) has observed how, under Smith’s editorship (1899-1900), The Illini moved from the official university news media to a site for student opinions (p. 276).

Prince was an African American student whose name is listed in the 1935-1936 “Colored students” list as a member of the Kappa Alpha Psi (Lee, 1936). He participated in Bethel’s Baraca class (Lee, 1927, October 7, para. 3). Fisher was an African American student whose name is recorded in the 1931-1932 “Colored students” list, as an Alpha Phi Alpha member (Lee, 1932). Benton was an African American student whose name is recorded in the 1931-1932 “Colored students” list not belonging to any student association (Lee, 1932). Bartlett is listed in the Alpha Kappa Alpha list of women students (Lee, 1936). Cantrell’s name is only listed in the President’s Office index cards as an LAS student (1928-1930).

118
Figure 15. African American student visibility on campus (ca. 1897-1907)\textsuperscript{78}

George W. Riley (left photograph, from left, lower row, sitting behind the drum) posing for the University of Illinois Symphonic Band and William Walter Smith (right) were two of the most known African American students for their participation in student organizations.

In contrast, Albert Lee, in his letter inviting members of the black fraternities to participate in Bethel’s Sunday school, claimed that “Hundreds of men have passed through the class [Baraca Bible class] and gone out into the world helped by its influence” (Lee, 1927, October 7, para. 3). Here too, the invitation appeared to be directed at those who seemed most promising, for the Baraca class was, according to Lee, “worthy of … [these young men’s] beat”

\textsuperscript{78}Left: George W. Riley (ca. 1894)—the student behind the drum, lower left side of the photograph. Photograph published originally in The Illini on April 2, 1897 (“University of Illinois Military Band,” 1897, April 2, p. n. p. [unnumbered leaf following p. 912]), which is now in the public domain. Part of the A. Austin Harding Papers, 1895-1958 (University of Illinois Military Band [Photograph], n.d.). Reproduced by courtesy of the Sousa Archives and Center for American Music, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Right: portrait of William Walter Smith (ca. 1900-1907), the first African American student to graduate in 1900 with an A.B. degree and in 1907 with a B.S. in Civil Engineering (William Walter Smith [Portrait], ca. 1900-1907). Studio: unknown. The portrait is displayed online in the “Guide to African-American Research Resources,” the online repository of archival materials housed at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Archives (“Guide,” 1994). Based on an analysis of the four factors of Fair Use and on the Fair Use Checklist (http://copyright.columbia.edu) issued by Kenneth D. Crews, Director of the Copyright Advisory Office at Columbia University Libraries, I am asserting Fair Use provision for the inclusion of this item. Reproduced by courtesy of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Archives.
Lee finally made his case in this letter by naming a few prominent alumni who had contributed to Bethel’s Sunday school: Roy Young (football player); H. H. Wheeler (also a football player and former president of the class); Milton L. Stevenson (hurdler and also former president of the Baraca class); Earl Dickerson (class of 1914); and Ben M. Moseby. Lee named as well William Jasper Prince (a varsity debater who had been included in the “Negro Students” report and in Bethel’s 1938 history), Julian Lewis (violinist and former president), Walter Thomas Bailey (architect), and St. Elmo Brady (Lee, 1927, October 7, para. 3).

Lesser-known rhetors (e.g., Albert Lee or those students active in lyceum and church events), not the ones whose lectures and speeches have found their way to anthologies, but those whose work might have been forgotten in an archive, understood the sociocultural conditions of their environments and interpreted and fashioned as well a middle class self-determination project, with all of the critical elements of good citizenship which Bethel had already identified and displayed—dignity, literacy, civility, and economy. The Baraca-Philathea lyceum was one such project: Stemming from a local middle class church, not all congregants could choose to pursue higher education or even graduate. Only a few of Bethel members, including Lee, enrolled as college students or completed their education during the interwar period. But those

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79 These African American students were all listed in Lee, ca. 1937b. A portrait of Earl B. Dickerson, honorary chairman of board, Supreme Life Insurance Company of America, hangs in a hall at the Illini Union, the student community and study building.

80 Lewis graduated in 1912 (Seniors, 1912).

81 Bailey obtained a B.S. in 1904 and a Master in Architecture in 1910 (Lee, ca. 1931).

82 Brady obtained an M.A. in 1914 and his Ph.D. in 1916 (Lee, ca. 1931).

83 Other African American students whom Lee (ca. 1931) mentioned in his letter are: Thomas B. Mayo (A.B. 1918), E. M. A. Chandler (Ph.D. 1917), George A. Ferguson (B.S. 1917), Ellis W. Stewart (A.B. and B.S. 1920), and Thomas Jackson (no information has been found about him in the Negro Matriculants List) (Lee, 1942a).
who did (or could), were at the forefront of their church societies. Yet Albert Lee, even without a degree, represented the ablest African American man. Hence, performing a dignified African American citizen appears to be selective, and is removed from those whom the church had wished to include—working class African Americans and middle class university-bred white citizens. That is, locally, in the black neighborhood, and within Bethel’s premises, uplift is understood by church members via recognition of outstanding black individuals.

Sites of rhetorical education were therefore significant for African Americans because they addressed the pressing need for racial uplift and afforded the development of black political literacies early in the lyceum movement (Porter, 1936; F. B. Williams, 1900/1969). Literacy studies scholars have agreed that literacy and rhetorical ability for African Americans have both been tools for sociopolitical action since the mid nineteenth century (Leeman, 2008; Logan 1995; Logan, 2004; Logan, 2008; McHenry, 2002; Ray, 2005; Royster, 2000). These sites have often allowed for the development of rhetorical ability as an unintended consequence of their political engagements. Jacqueline Jones Royster (2000) elucidated black communities’ understanding of literacy demonstrated broadly as a sociocultural ability to use language intently to “articulate lives and experiences” (p. 45). Applied to mid- to late nineteenth and early twentieth century black America, these abilities have translated into rhetorical productions, all concerned with effective black citizenship. Similarly, Shirley Wilson Logan (2008) has argued for the interrogation of the means by which African Americans have “developed the rhetorical

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84 Some prominent Bethel members, who had been university students are Harold D. Gray (lyceum president), Walter R. Thornhill (lyceum secretary), Erma P. Scott Bridgewater (Bethel member and activist, now deceased), and of course Albert Lee (leader of many of Bethel’s organizations).

85 Lee took classes during the 1897-1898 academic year in the College of Literature and Arts (Lee, ca. 1937b; Solberg, 2000, p. 48). “Although he returned to working full time in 1898, he didn’t give up hope of achieving an education. He studied privately, reading university textbooks in his free time” (Mabry, 1989, p. E3).
astuteness to negotiate a hostile environment … and [have] established a common language … to interact with and to challenge … this environment …” (p. 3). Hence, black political activism and rhetorical training (including oratorical display in lecture circuits and literary society events) have mutually informed each other, and those most competent African Americans—both nationally and locally—have effectively (and actively) used both tools to demonstrate their civility and to argue for their rights.

Accordingly, the Baraca-Philathea lyceum, arising through a need for political self-determination, also functioned as a site of rhetorical aid and educational improvement or, borrowing Deborah Brandt’s (2001) descriptive term, a sponsor of African American literacies. Bethel members have developed a political ethos out of the overlapping nature of their work, which was communal, religious, racial, and rhetorical—out of identifying a need and responding to it (E. Merrifield, personal communication, November 12, 2009). With Albert Lee’s vision, Bethel’s lyceum work extended campus amusement, levity, and socialization, and became a site removed from white scorn. Yet, some senior congregants have claimed, “Never [politics] from the pulpit” (M. Benson, personal communication, September 10, 2009), or “We were never political” (L. Gray, personal communication, September 18, 2009).86 While some in their recollections distanced themselves from partisan politics, and others were amused at memories of church politics (E. Rivers, personal communication, November 12, 2009), still other senior members could not recall a Bible study meeting—the men’s study—without a discussion of

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86 Years later (1978), church artistic expressions were also removed in Bethel’s memory from politics. During her visit and campus presentation (October 2009), artist Angela Rivers, whose mural I introduced in the coda to my Introduction, has also emphasized how her work—the mural—“was not intended to be political” (Rivers, 2009, October 15). She frames her work as a “reanimation” of the black neighborhood, and even a civic initiative given how the community had to “push the city to do things” to support local employment initiatives—Comprehensive Employment Training Act, CETA (Rivers, 2009, October 15).
current racial affairs. (L. Lomax, personal communication, February 28, 2009).\textsuperscript{87} Being political entailed close attention to how their race has determined their status. The foremost rhetorical (and political) act, however, had been that of even conceiving, designing, and opening an African American literary society in the midst of mainstream ones, and the performing of a literary ethos locally. Hence, the strong rhetorical force of their own self-determination locally prompted the members of the Baraca-Philathea lyceum (and Albert Lee) to oppose apathy at church premises. In particular, awareness of national and local discourses served as catalysts of their local work.

To accomplish this work, race discussions were frequent components in lyceum services. Because he understood the incongruity of his own visibility—an influential man in the black neighborhood and in the President’s Office, but fulfilling, when needed, on-campus service tasks (Lee, 1942b, President’s House, p. 33)—Lee paid special attention to extemporaneous speech on the economic conditions supporting race advancement. An annotated set of programs and extempore topics (Figure 16, top and bottom) enumerated the following concerns: reasonable expectations from the NAACP Champaign branch; possibilities of engineering as a chosen career for African Americans; black students in Champaign and Urbana High Schools, statistics, progress, and activities; African American businesses in the twin cities (Champaign-Urbana, IL); African American migration to the North, benefits and dangers; and motivating fraternization among race students of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. The lyceum’s concerns align with Jacqueline Jones Royster’s (2000) observations that “African American societies have consistently shown evidence of a basic mandate—that is, the need for those forming such alliances to operate in conscious regard of political and economic forces” (p. 208). Lyceum

\textsuperscript{87}Currently, Sunday services and bulletins, with a clear religious orientation, communicate congregants of Bethel’s ongoing educational projects (‘adopting’ a school program), but also reminds them that “Obama needs our help.”
concerns suggest an understanding of what Jacqueline Royster would term situated ethos, as black societies invoked matters arising from power and access differentials that compromised African American progress—namely segregation, restricted labor, the extra-legal practice of lynching, and the dangers of the Ku Klux Klan. Moreover, these topics and the lyceum programs suggest practices of intellectual engagement and invented ethos (Royster, 2000, p. 168); Bethel created a rhetorical space of its own as a much-needed response to local racial differences.

![Extempore topics for lyceum meetings (ca. 1923-1924)](image)

Figure 16. Extempore topics for lyceum meetings (ca. 1923-1924)

Lee composed a series of extempore discussion topics, to which he added participant names, university students and Bethel members.

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88 Set of annotated topics lists found in the Albert Lee Papers (Lee, 1920-1924b) in the Baraca-Philathea Folder at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Archives. I took these photographs at the Archives. Reproduced by permission of Bethel AME Church.
Albert Lee, acutely aware of his times, made sure that the lyceum’s extempore topics covered national racially-motivated violence against African Americans, and their efforts to counter such violence, including: “The outlook for the Dyer Bill [Dyer antilynching bill],” “The defeat of the Dyer Bill,”89 “Governor Walton’s stand in Oklahoma,”90 “The Klan: present tendencies and outlook,” and “Are the activities against the KKK well directed?” Lee’s political interest in lynching is demonstrated, too, in a 1924 letter he sent, as a concerned citizen, to Congress (Representative Allen F. Moore for Illinois) requesting the favorable consideration toward the Dyer antilynching bill.91 The Klan was not an abstract topic, but a visible force in the Champaign community. Given his familiarity with campus life and student initiatives, Lee must have also been influenced by his close knowledge of the university racial environment and of the controversial university fraternity named after the Ku Klux Klan in the early twentieth century.92

89The Dyer Anti-Lynching Bill, originally a 1901 NAACP proposal written by co-founder Albert E. Pillsbury, was presented for consideration to the House of Representatives by Leonidas C. Dyer (Missouri) (United States Congress, n. d.a) in April 1918. Not without tension (or delay), the Housed passed the bill four years later (January 26, 1922), but additional dilatory tactics prevented its passing in the Senate. The bill established both pecuniary and criminal charges to those abetting or ignoring lynching (LOC, 1918, May 7, About this item, para. 1).

90The stand to which Lee refers is the martial law against the KKK implemented by Governor John C. Walton in Oklahoma in 1923 given increased violent incidents in the state. Walton was impeached in 1923 as retaliation, although his administration was marred by allegations of dishonesty. However, “In 1923 the Oklahoma legislature passed an anti-mask bill aimed at curbing Klan violence” (O’Dell, n.d., Ku Klux Klan, para. 7).

91A close reading and analysis of this letter and the response he received from Moore can be found in chapter 4, Advocacy from within subtitle.

92The University of Illinois Archives holds records (e.g., yearbooks, The Daily Illini, or the Urbana Daily Courier) documenting the existence of a very secretive student organization (interfraternity honor society) named Ku Klux Klan from ca. 1906 to 1925. In 1923, the organization had chosen a different name—Tu-Mas. During the early 1920s, the organization called attention to itself when members were seen wearing robes and hoods to dances; as a result, it was prohibited from holding any more dances by the university administration. The group ceased activities in the 1930s (Ku Klux Klan, 2009). In a FAQ online report discussing what kinds of inferences can and cannot be made from records, and naming the kinds of holdings implying the existence of this organization, the University of Illinois Archives has claimed, “But absent any direct evidence, one cannot say authoritatively that the campus group was connected with or had the same racist aims as the national Ku Klux Klan (KKK)” (Ku Klux Klan, 2009, para. 1). This researcher is however interested in knowing more about this curious coincidence—the choice of a nationally-recognized name for a campus association.
Lee’s letter must have certainly responded to church concerns as well: Bethel members remember local Ku Klux Klan marches (e.g., down Neil Street) and more than one incident involving a burning cross placed on porches in the black homes of prominent congregants as early as the mid-1920s, up to the early 1950s (L. Lomax, personal communication, March 3, 2009)\textsuperscript{93}. These extempore topics (on racial violence), and Lee’s letter to Congress, are situated at times when the twin cities were a revival of the order locally (K. K. K., 1922, August 7; Klan, 1922, August 9; Officers, 1921, October 4).

A cursory examination of the Baraca-Philathea lyceum’s records might suggest that it was just another literary society. A close scrutiny, however, proves it was not. Albert Lee’s organizational letters and lyceum programs suggest otherwise. Student productions on campus suggest otherwise. When a community’s political determination has been conditioned by segregation, when campus representations are openly inappropriate, engaging in neutral themes and practice exercises—devoid of racial concerns—was not pressing at all at the Baraca-Philathea lyceum, in Bethel, or for Lee. During his tenure, and when Bethel’s rhetorical education and political activism interacted (quite possibly, the most), congregants and black university students acted across contexts—teaching and learning advocacy, performing dignity and making themselves visible, and displaying an economic, political, and literary ethos. During those moments of continuous traversing from their black middle class safe places to mainstream, university and city ones, they became de jure political bodies traversing racial boundaries and

\textsuperscript{93}The Nelson family with a long trajectory in Bethel and with male members in the service duty overseas during World War I, have lived through the experience of two burning crosses in their private homes some time during the mid-1920s (on North Market Street in Champaign, IL, by the railroads) and in 1942 (on North Fifth Street and East Eureka Street in Champaign, IL). When Cecil Nelson Sr., the Nelson sisters’ father and a World War I veteran, became the first African American head janitor in Booker T. Washington Elementary School (Champaign, IL)—located in the North End—the school was threatened too with another burning cross soon after its opening, at an unknown date during 1949-1950 (L. Lomax, personal communication, March 3, 2009).
performing race work. Quite naturally, African American congregants and students ought to be involved in politics.

3.3 The Rhetoric of Discipline: Forming Character through Writing

In 1948, upon hearing the news of Lee’s passing, George D. Stoddard, University of Illinois President (1946-1953), remarked, “Albert Lee was a man of substance and one of Illinois’ finest traditions” (eBlackCU, 2010-2012d, para. 7). Lee played an indispensable role in the development (and strengthening) of the African American ethos in Bethel and the black neighborhood in Champaign-Urbana, IL. By virtue of his local activism and teachings, in Bethel’s collective memory, Lee is remembered as a man who was “good to his race” (L. Gray, personal communication, September 18, 2009). But beyond the mundane, such as cautioning young African Americans during his walks around the neighborhood about going on the train tracks (E. Merrifield, personal communication, November 12, 2009), Lee became a great resource for Bethel given his dual membership—his formal labor ties to campus and his racial bonds to the black community. Most notably, beyond “providing … [African American students] with scholastic, social, and moral guidance and representing their interests to the administration” (“Guide,” 1994, Introduction, para. 2), Lee understood the vulnerability of their nascent visibility on campus. Thus, Lee constructed Bethel’s and black students’ lyceum as part of his uplift program, one which, in response to what he perceived to be mis-education, required dignified performances via local traversing, embodied literacies, oratorical abilities, decorous settings, and, most notably, a disciplined character. All of these constituted nonetheless daunting expectations for lower economic classes of African Americans.

94George D. Stoddard, 1953.
Not unlike posing for an individual or a family portrait, middle- and upper-class African Americans aimed to demonstrate in their public visibility an image of respectability found in their posture, clothing, artifacts surrounding their settings, and their literacy tools (hooks, 1995; Smith, 2000; Smith, 2004; Willis, 2000). Bethel has translated such images of respectability into their public literary events. For as Kevin K. Gaines (1996) has observed, “these still portraits of refinement [alluding to middle class photography] sprang to life in performance rituals, often based in the church, of elocution, preaching, and in the jubilee and quartette singing of Negro spirituals.” (p. 69). Being a good Methodist, an enthusiast Mason, and a “stickler for rules and regulations” (E. Bridgewater, personal communication, September 17, 2009) Lee further aimed at perfectibility. Thus, he conceived what I would term a rhetoric of discipline—a demonstration of character he modeled with writing (and via the content) of his letters, programs, histories, and behavioral manuals as organizational tools, which he expected church members and students to implement in their public behaviors and church events. Lee demanded from lyceum officers—black university students—character in their speech, propriety in their visibility, and discipline in their habits. He identified what Charles W. Chesnutt (1881/1999) had theorized about literary societies: That they disciplined the mind by nurturing self-possession, self-control, respect for constituted authority, and acquaintance with the laws of government (pp. 16-17). Lee further demanded from them attendance, punctuality, and front-stage visibility. Accordingly, Lee emphasized in a lyceum event the quality of the program. “We must have our programs of such a character,” he insisted, “that it will be an honor to appear upon them” (Albert R. Lee, 1922, November 15, para. 2).
Lee was appointed president of the Baraca-Philathea lyceum in 1922, for what was supposed to be a one-year term (November 1922-November 1923);\textsuperscript{95} his tenure, however, extended a few years into the 1920s (ca. 1924).\textsuperscript{96} Being already engaged in many other church committees he did not appear too eager to assume this responsibility. Bethel members, however, knew who they were electing for the task; Lee knew what to do since, as a parliamentarian, he had always held a place in every lyceum program (W. R. Thornhill, 1920, January 5, para. 1).

“Against my desire and judgment,” he wrote in his first letter addressing lyceum officers (whom he addressed as “co-workers” as well), “I was selected as the President of the Baraca-Philathea Lyceum” (Albert R. Lee, 1922, November 15, para. 1). Lee continued, “The purpose of my election at this time was said to be to ‘put the Lyceum on its feet’” (1922, November 15, para. 1). He immediately laid out his plans for the officers and forcefully, in the manner of Lee, requested their cooperation. In particular, he laid out his vision: “The success of the lyceum lay in its programs,” he contended (Albert R. Lee, 1922, November 15, para. 2).

And a good program, he thought, should balance its number of literary and musical offerings (Lee, ca. 1923). In developing his vision, Lee (1922, November 15) outlined the ideal features of a program, one which aimed to be “mental feast,” in Shirley Wilson Logan’s terms (2008), for an interested audience:

The literary numbers should include readings, declamations, papers, orations, extempores \textit{[sic]} on current question, and an occasional debate. The musical numbers should include

\textsuperscript{95}Lyceum officers (university students), on the other hand, were elected for a six-month period. It does not become clear from reading Lee’s letters what the length of the tenures were for the vice presidents, secretary, treasurer, or critic, for instance.

\textsuperscript{96}Two 1924 programs archived in the Baraca-Philathea folder identify C. Felder. Lane as president of the lyceum. Lane could have been an interim president or merely presiding those particular lyceum meetings as some of Lee’s letters suggested. His name is not listed on Lee’s Negro Matriculants List (Lee, 1942a) or Bethel’s members’ list (as an appendix to its 1938 history).
vocal and instrumental. The vocal might comprise solos, duett [sic], trios, quartets, or even choruses. The instrumental, might be made up from piano, stringed, reed, and wind instruments. (para. 2)

Given how student officers carried the responsibility for securing numbers and inviting orators (two numbers and two guests per officer), in this letter Lee identified for black students the kinds of performances that would have been uplifting or informative for the community (Figure 17).

Figure 17. A report on a Baraca-Philathea program (ca. 1923)

In this report (most likely a press note), Lee listed the lyceum numbers for that night—alternating readings and orchestral and voice performances, ending with an open discussion, and the customary journal and editor’s observations.

While vocal arts were suitable means of lyceum recreation, aiming to cultivate higher tastes Lee suggested folk songs be chosen only occasionally (Albert R. Lee, 1922, November 15, para. 3). He even framed any display of levity within proper limits: News and humorous readings are

97I took the photograph at the University Archives. Program housed in the Albert Lee Papers, Baraca-Philathea Lyceum Folder (Albert Lee Papers, 1912, 1917-1928a), at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Archives. Reproduced by permission of Bethel AME Church.
acceptable, but “we will not make our jokes too personal,” he suggested (Albert R. Lee 1922, November 15, para. 5).

The lyceum program, as imagined in Lee’s letters, provided officers had followed his directives, further reinforced his rhetoric of discipline by organizing the evening in four movements—an opening with a formulaic call to order, music, prayer, and attendance list; a business meeting with the reading of minutes, putting of new business, and parliamentary drills; the program itself with the customary journal and critic times; and a coda for an occasional Biblical farewell, a Mizpah or a benediction, and a social hour (Figure 18, left and right).

Figure 18. Annotated programs for the Baraca-Philathea lyceum (1924)

With annotations about speakers, Lee registered lyceum features with an opening, business meeting, the program, and a coda and social ending.

98 Found in Genesis 31:49 as a symbol of a bond between two people: “May the Lord keep watch between you and me when we are away from each other.” It might have served as a parting benediction. This expression closely resembles in meaning the closing phrase of Sunday services benediction, “Until we meet again.”

99 I took the photographs at the University Archives. Programs filed in the Albert Lee Papers, Baraca-Philathea Lyceum Folder (Albert Lee Papers, 1912, 1917-1928a) housed at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Archives. Reproduced by permission Bethel AME Church.
In his “Policy of the Baraca Lyceum,” Lee (ca. 1923) distinguished regular from special features. Extensive oratorical practice characterized the regular features—parliamentary drills, talks (extempore or prepared), conferences, and quotations, and literary readings. The special features, which entailed longer or more elaborate numbers—recessionals, debates, political conventions (or parliamentary meetings), guest lectures, weekly trails, and plays—did focus on the oratorical as well, as a mode of performance, and demonstration of a cultured character.

Lee framed in his letters a lyceum protocol: responsibilities, audience, schedule, and fraternization. “We want our business carried on in a businesslike manner in keeping with intelligent young people,” he stipulated (Albert R. Lee, 1922, November 15, para. 4). He made sure black students conducted themselves as fine and responsible hosts. He also determined: “I want the officers to sit in front, and take an active part in the business, leading in the discussions and making of motions. I am going to reserve a place for each officer to sit on the platform” (Albert R. Lee, 1922, November 15, para. 4), thus anticipating active deliberation among participants. Lee had also imagined student officers as “publicity agents” (Albert R. Lee, 1922, November 15, para. 6), in charge of both selecting numbers and lecturers, and spreading the news of meetings.

Even though any community member could sit in on lectures, Lee (1922, November 15) insisted that only high school and university students, university faculty, and professional men (para. 2) could partake in this society, thus further framing these events as highly literate, and indeed exclusive. Being a no-nonsense lyceum organizer, Lee found tardiness—an aspect of the decline of literary societies which I discuss in the following section—unacceptable (Lee, ca. 1923). “We want our meetings to start earlier than formerly. Not later than 8:30. Let each officer be there on time, and ask your participant on the program to be there at 8:30,” Lee insisted
Lee’s reorganizational efforts focused on attendance and on how revamping the lyceum’s programs would translate into larger audiences by satisfying the need for local entertainment for African Americans. Concerns for attendance precede Lee’s initiative: The lyceum’s prior administration had been insistent on attendance, too, asking the black community to “boost and encourage the Lyceum by … [their] attendance” (Harold D. Gray & Walter R. Thornhill, 1920, January 6, para. 2). Lee was also planning on enforcing a non-denominational design for the lyceum—its original configuration—in order to secure participation. Lee’s inaugural letter announced too that the lyceum might stand in for the lectures originally planned by Bethel’s Bible school, although conceding that the matter would be discussed later. Considering how church places and events typically overlapped in Bethel (productively so) and, more importantly, given Lee’s determination to offer memorable literary programs for students and adults in the community, it is not surprising that he would seek to distance the lyceum’s identity from that of a religious ritual, and avoid the impression of an identical offering. Thus, his image for the lyceum distinguishes a once-a-month Friday evening enlightenment in addition to, and separate from, a weekly Sunday devotion—education of the mind and moral education. However, once more because he was faithful Methodist, some of his lyceum programs ended with a Mizpah, which beyond its religious significance—the supplication for protection at the physical distance of two friends—is a remembrance of an abiding racial bond. That is, Lee repurposes a church
benediction, and uses it to affirm community: When members meet again, it will be with those of the race.

Lee was of course the overseer of discipline and good habits. While university faculty was excluded from student society exercises, Lee was always present and held a tight control over proceedings and organization—from his letters to the actual programs, to the behavioral manuals that he composed even for Bible study, and which closely followed parliamentary language. Free from faculty intervention and campus observation, student officers were commissioned with the outlining of programs, which Lee appraised. Winton Solberg (2000) has written, “Each [student] society elected a designated critic who was charged with the duty of evaluating the performance of the speakers” (p. 310). Lee’s position as critic afforded increased intervention into these students’ rhetorical training. Solberg (2000) further observed, “Although generous with praise for well-prepared talks that provided information and showed originality, critics could be harsh” (Solberg, 2000, p. 310). And Lee could certainly be a harsh critic. His letters to lyceum further served as occasions for evaluation, recommendations, criticism, and encouragement of officers. On October 5, 1923, Lee observed, “[the lyceum] has not measured up to our ideas, but has functioned, and has done some good” (Albert Lee, 1923, October 5, para. 2). Lee imagined even better performances.

Albert Lee’s system of rules, however, was mostly directed at black students. Lee had wished to mold their character by assigning them to lyceum duties, by teaching them rhetorical habit. Through his conferences with officers prior to lyceum meetings and the regular letters he sent to these black students, Lee conveyed a sense of urgency about the need to gather people and produce outstanding lyceum programs. His writing therefore becomes an activist pursuit, his

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100 The Baraca Manual is an example of Lee’s organization of student initiation, class meetings, and Sunday sessions (Lee, 1928).
own intervention into the collegiate experience of black university students. He prompted lyceum officers to excel in finding literary material, guest speakers, and performers. Following his appointment, in his November 28, 1922 letter, Lee reviewed the outcomes of the previous meetings: “The program was good, but many who had promised to participate failed us, and we were forced to the expedient of supplying the omissions by extempores [sic]” (Albert R. Lee, 1922, November 28, para. 1). Lee was strict; he recommended officers not to count again on those who had missed their numbers that evening (para. 1). His letters were not shy in signaling disappointment: “We were able to start a little bit earlier than ever before, but we were not able to start at 8:30. Too many of the officers were absent at that time” (para. 1). Such behavior appeared to be frequent regardless of his policy on punctuality (Lee, c.a. 1923) which might suggest decline, but also implicated the difficulties of moving from campus to the black community. He reminded officers to arrive on time, call on their participants to be on time, sit on the platform, and be active in the business and parliamentary drills (para. 2). But he could be generous with praise when appropriate: “The song service, and the orchestra were features which were enjoyed by all, and which we must encourage and make a part of each meeting” (para. 1).

Lee had the foresight to realize that the Baraca-Philathea lyceum was a suitable venue for the practice of parliamentary law—the organization of deliberative meetings. He understood what Charles W. Chesnutt (1881/1999), late in the history of literary societies, had already observed about parliamentary work:

> Experience has laid down certain rules which will enable a body of men to act together in harmony, and decide in the shortest time those questions which they have met to discuss. Under our system of government, the democratic form, every intelligent citizen is likely, almost certain to be called upon at some time to take part in a public meeting, or to fill
some public office. Hence it is perfectly clear that every intelligent citizen should acquaint himself with the rules of parliamentary procedure. (p. 16)

Lee anticipated for these citizens a need for assembly. He had imagined Bethel’s literary society as a deliberative body, a place for the discussion of racial issues and the proposal of actions. Being an accomplished parliamentarian (E. Rivers, personal communication, November 12, 2009), Lee molded student’s and member’s literacies through parliamentarian drills, debates, and elocution. Discipline was further demonstrated through the learning of procedure (Figure 19).

Figure 19. Parliamentary work: Form of putting a motion (ca. 1923)\(^{101}\)

At the end of a written program, Lee adds a typewritten note about the language needed to put a motion during the business segment of a lyceum meeting.

Occasionally, Lee would include a concluding note for officers with the words to be used by speakers in putting motions (e.g., adopting a committee report which carries a resolution).

Members recalled that adults read and memorized the Robert’s Rules of Order for deliberative assemblies (Robert, 1889), for conducting business during discussions and debates, and for learning persuasion. Henry M. Robert (1889), the author of these rules Lee and Bethel

\(^{101}\)I took the photograph at the University Archives. Final notes of an October 27, ca. 1923-1924 lyceum program, Baraca-Philathea folder in the Albert Lee Papers (Albert Lee Papers, 1912, 1917-1928a) housed at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Archives. Reproduced by permission of Bethel AME Church.
members learned, noted, “The vast number of societies, political, literary, scientific, benevolent and religious, … though not legislative, are deliberative in character, and must have some system of conducting business, … and are necessarily subject to the common parliamentary law” (pp. 13-14). Accordingly, Eunice Rivers asserted her father, Cecil Nelson Sr., was well versed in parliamentary law, while other church members “could quote chapter and verse” (E. Rivers, personal communication, November 12, 2009). Elocution lessons were paired with teachings on proper expressions, posture, pronunciation, and intonation. Her sister, Hester Suggs, further recalled, “You not only were taught to … perform to an audience, but you were taught to get your point across” (H. Suggs, personal communication, November 12, 2009). Congregants further learned the history of Illinois—what members identified as the Blue Book—and such knowledge helped them in their civic work (E. Rivers, personal communication, November 12, 2009).

3.4 Decline, Resilience: The Practice of Citizenship Off-Campus

In its traditional sense, being an alternative venue entails being alternative (extracurricular or substitute) to the rhetorical training offered in formal educational settings (Bode, 1956; Logan, 2005; Logan, 2008; McHenry, 2002; Ray, 2005; Royster, 2000; Solberg, 1968; Solberg 2000). Rhetorical scholars and historians recognize that literary societies declined when their activities were taken over by the more methodical training and entertainment offered by public schools, universities (e.g., Greek and sports associations), museums, libraries, and the radio, for instance (Bode, 1956; Logan, 2008). These societies began declining at the outbreak of the Civil War, and well into Postbellum when college students became less interested (Solberg, 1969, p. 193). “The lyceum rose to great power,” Edward Payson Powell (1895) has asserted
“and fell away and practically died, inside a single quarter of a century” (p. 737). Heirs to the lyceum movement are the Chautauqua movement and women’s voting rights societies of the late nineteenth to early twentieth centuries. Shirley Wilson Logan (2008) has also observed that literary societies declined “as other social groups replaced them in colleges” (p. 95). The decline thesis rightly records the emergence of more comprehensive instructional, social, and racially (and gendered) supportive venues (e.g., fraternal organizations) within higher educational institutions, which offered rhetorical education during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries thus replacing less influential or “alternative” sites.

At the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, the decline thesis conforms to what was observed about student (read mainstream) literary venues; yet such decline occurred later because oratory and elocution had also developed later (Solberg, 2000, p. 67).102 “From all outward appearances,” Winton Solberg (2000) has reported, “the literary societies seemed to be thriving, but in fact they were declining” (p. 311). Dr. Solberg (2000) further reasoned, “An expanded curriculum was rendering their educational function less urgent than in the past, social fraternities were beginning to offer competition, and students were turning to intercollegiate athletics” (p. 311). The decline thesis, however, does not fit as nicely the trajectory observed in the Baraca-Philathea Lyceum, not at least in terms of its lifetime (beyond decline dates for white societies), or Bethel’s tradition of self-supportive organizations (before mainstream societies initiation dates). Specifically, while white students could turn to their own fraternities and sororities, black students had nowhere to turn but to Bethel, even when some black fraternal organizations were already in place, but facing “voluntary” overcrowding (University, 1940, p.

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102 Winton Solberg (2000) noted that membership in student societies had declined. From an average of 131 members in total (Philomathean, 41, Adelphic, 38, Alethenai, 30, and newly formed Illiola in 1904, 22), enrollment fell to 111 during 1894-1904 (pp. 309-310).
Therefore, the external take-over by university venues is at once an overestimation of their openness toward racial minorities and an underestimation of the ability of local racialized venues to continue to supply their own initiatives, conceived as anything but alternative to these minorities.

In the examination of black political literacies and their decline, I emphasize what I have called the problematic mainstream-alternative dichotomy—the flawed characterization of African American societies (and any of their offerings whether rhetorical or not) as alternative to other available options. While the decline thesis rightfully assumes a linear redirection of lyceum-type of activities, from the “alternative” locations to mainstream ones, it does overlook distinct modes of access to mainstream venues according to the community sponsoring them. For racial minorities, as with Bethel, local access to university venues was highly problematic hence congregants’ resistance, and mine, to perceive their rhetorical (and political) work as declining. The Baraca-Philathea lyceum did wane early in the 1940s; those particular meetings ceased then. But Bethel’s rhetorical work, which had preceded its lyceum (of which the Baraca debate society or Bethel’s reading room were instances) continued. Bethel’s history suggests a trajectory, unlike other African American churches, of literacy and rhetorical engagements, from its Sunday school with a debate society (turn of the century), to a reading room and lyceum (interwar period), and, finally, to its men’s Bible class with political discussions (today). That is, the genre of literary societies via the program has evolved into church practices that have retained rhetorical, instruction, display, devotion, and discussion current affairs.

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103Literary societies as default offerings in the AME hierarchy were not always the case in AME churches. The librarian and archivist for Mother Bethel in Philadelphia, PA, for instance, indicated there are no records in that location documenting debates or literary societies. “The organizations were to assist the pastor in the running of the church” (M. Jerrido, personal communication, June 27, 2012). Bethel Church, Philadelphia hosted addresses given by African American societies for educational improvement (e.g., Pennsylvania Augustine Society for the Education of People of Colour, September 30, 1818) (Porter, 1971/1995).
In light of local segregation, Bethel organized Bible classes, a reading room, a debate society, and a lyceum, and has maintained, throughout the years, programs—religious, civic, and literary. Furthermore, Bethel has merged these and other venues (convivial and charitable ones) in the interest of race work, and has crafted a literate identify for its congregants, one which cannot be separated from a religious one. Such merging has allowed the survival of organization and civic engagements in modern-day programs. Yet, Bethel’s offerings constitute a responsive rhetoric, one which I claim was explained by its close proximity to the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and its disregard in the early twentieth century, by the student initiatives that were taking place there, and more importantly, by the workings of an African American man, Albert Lee, who enforced protocol, discipline, and rhetoric in Bethel.

Tension characterizes the recognition of Albert Lee as the rhetor solely responsible for Bethel’s rhetorical development, even though the Baraca-Philathea lyceum was inextricably connected to Lee’s administration and no other member has been identified as an expert parliamentarian since then. Prefacing his recollections with a caveat (“I’m not saying that he was the only one”), Nathaniel Banks, a member whose family has a long tradition in Bethel, and Lee’s relative (possibly his great-grandnephew) observed that what Lee had designed carried a college protocol, which in his view, Lee had imported from the University; at his passing, Banks thought, most of his practices ceased (N. Banks, personal communication, March 13, 2009). While being fascinated by what took place in a lyceum meeting, although not quite understanding the proceedings, Hester Suggs observed as well, “He [Lee] wasn’t the only one who had that particular kind of training (H. Suggs, personal communication, November 12, 2009).

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104 Bethel’s missionary women meetings, for instance, are organized today around a sequence of historical readings of African American authors, recitations, songs, and a social ending with a meal. The Men’s Bible study follows a protocol of invocation, scripture readings, interpretation, and application to their lives, discussions of local matters, and a final petition.
Nevertheless, Bethel members have always seen themselves as strategic and interested citizens; during the interwar period, however, I recognize main agency in Albert Lee’s training initiatives—his participation in Bethel’s debate society, reading room, and lyceum (and in most other Bethel association), his parliamentary training (E. Rivers, personal communication, November 12, 2009), and his advocacy and organization via letters. I do so—the foregrounding of Lee’s agency—given how most of Bethel’s literary initiatives overlapped with Lee’s lifetime.

Bethel’s overlapping of church places and activities lends to conflicted memories about actual events. Senior congregants remember their lyceum from parents and older relatives and from experience. Estelle Merrifield remembers the Philathea class, since her mother had been a member, and had written poetry for this venue (Figure 26, bottom left, in chapter 4). Accustomed to the overlapping of church places, members’ memories appear to conflate lyceum meetings with Bible classes and fraternal organization meetings. Some recall only one of the Bible classes sponsoring the lyceum. Others recall the men’s class, which never ceased, and while not called the Baraca class anymore, the men who meet weekly on Saturday mornings in Bethel’s sanctuary to read scriptures and discuss political events, consider their forum the religious offspring of the Baraca-Philathea lyceum (L. Lomax, personal communication, February 28, 2009). Erma Scott Bridgewater, the oldest congregant to date, whose father Raymond Mac Scott was a messenger on campus and a member of the Baraca class, unmistakably remembers the lyceum as a literary society, separate from the Baraca Class. This is so because, at a lyceum program, she performed a solo number, coached by a student officer (in the manner of Lee’s training) (E. Bridgewater, personal communication, September 17, 2009). Some women recalled that women and children were forbidden from entering the Baraca room, where they thought training for the

\[\text{105 Erma Bridgewater passed away on April 2, 2013.}\]
lyceum meetings might have been held. Women were, however, allowed to bring food for students since who could not eat comfortably, or at all, on campus (E. Merrifield, H. Suggs, & E. Rivers, personal communication, November 12, 2009). Other members challenge such memories, and rightfully so since Bethel’s lyceum was open to all regardless of gender: There was no reason for the men’s Bible class to be secretive, so the women’s recollection of the prohibition to approach the room suggests instead black fraternal organizations meetings (N. Banks, personal communication, March 10, 2009).

Conflicting recollections only reinforce member’s conviction about the permanence of their rhetorical habit through multiple and overlapping venues. What is referred to as their culture (D. Lomax, personal communication, March 3, 2009) or Lee’s “protocol,” inherited from former societies, has remained, dispersed, through the church’s various programs (N. Banks, personal communication, September 12, 2009). On April 9, 1924, a local meeting of the NAACP organized by Bethel, and of course Lee, relies on the organization of a program to discuss racial equality; music frames the beginning and ending of discussions (W. R. Thornhill, 1924, April 9) (Figure 20 left). A women’s missionary luncheon (February 28, 2009), for instance, became a literary function, organized following Lee’s 1920s programs—prayers, poems, songs, and tributes to African American leaders by way of monologues composed and performed by the missionaries for their audience (Figure 20 right). Such events are evidence of how the oratorical is to date deeply rooted in the speeches of known rhetors—Sojourner Truth, Frederick Douglass, and Mary McLeod Bethune. Their long history of associations, Bethel’s lyceum, the Baraca Class, and Albert Lee are nonetheless all present in members’ collective memory.
Two Bethel programs, from Lee’s time (1924) and a current one (2009), documenting an expected sequence of numbers—music as recreation and racial discussions (left) and historical figures (right)

Members’ perceptions of the lyceum’s decline cite as a cause the reduced involvement of African American students. “They did not need us anymore,” recalls Erma Bridgewater (E. Bridgewater, personal communication, September 17, 2009). As black students were accepted on campus, they too lost interest in this alternative society. Yet, campus acceptance (and support) was extended by members of the race, by university organizations (fraternities and sororities) which were essentially supportive of black initiatives and behaved as the sponsors of black individuals. Winton Solberg (2000) has found that “One sign of declension was absenteeism” (p. 311). “Another sign … was tardiness” (Solberg, 2000, p. 311). Lee identified the signs; his sense

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106 Left: the NAACP 1924 program is located in the Albert Lee Papers, NAACP folder (Albert Lee Papers, 1912, 1917-1928b). I took this photograph at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Archives. Reproduced by permission of Bethel AME Church. Right: at the missionary luncheon I attended (February 28, 2009), I received a copy of the Women’s Missionary 2009 program (Bethel, 2009). Reproduced by courtesy of Bethel AME Church. Church Sunday bulletins are, too, demonstrations of rhetorical habit with services organized as programs (Bethel, 2009-2012).
of urgency about missed meetings and delayed openings, found in his organizational letters, suggests so. Just as it had flourished later (1910), and in response to the need for rhetorical training and political expression, the Baraca-Philathea declined (1940s), when racially supportive African American campus organizations supplied black students’ social needs. Bethel’s lyceum declined; students’ attachments to Bethel declined. But Bethel’s rhetorical habits have not.

When images of national circulation produce the following representations of African American debate societies (Figure 21, left and right), and when campus literary programs (the Philomathean ones discussed in chapter 1) and theatrical representations (minstrel shows above) depict characters eerily similar to these below, Bethel, its local discourse, and Lee are immediately elevated, for it is not the comical—the grotesque and uncivilized—what is being placed before the eyes, but the uninformed (and prejudicial) focus of the white gaze.

![Figure 21](image)

*Figure 21. “A literary debate in the Darktown Club” (ca. 1885)*

A national perception: “Setting the question” (left) and “The question settled” (right).

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107Original lithograph caricatures were published in *Currier & Ives*, ca. 1885 (Thomas Worth, 1834-1917, artist), part of the “Darktown comics” series. These images are in the public domain. Reproduced from the online catalog of The Library of Congress. Left: “Setting the question” (“A literary debate,” ca. 1885a). Right: “The question settled” (“A literary debate,” ca. 1885b). I am thankful to Carly S. Woods (University of Nebraska, Lincoln) whose 2012 presentation (“The Anxieties of Arguing: Comic Framings of Non-Normative Debating Societies”) at the conference of the Rhetoric Society of America (RSA) introduced me to these images.
Racist amusements such as these ca. 1885 portrayals, where two African American men fight at a political debate, in a room with adorned with pictures of American presidents, some of which were broken as a result of their disagreement, are still relevant in Lee’s times and at the lyceum’s height (mid-1920s) forty years later, because they communicate a sentiment which had been persistent on campus.

On December 27, 28, and 29, 1933, the American Historical Association held its forty-eighth meeting at the Urbana campus of the University of Illinois. A session on the Old South included a talk by Vanderbilt University Professor and historian Frank L. Owsley,108 entitled, “Three American Crusades: Abolition, Reconstruction, Scottsboro” (Bourne, 1934, p. 434), which was based on the article he had previously published in The American Review, “Scottsboro,109 the third crusade: The sequel to Abolition and Reconstruction” (Owsley, 1933). The meetings’ proceedings only named Owsley’s talk (without a description), but some of his bold contentions in the article offered insights into what his presentation on campus might have argued: Northern interference with southern affairs was a matter of convenience—slavery became an evil only because of the industrialist views northerners had for the South (Owsley, 1933, p. 261). Accordingly, Owsley (1933) reasoned that such interventions could explain violent reactions by the Ku Klux Klan or other whites toward African Americans (p. 285) and, more disturbingly, that emancipation had unduly accelerated changes in the South thereby leaving the African American “unprepared as a child upon the world” (p. 264).

108 Frank L. Owsley had been a member of the Nashville Agrarians, a group of Southern intellectuals who in 1930 had published a pro-agrarian and pro-Southern manifesto entitled I’ll take my stand. Owsley’s chapter had been particularly racist.

109 The Scottsboro crusade, as Owsley called it, refers to the Scottsboro trials after two white women accused nine African American teenagers of rape in Paint Rock, AL, in 1931. The affair which lasted over two decades involved multiple trials and reversals, but fueled the admission of African American in juries and, ultimately, Civil Rights movements (Linder, 1998).
Such dismal climate goes beyond the scholarly etiquette of a campus conference. In ca. 1934, Lee remembered how after a meeting with the Chicago Civic Council (a group of leading African American men), where President Arthur C. Willard was reminded of the discrimination toward African Americans in local restaurants, he arranged to meet with some owners to discuss the matter. One owner told President Willard that he would be amenable to serve African Americans provided others did the same. “The President knew that to be an impractical proposition,” Lee recalled, “ended the conference, by remarking, that the University would have to go into the restaurant business to meet this situation” (Lee, 1942b, pp. 19-20). Willard soon tended, according to Lee, to this initiative by securing money from the Board of Trustees for an eating establishment. Three years later, however, eating policies had not changed much, and while the University Senate committee had recommended the opening of a restaurant in the Women’s Building, a note in the Illinois Alumni News (1937, July) complained that such proposal was ‘a mere sidestepping of the real problem. A more beneficial and less expensive solution would be to bring pressure to bear on the ‘offenders’” (p. 24).

These incidents represent Lee’s times—two 1885 lithographs removed from Bethel, a scholarly presentation denying black citizenship, and the persistent refusal to serve African Americans on campus restaurants. The lyceum experience, the church’s debate society and reading rooms account for the value of rhetorical display as a mode of racial uplift, one which necessitated and functioned in an “alternative” location. Deftly discerning a need for such distance, and despite his campus influence, Lee, maintained his lyceum within the black neighborhood. Being the foremost agent in the construction of an African American ethos during the interwar period, Lee invented, enforced, and modeled a literate character for these students, and presented them to the university (and to themselves) not as unprepared children, but as valid
interlocutors with an ability to debate and settle any question. Bethel, Lee, and their societies created a gaze of their own, a more productive and racially supportive gaze. For while he might have wished to articulate a common ideological ground, and to establish recognition locally, his lyceum work—his racial distance—does not suggest he saw on campus a capability to mix audiences or to support black student literary performances.
CHAPTER 4
PERFORMING RACIALIZED ARCHIVES, NARRATING LOCAL HISTORIES

To enter black homes in my childhood was to enter a world that valued the visual, that asserted our collective will to participate in a noninstitutionalized curatorial process.

—bell hooks, *Art on my mind: Visual politics*

I begin this fourth chapter with bell hooks’ image of the black home as a non-institutionalized curatorial space to advance here a concept of archives beyond institutional collections or public records, beyond sanctioned venues where official documents are expected to be stored (e.g., governmental agencies, historical societies, public or university libraries). I study here domestic (or private) archives that are kept under the control of black families or individuals. Because archives are culturally situated and function rhetorically (N. Johnson; 2010; Morris & Rose, 2010; M. Powell, 2008; Schultz, 2008), I argue in this chapter that local archival practices and historical memories produced in “alternative” and segregated locations have specific rhetorical (and survival) functions—affirming citizenship, demonstrating literary character, and establishing agency. I therefore examine how Bethel congregants studied, maintained, and circulated their own texts to articulate early twentieth century black histories. To do so, I draw from recent scholarship theorizing archival practices, constructing new archival histories, reflectively articulating methodologies involving personal experience, and making meaning out of neglected (or secluded) primary texts. Chiefly, I draw from Gesa E. Kirsch and Liz Rohan’s 2008 edited work on archives as personal, cultural, and lived processes, and from Alexis E. Ramsey, Wendy B. Sharer, Barbara L’Eplattenier, and Lisa S. Mastrangelo’s 2010
edited collection on research methods applied to archival as rhetorical work. I emphasize such recent re-conceptualizations of local archives—and increased scholarly use of private texts—as the “intersection of the personal, cultural, and scholarly” (Kirsch & Rohan, 2008, p. 3).

My work in this chapter highlights the local and historical work of maintenance, recovery, and narration of racialized selves in the early twentieth century by Bethel members, and characterizes such work as cultural and rhetorical. Most notably, my research deems Bethel’s practices—historical and archival—as lived processes purposefully documented and performed in church premises to demonstrate an alternative experience, to resist traditional discourses about African Americans in this locations, and to create a community and a cultural memory. Hence, the third core rhetorical practice of Bethel members during the early twentieth century, part of the mainstream-alternative dichotomy so prevalent in race relations on and around campus in Champaign-Urbana, IL, is racial uplift via the rhetorical functions of historical documentation and archival habits, practiced locally and privately in the offices and homes of Bethel members. Private curatorial work practiced by individual citizens, learning communities or activist groups has been widely documented (Eubanks, 2008; Hogg, 2006; hooks, 1995; Okawa, 2008; B. Rohan, 2008; L. Rohan, 2010; and Sharer, 2008). Such scholarship underscores the significance of the domestic and its productive engagements with (read also challenging responses to) institutional archives.

Bethel members’ maintenance of archives included the collections furnished by Albert R. Lee at his university post during his tenure (1895-1947), and by the senior black women participants in my research, at their private locations since the lyceum times (and currently). These members produced what Antoinette Burton (2003) has called counter-archives (p. 5), a rhetorical response to the absences of the official archive as they encountered it. While both
collections demonstrate race work, their provenance and curation are markedly different: Lee conducted (and performed) his uplift from within, while building a historical archive which was to remain inside and therefore had not reached members or other black individuals; Bethel senior women did not enjoy some of the advantages of Lee’s location; although they, too, crossed neighborhoods and produced a self-sustaining archive, one that was used locally and became accessible privately. Furthermore, not only have these black citizens produced “alternative” records from within their private locations, but their lives have intersected as well, personally and rhetorically. Senior Bethel women knew Albert Lee (and of his work) when they were young or children, benefitted directly from his interventions (on campus and locally), and conducted race work of their own in their segregated neighborhood and from their gendered (read also domestic) places (E. Rivers, personal communication, November 12, 2009). They outlived Lee and sustained their own historical documentation since Lee’s times until today. These women thus became critical in the maintenance of Lee’s legacy (and his racial work) both in the white (during black history month celebrations) and black imaginary. Lee has been invoked after his passing (1948) to promote church revivals; his name fostered more collaborative work among these women, thus turning their private (and individual) efforts into activist pursuits.

Albert Lee and the senior Bethel women with whom I have worked most closely for the past four years created, collected, and organized texts (written and pictorial), where fundamental factors in deciding what to create and collect were racialized concerns. While Albert Lee established his uplift site from within a white university venue, and crossed over continuously from his black neighborhood to campus (and back), Bethel senior women, also traversing racialized locations, as either university students or service workers on campus, settled their archival, historical, and activist work within their domestic spaces. Their collections and
memories speak of life events that contrast sharply with official depictions of the African American experience in Champaign-Urbana, IL. They collected alternative texts and artifacts such as local black periodicals; local mainstream newspapers documenting black alumni’s work, essays on national experiences for African Americans, portraits and photographs documenting their lives and church functions; rhetorical manuals and histories produced with other church people; church meeting minutes and bulletins, and World War I black soldiers’ news reports, photographs, medals, and other ephemera.

The scope of curated documents was both national and local. For instance, Lee sent a letter in 1924 to the House of Representatives (19th District Illinois) inquiring about (and advocating for) the Dyer Anti-Lynching Bill (Albert R. Lee, February 23, 1924). Senior women wrote to their local authorities complaining about housing conditions in sections of their black neighborhood (as early as 1950, and certainly later)—a practice which, according to memories, they had learned from older relatives. These women interpreted their racial work for the church and black community. Most notably, they used their collections to articulate local black histories for interested outsiders in an overwhelmingly white, Midwestern university town during the early twentieth century. They did so, when, for instance, university staff had approached the church in the late 1960s during the Civil Rights movement. These practices—advocacy through writing and memory—turned into habits that have defined African American identity: Collecting texts, approaching their archival materials, and inhabiting and questioning their physical landmarks in white communities have long histories in black communities. As

110 The letter and its response are preserved in the Albert Lee Papers, 1912, 1917-1928: Lee’s letter to Honorable Allen F. Moore, House of Representatives, is filed in Box 1, University& Letters of Recommendation, A-Z, 1919-28 Folder; Moore’s response to Lee is filed in Box 1, NAACP 1923-24 Folder. The Baraca-Philathea lyceum’s interest in the Dyer Anti-Lynching Bill, found in the many extempore topics listing this matter, is discussed in chapter 3 as part of Bethel’s political self-determination (under the Critical Black Political Rhetorics).
librarian and archivist Dorothy Porter Wesley has noted (1957/2001), “Anti-slavery societies, African American literary organizations, church associations, and historical societies did much to stimulate the collecting of books and pamphlets by African American authors …” (p. 19). These black venues engaged in such collecting habits to demonstrate how African Americans were deserving of a better status through their literary and civic work.

Examining hybrid racial nooks—Albert Lee’s black activist post inserted in a white university administration, and “alternative” sites of archival practices and history-making—the homes of senior Bethel members—is productive in the articulation of black political literacies and community involvement. Because archival locations, whether mainstream/institutional or local (domestic), are far from apolitical spaces, here I argue once more for a careful interrogation of those unexplored racialized sites and their rhetorical productions. As bell hooks (1995) noted in reference to long-standing photographic traditions in black households, “The sites of contestation were not out there, in the world of white power, they were within segregated black life. Since no ‘white’ galleries displayed images of black people created by black folks, spaces had to be made within diverse black communities” (p. 59). Such sites of contestation have been, in Bethel’s case, its church with its educational and literary work (chapter 2 and chapter 3, respectively), Lee’s work space inserted in a white university, and the domestic spaces created in the homes of black families, this chapter’s discussion.

The presence of these local black repositories amid officially sanctioned and recognized spaces for archival work within walking distance of the black neighborhood, such as the two public libraries (in Champaign and in Urbana, IL) and a university library on campus town suggests that Bethel members did not trust their record to the mainstream white community. These institutional libraries might have offered an ambiguous welcome to African Americans in
the early twentieth century. I therefore find it telling that Albert Lee and these women developed a habit of making sense out of their racialized reality with their own collections. While their private spaces are sites of affirmation of their experiences and lived history, institutional libraries locally, established in Western-looking (Roman, colonial, and gothic-like) edifices, could be read, following Native American scholar Malea Powell (2008), as “textual spaces designed to intimidate … as a way to negate their own temporality and impermanence” (p. 121). Malea Powell further observes how these institutional spaces “accomplish such negation through the practice of history” (p. 121). That is, by being less accommodating—by practicing one kind of history only—these imposing spaces, practices, and histories (e.g., university venues and texts and city libraries) at once suppressed and encouraged, without meaning to, the proliferation of “alternative” spaces, such as those I found in Bethel, in Lee’s writing, and in senior women’s collections and memories.

Bethel members, because of their commitment to documenting their past and their sense of historical and racial locations, I contend, should be considered ‘historians without portfolio,’ borrowing from Earl E. Thorpe’s (1971) designation—black people not professionally trained in history, but with an interest in the field, and a sense that their experiences equip them to interpret history (p. 144). Although most intellectually-inclined or educated black women in the late nineteenth to mid twentieth centuries carried, according to Pero Gaglo Dagbovie (2004), no “extensive academic credentials or the approval of the mainstream academy” (p. 242), they managed to engage in historical recovery, document an alternative reality, and even publish their work in scholarly forums (e.g., Dorothy Porter Wesley).\textsuperscript{111} Similarly, senior Bethel women,

\textsuperscript{111} Some African American women, however, did earn their academic credentials. Anna Julia Cooper, for instance, obtained her doctoral degree in History in Paris in 1925 (Lemert, 1998, p. 6); while Marion Thompson Wright obtained hers from Columbia in 1940 (Lurie & Mappen, Eds., 2004, p. 890).
socialized and trained to become nurses, teachers, and teachers’ aides, who worked locally as cooks, maids, and stock “girls” (their term), call themselves historians and are recognized as such by their community. Therefore, I highlight here as well the active roles played by individuals whose cultures we study, whose personal archived texts we read (because the individuals are long gone), or whom we approach to record narratives (because of their long lives and willingness to share with the researcher).

After reading Albert Lee’s letters, histories, manuals, and programs, I did not recognize him as a messenger or clerk (his university positions) but as an activist, a man apt to writing what was connected to race work, and especially suited to organizing racial material and black people’s initiatives. Just as Lee had managed to subvert and extend the reach of his university post, these Bethel senior women resisted being informants only and assumed the roles of archivists and historians during our working sessions, thus revealing their homes as knowledge-making sites. Discussing their lyceum with me was agreeable to them; yet they insisted I noticed this was but one of their rhetorical and activist sites. Hence, I further claim that their persistent documentation became a necessary corrective to segregation; as bell hooks (1995) observed, “When the psychohistory of a people is marked by ongoing loss, when entire histories are denied, hidden, erased, documentation can become an obsession” (p. 59). This was the case for Lee and these senior women. They demonstrated an acute understanding of their racial landscapes—a white university town and their segregated black neighborhood—and of their city markers—the railroad tracks and local prejudice, physically and symbolically dividing spaces and people. They further understood the imperative of performing a kind of dignified and

112At her passing on April 2, 2013, Bethel’s pastor, Reverend Larry Lewis, remembered Erma Scott Bridgewater as a “waking historian who embodied Champaign, having lived in the city for 99 years and five months, through racial turmoil and segregation” (Merli, 2013, April 3, para. 11).
educated visibility that would indicate to white audiences and attest to black ones that they were uplifted middle-class citizens.

I therefore argue for revisiting the relationships between rhetorical activity and archival work; the latter appears to be a purposeful rhetorical stance emerging from within “alternative” sites, those every day, domestic, and most relevant social spaces for Albert Lee and these senior women. Their archival, historical, and interpretive work is constitutive rather than alternative. That is, the sites that Lee and Bethel senior women inhabited, with Lee fashioning a black site from within his university post, reveal fundamental and productive archival and historical practices that I claim demonstrate their understanding of their local black middle-class citizenship as a duty as uplifted individuals themselves to assist and enlighten others, chiefly black students also uplifting themselves through education. Records had to be compiled, experiences had to be documented with images and written texts, press features had to be retrieved for later use, and performances—those rhetorical in a lyceum meeting as well as civic by way of public actions—had to be remembered. It was their duty to document all, otherwise, mainstream narratives (and the official archives), not of their making and liking, might continue to distort this history. In such a sense their work is constitutive. They also preserved their memories (Lee with his histories and manuals, and the women with their oral testimonies and archives) in order to argue against a simplistic view of non-discriminatory access to university venues, such as those advanced by university discourses (e.g., the 1940 “Negro Students” report discussed in chapter 1, under the Campus Racial Climate section).

Memory is partial and never objective, but it is constitutive as well: Segregated communities create memories to insert themselves in the historical record with their accounts, for racial histories are told, even if within safe places, and events are articulated even if the rhetor’s
account has been (or will be) silenced. “When an event has taken place,” Lucille M. Schultz (2008) has observed, “what we know of it comes from various accounts constructed as rhetorical acts in a theoretical space by writers who, while engaged in historical research [much like Lee and senior Bethel women did], assume the subject positions of rhetorician” (p. vii). Senior women’s various accounts, through time and for my research most recently, have served to probe into partial documentary evidence. That is, their oral testimonies have bridged the gaps that I encountered in written archives by completing evidence and interpreting texts, and were offered as symbolic of the racialized experiences of being a black citizen in that university environment in the early twentieth century, thus functioning rhetorically, too. Their narratives were offered to further define their landscapes—experiences, city sites, church, neighborhood, and university campus—as highly conceptual, as epistemological grounds from which they articulated an alternative reality—one marked by being recognized locally as African Americans.

Accordingly, their memories interwoven with remaining documents which the senior women selected, examined, and challenged during our sessions become symbols, too, of race relations. Most importantly, when shared with me, the researcher, an outsider they welcomed and mentored, memories were articulated, and then again revised, collectively among family members, within the safety of their private spaces. These memories have worked rhetorically to symbolize an identity of middle-class black citizenry in a predominantly white university town. As Gregory Clark (2004) has noted, “When landscapes are publicized—when they are shared in public discourse or in the nondiscursive form of … public experience—they do the rhetorical work of symbolizing a common home and, thus, a common identity” (p. 9). When these women make meaning out of the racist (e.g., on campus) and supportive spaces (e.g., in the black
neighborhood) in which they lived, they articulate rhetorics of dis-identification and affirmation, respectively.

I apply Jacqueline Jones Royster’s (2003) notion of landscape, as an interpretive practice, “one that acknowledges a view and often re-scopes that view in light of aesthetic sensibilities—values, preferences, beliefs” (p. 148). “We landscape,” Royster (2003) has said (p. 148); Bethel members have done so, too, to produce historical knowledge and situate their memories. Such ways of inhabiting a land (the black neighborhood), of showcasing a landscape for themselves and the researcher (a segregated experience), and observing another landscape (an unsupportive campus climate) metaphorically, but literally from the material barriers represented in the railroad tracks proximal to the black neighborhood, are particular of Bethel, of the African American students whom the church supported, and of the critical ways in which race (and class) created distinctions locally. These metaphors—Clark’s (2004) and Royster’s (2003)—allow my work (and my analyses of Bethel’s memories and texts) to reproduce the interplay between being/becoming a cultured black citizen and being perceived and accepted as such, with full citizenship rights.

4.1 Advocacy from within: Albert R. Lee’s Writing as Activist Work

Albert Lee (1874-1948), whom I introduced in chapter 1, co-author of the 1940 University of Illinois commissioned “Negro Students” studied in the same chapter under Campus Racial Climate, was a self-appointed black leader, who from his university posts—a messenger and the chief clerk at the president’s office from 1895 to 1947 (Albert Lee, 1948; Guide, 1994)—engaged in race work. He did so by demonstrating a strong sense of organization of people and rhetorical events (chapter 3, The Rhetoric of Discipline section) and of race material. Despite
finding Lee’s name in most of Bethel’s early twentieth century work (e.g., programs and histories) in my archival explorations, senior women perceive him as one of many church leaders. His influence on campus and his personality traits have made him endearing to his community, and have prompted Bethel’s desire to preserve his memory thus turning his figure into an object of senior women’s archival collections. He was even remembered (by Bernice Brightwell, his daughter) as “a ghost writer for the president” (as cited in Franke, 1990, p. 139). Most importantly, however, Lee became an active archivist subject at his university post—the embodiment of the duality between what was public and institutionally-sanctioned (also read as white) and what was private and domestic (understood as black). The strength of his hybrid nook resurfaces here once more as I decenter from the Baraca-Philathea Lyceum (the focus of chapter 3), and examine the significance of his entire archival collection.

His was not an inorganic collection, but a carefully crafted and organized set of materials, evidence of his many involvements in Bethel’s initiatives (e.g., choir, lyceum, and Sunday school), at the NAACP, and at the University (e.g., letters of recommendation he composed as honorary dean of black students and university histories and reflections). Interspersed unevenly throughout these texts, Lee included pamphlets produced nationally by race organizations such as The American Federation of Negro Students\textsuperscript{113} and press notices by the Commission on Interracial Cooperation in Atlanta, GA\textsuperscript{114} thus signaling a sustained interest in race matters nationally. More importantly, however, are his epistolary racial affairs. Similarly to how he had organized Bethel’s lyceum, Lee’s letters performed his advocacy.

\begin{footnotes}
\item[113]“Why not a bigger and better Negro business?” is an instance of a pamphlet arguing for African Americans supporting black-owned businesses.
\item[114]“Suggestion for papers by high school students on Negro progress since the Civil War” and “How has the Negro used his freedom?” are two examples.
\end{footnotes}
On February 23, 1924, Albert R. Lee wrote to Republican Representative (19th District, IL) Allen Francis Moore, and requested that the Dyer Anti-Lynching Bill,\footnote{The Dyer Anti-Lynching bill was a 1918 initiative of Leonidas C. Dyer, Representative from Missouri (United States Congress, n. d.a) which was approved in the House (1922) (LOC, 1918, May 7, About this item, para. 1). See discussion on the Baraca-Philathea lyceum’s concern about this bill in chapter 3, Critical Black Political Rhetorics section. At the time of Lee’s letter (February 3, 1924), the House had already passed the bill in 1922, but it was later defeated in the Senate (LOC, 1918, May 7, About this item, para. 1) in 1924.} which was at the time of the letter, per Lee’s cognizance, in the Rules Committee, be given Moore’s “favorable consideration” (Albert R. Lee, February 23, 1924, para. 1). In a self-disclosing gesture that I have not found in other letters, Albert Lee urged the passage of this bill. He asserted, “The bill is one of vital interest to all members of the Colored race of which I am a member” (Albert R. Lee, February 23, 1924, para. 1). Lee called upon Moore “to use … [his] influence upon other members of the committee to secure favorable recommendation” (para. 1). Lee, who might have personally known Representative Moore (given how part of their university tenures overlapped), positioned himself rhetorically not only as a black citizen concerned with lynching as an extra-legal and terrorizing mode of dis-identification, but as a citizen writing from the office of a university president: Lee signed using his university title—chief clerk in the president’s office. Lee ends his letter in a clear transactional mode: He said, “Your favorable stand on this bill will elicit the good will of all of your constituents of our race, who are strongly and actively interested in the passage of this bill” (para. 2). Allen F. Moore, who had been a trustee at the University of Illinois from 1908 to 1914 (United States Congress, n. d.c), promptly replied to Lee on February 25, 1924, recognized the letter as coming from an institutional source—University of Illinois—and assured Lee that he would be “glad to talk with … [his] Colleagues on the Committee relative to reporting this bill out” (Allen F. Moore, February 25, 1924, para. 115).
Lee’s interest is not surprising given how it is now widely accepted that lynching was not only a Southern practice—though an overwhelmingly Southern mode of racial control.\textsuperscript{116}

Lee is remembered by Bethel members as a man who was “very dedicated … to his race … [and] instrumental in getting a lot of Negroes scholarships [to attend the university]” (L. Gray, personal communication, September 18, 2009). He is known in the press for counseling black students on matters of campus life (Albert Lee, 1948; Mabry, 1989, February 5, E3). As a church-going African American man, Lee was Sunday school district superintendent, Bible class teacher (Springfield, IL), and president of Bethel’s choir for 36 years (Mabry, 1989, February 5, p. E3) as well as active member in the local branch of the NAACP, Past Grand Master in a masonic organization (Mabry, 1989, February 5, p. E3), and the strongest force behind Bethel’s parliamentarian training discussed in chapter 3, under The Rhetoric of Discipline section. Lee retired from his university duties on July 1, 1947, and passed away on August 24, 1948.\textsuperscript{117} He was recognized both locally, and in Midwestern periodicals as the unofficial dean of African American students (Albert Lee, ca. 1938; Albert Lee, 1948, September 11, p. 4; Guide, 1994, Introduction, para. 2). One such instance is The Chicago Defender’s report on his death (Figure 22).

\textsuperscript{116}Given how the Dyer Anti-Lynching bill suffered defeat in the Senate (LOC, 1918, May 7) and several burning cross occurrences in Champaign-Urbana, IL, (early 1920s), Albert Lee made sure that the bill’s defeat and local occurrences were a matter discussed extemporaneously during Bethel’s lyceum meetings. Evidence of such discussions is found in the lyceum’s lists of extempore topics discussed in chapter 3, under the Critical Black Political Rhetorics section.

\textsuperscript{117}Lee was interred in Mount Hope Cemetery in Champaign, IL, on August 27, 1948 (Mt. Hope, 1998a), in a sector where many prominent Bethel family names can be recognized—Suggs, Nelson, Riley, Earnest, and Banks.
Figure 22. “Albert Lee, Unofficial Negro Illini Dean, Dies In Champaign” (1948)\textsuperscript{118}

Note about Albert Lee’s passing published in \textit{The Chicago Defender} on September 11, 1948.

Little is known about the physical space that might have been assigned to such an employee and where he might have maintained his “personal” files, which is how the University of Illinois Archives classifies Lee’s papers. Such definition withholds the institutional character of the work that Lee performed from his desk. In fifty-two years of service, there are no official pictorial records of this man’s working space at the President’s office.\textsuperscript{119} A 1989 photograph (Figure 23) published in the local press (\textit{The News Gazette}, Champaign, IL) depicts Lee, formally dressed in a dark suit, sitting at a desk, with pencil and paper pad at hand, books in front

\textsuperscript{118}News about Lees’ passing reached Chicago, IL (Albert Lee, 1948, September 11). Reproduced by permission of \textit{The Chicago Defender}.

\textsuperscript{119}From letter exchanges, an address used to reach him was 355 Administration Building (Carl Stephens, 1938, May 27). In Lee’s institutional memoir, “University of Illinois Presidents I Have Known,” Lee recalled how during President Edmund J. James’ tenure, the president’s office was in the Law Library Building (Lee, 1942b, Edmund Janes James, President’s House, p. 32).
of him, and in a writing pose in the manner of a cultured, black individual, (Mabry, 1989, February 5, p. E3).

Figure 23. Albert Lee, “unofficial Dean of the colored students” (1989)\footnote{120}{A note on Lee’s support toward black university students included this photograph of Albert Lee (Mabry, 1989, February 5). Reproduced by permission of The News Gazette.}

Photograph published in The News Gazette on February 5, 1989 in an article by Rebecca Mabry entitled “The black students went to see Mr. Lee”

The location of this desk, where the portrait was taken, remains unknown. Lee died after a long illness in 1948 (Albert Lee, 1948; Albert R. Lee Dies, 1948; eBlackCU, 2010-2012a; eBlackCU, 2010-2012b; eBlackCU, 2010-2012c; eBlackCU, 2010-2012d) which might have prevented him from collecting his files at the time of his retirement in 1947, thus causing his archives to remain stored within university premises—specifically at the Office of the President. This was the case...
from 1947 until September 1963 (shortly after the creation of the University of Illinois Archives) when university archivists acquired his collections from President David Kinley's Papers, within which Lee’s texts had been subsumed (R. M. Dunn, personal communication, June 18, 2012).

David Kinley, University of Illinois President from 1920 to 1930 (President David Kinley, ca. 1925), for whom Lee worked at the height of Bethel’s lyceum, was also the authority, who according to Lee (in a 1942 newspaper note),\(^{121}\) enforced on campus that he be addressed as “Mr. Lee,” and not as Albert or as “the boy,” which had been the case until Kinley took office in 1920 (Mabry, 1989, February 5, p. E3). Albert Lee, given his close work with President Kinley, might have also donated Lee’s papers, a customary move in public office, at his retirement, thus demonstrating an understanding of the significance of the records he was leaving behind, as these reflected the hurdles of being an African American citizen, whether a student, or a church or community member. Lee’s likely decision contrasts with the classifying of his records as “personal papers” by the University Archives even as many of Lee’s documents speak of campus matters (e.g., on-campus housing, admissions, and university memoirs). Furthermore, the permanence of his records on campus blurs the distinctions between the institutional and the domestic, with the latter being an equally compelling source of campus life. Since Albert Lee was the university official responsible for correspondence at the office of the university president, I imagine him stationed at his secretary desk or counter, which he managed to turn into an activist site, pensive in front of his typewriter, but actively and even forcefully engaging in black students’ needs. At the president’s office, he performed influential clerical work. By Lee’s own account in his 1942 institutional memoir, “University of Illinois Presidents I Have Known.”

\(^{121}\)To date, I have not found such note in any of the local periodicals in Champaign-Urbana; nor have I found it in Lee’s institutional memoir (1942b), “University of Illinois Presidents I Have Known.”
Known,” he served in many capacities as “office boy, stenographer, typist, chief clerk, executive secretary, and acting president” (Lee, 1942b, pp. 36-37). Lee (1942b) further listed the extent of his office duties and influence:

I took and gave dictation, replied to letters and telegrams, hired and supervised student[s] and extra help. I was permitted to organize the filing system …, initiate and organize the routine of office work and standardize the duties and work of every member of the office staff—the president excepted. (p. 37)

Similarly, not much is known about the circumstances of his employment: He applied for the messenger’s job at the Office of the President in 1895, after graduating from Champaign High School, and “President Draper [1894-1904] hired him on the spot” (Mabry, 1989, February 5, p. E3). Lee, however, knew his worth. Lee recalled how he leveraged his promotion from messenger to assistant clerk by prompting President Edmund J. James (1904-1920) to notice the incompatibility of his responsibilities—composing and delivery of telegram—with this

122 In this 176-page text, Lee composed a historical and reflective narrative of his experiences working closely with five university presidents and one acting president. In the memoir’s foreword, Lee framed his writing as his evaluation of the presidents’ work. The report moves chronological from president to president—from Andrew Sloan Draper (1894-1904) to Arthur C. Willard (1934-1946). The document covered topics such as the purely academic or campus life (faculty, students, discipline, curricula, athletics, scholarship, administration, appropriations, finances, staff, physical plant, welfare, social life, and Negro students), to events pertinent to each president’s tenure or controversial events (“Dark Clouds,” nepotism, and trustees or faculty troubles), or the more subjective or personal matters (appearance and personality, home life, and personal relations). He documented too those presidents who had been generous toward Bethel given the church’s hosting of black students. This memoir includes frequent segments from speeches given by the presidents (which given his filing duties Lee had access to) and quotes from their interactions with Lee. All presidents’ sections end with his estimate of each administration (Lee, 1942b).

123 At the end of this sentence Lee includes a question mark right after the framing of his work as “acting president.” This might have been an earlier draft.

124 Andrew S, Draper, 1894-1904, Biographical Note, para. 2 (2/4).

125 President E. J. James, ca. 1910-1915.
given title. Lee boldly observed that “it would be embarrassing to send a message over the signature of a man with the title of messenger” (Lee, 1942b, p. 37). President James, who was listening, “changed … [Lee’s title] to assistant clerk and later to clerk” (Lee, 1942b, p. 37). He was consulted on matters of black students’ admissions, who issued letters of recommendation in favor of black soldiers (World War I veterans) whose files may not have otherwise been considered (Lee, 1912-1928; L. Gray, personal communication, September 18, 2009). “His kind understanding and influence helped many students with doubtful records gain admission” (Albert Lee, 1948). In his unofficial capacity as the overseer of black students, Lee even intervened in financial matters. Mrs. Bernice Lee Brightwell, Lee’s daughter, remembered in 1989 how, when black students could not afford tuition expenses, her father arranged for “their fees [to be] deferred until they could pay” (as cited in Mabry, 1989, February 5, p. E3).

Lee was a complex figure—a recognized man in his black neighborhood, equally recognized and trusted as a clerk in the President’s staff. He was also “ornamental” only at presidents’ private affairs and family celebrations (Lee, 1942b, President’s House, p. 33), which diminished his institutional power. Lee’s visibility at the University was a source of pride for himself, his family (as demonstrated by his daughter’s observations), and Bethel members (especially the senior women), for he accomplished race work from within a white location. Yet, his display in the President’s office serves a rhetorical purpose for the University, for he is not any African American man, but a respectable middle class, church-going man. Lee symbolizes the already uplifted New Negro, but most importantly, a man able to recognize (and recommend)

\[126\] In the Urbana Daily Courier, I have found a curious note about a divorce demand which clarifies Lee’s identity. The note stated, “Opal Bates Lee today instituted divorce proceedings against Alfred E. Lee (not to be confused with Albert Lee, chief clerk to the president of the University of Illinois), accusing him of desertion” (Sues Husband, 1933, p. 1, para. 1).
those African Americans who wish to uplift themselves through higher education. Moreover, this overwhelmingly white university administration recognizes him because of his dignified presence and, given his knowledge of the black community, he becomes the authority in prospective race students’ character. That is, rhetorically, Albert Lee serves a filtering role for the Administration, for he can identify those “deserving” individuals—those who, as discussed in chapter 1 (under Campus Racial Climate section), would not have disgraced the University’s reputation (University, 1940, p. 7).

Lucy Gray, one of my senior member participants, remembers Lee’s interventions. “I think that was his main purpose—to get them [young African Americans] involved at the university … He was very interested in young people, and he encouraged them to get an education” (as cited in Mabry, 1989, February 5, p. E3). Lee composed many letters of recommendation on behalf of black graduates. In his letters, he addressed parents, university authorities, and students as he offered advice and arranged meetings and campus opportunities. Parents and students called on him for information before enrolling at the University. “I thank you,” writes Ollie L. Brown, from the State Normal school at Montgomery, AL, on August 31, 1928 “for your letter giving me the desired information concerning rooming places for young women who attend the University” (Ollie L. Brown, 1928, August 31, para. 1). Miss Brown further inquired, “Are persons who are not members of the sorority permitted to live in the building which you mentioned?” (Ollie L. Brown, 1928, August 31, para. 1). Miss Brown ends the letter announcing her intention to attend this University provided she had earned the necessary credits in her home institution.

Lee’s post allowed him access to the academic qualifications of black students to which he referred when recommendations were requested from him. His influence reached employers
in Illinois and beyond for he was consulted about African American graduates and prospective African American teachers. Showing an uncompromising disposition, as with his lyceum organizational letters (examined in chapter 3), Lee offers his reference on behalf of a young African American woman, Miss Martha Wilson, to the Manager of the Colored Teacher’s Bureau in Wilberforce, OH, who had made inquiries directly to him (F. A. McGinnis, 1924, April 21) about Miss Wilson’s scholarship, character, and qualifications. On April 29, 1924, Lee replied to the query:

[Miss Wilson] is a student in Home Economics in the College of Agriculture. My knowledge and relations with Miss Wilson, are of a social nature. I have however, looked up her grades, and she seems to have done fairly well as a student. Her work is that of the average student. She is a young lady of pleasing personality and of good address. She meets people well, and is quite an attractive girl. She comes from a good family, and impresses me as a young woman of good character. I do not know whether she has had previous teaching experience, but she ought to be able to adapt herself to the work.

(Albert R. Lee to F. A. McGinnis, 1924, April 29, para. 2)

Albert R Lee positions himself here as good judge of African American character, personality, comportment and presence, and family background. While not being too familiar with her academic work, Lee attends to the social features which should grant this young African American woman a position as a teacher, and frames her as deserving because of these credentials, which oppose how black women had been traditionally imagined—far from docile or civilized.

Albert Lee’s race work in favor of African American students not only included admissions and financial aid interventions, but also involved counseling and material learning of
racialized divisions in town. “He … helped [these students] learn their way around Champaign-Urbana, which had segregated restaurants and barber shops in those days” (Mabry, 1989, February 5, p. E3). Moreover, Lee “matched students up with families in north Champaign that were willing to rent out rooms.” Alternatively, Rebecca Mabry has observed that Lee offered meals and lodging in his home (Mabry, 1989, February 5, p. E3). Via these contacts, Lee engaged these women in his local race work. His inquiries—his search for housing in his black neighborhood and his enrolling of Bethel families in this cause—have prompted these women to conduct comparable activist work of their own, and to document his initiatives, and references to them as newspaper notes were being published locally at key black historical moments, such as Lee’s retirement, his death, the Civil Rights movement in Champaign, and Black History month celebrations throughout the years. By inviting black students to live in the black neighborhood (what would in the 1950s be called the North End), and by doing so in ways similar to his invitations to Bethel’s lyceum, Albert Lee modeled for them the kinds of racial and material traversing that he was performing, from a non-accommodating white campus to a segregated black neighborhood. Given how the “Negro Students” report unapologetically admits to overcrowding on campus dormitories designed for black students (University, 1940, p. 5), Lee’s housing initiatives become critical features of his race work.

Despite being commissioned with (and willing to assume) such influential duties, as a black man, Lee navigated and functioned from within an administration not openly vested (or only minimally so) on challenging inside racist responses. Nonetheless, Lee performed his race work even if it depended on the “magnanimity” of university authorities, on their willingness to listen to his requests for better on campus housing for black students. His documents, which originated in university premises and remained housed on campus archives after his retirement
(and death), are therefore not only material testimony of the racial tensions of his time, but clear evidence of a racialized local history. His writing and his organization of documents are thusly rhetorical practices. Engaging in the project of racial uplift in Champaign, IL, entailed the lived experience of civic and church engagements—leadership and teaching in Sunday school venues, church choir and rhetorical education, and supporting African American university students. Performing uplift further entailed historical documentation practices. Curiously, Lee’s papers do not include pictorial evidence of his life and work in Champaign, IL—that life has been documented only by senior Bethel women in their domestic spaces. This strongly suggests Lee conceived his university post as a site of institutional exchanges—indeed most of his archives are epistolary texts—and of racial interventions and written productions on race matters. Hence, I understand his post as a hybrid one, one from which an influential black man inserted in a white venue served as black student “dean” for the university administration (“Guide,” 1994, para. 2).

It is therefore within long-standing practices of documentation (whether written or pictorial) by African Americans that I situate Albert Lee’s archives and race work. His papers, I claim, are an instance of black self-representations found widely in self-sponsored publications, photographs, exhibits, and in art, thus making his work comparable, albeit at a local level, to what other cultured (and well known) African Americans had already conducted in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as ways of offering alternative written and pictorial theorizing (Fisher, 2005; hooks, 1995; Meyerowitz, 1997; Smith, 2000; Smith, 2004). One such instance of national curatorial (and racial) work is found in W. E. B. Du Bois, who as curator and archivist mounted a gold-medal winning exhibit—the “American Negro Exhibit”—for the 1900 Exposition Universelle in Paris (Fisher, 2005; Smith, 2000; Smith, 2004). While Du Bois had constructed a New Negro through collections of artifacts, books, charts, and photographs, Lee
had produced historical narratives and advocated for black students by mediating and corresponding with parents, employers, and university officials, all with careful attention to white authority. Such representational work—archival and historical—in smaller and larger venues, locally, nationally, and internationally, was possible given how, since before Emancipation African Americans have collected evidence of their cultural work (hooks, 1995; Porter Wesley, 1957/2001; Smith, 2000; Smith, 2004; Willis, 2000). Librarian Dorothy Porter Wesley (1957/2001) observed as well how early black leaders and their white abolitionist supporters “[i]n response to individual and family needs and national interests and in the face of slavery and the later disappointments of reconstruction and disenfranchisement, … persisted in gathering data and in the production and the preservation of records of their race” (p.17).

Lee was, according to Lucy Gray, keenly aware of his duty toward black students—toward those black university students “if they showed the interest” (Mabry, 1989, February 5, p. E3). A belief in uplift through education, scholarly, literary, and Christian, Lee demonstrated a middle-class mindset which divided the worthy from the unworthy. He supported those who were already participating in uplift as he defined it. Further insights into Lee’s sense of racial uplift can be read in his 1912 annual report to the Springfield District Sunday School Union. In this twelve-page annotated report, Lee addressed his co-workers (other District members), offered a summary of his one-year administration, and highlighted some accomplishments—most notably, a system of regular visits to local Bible classes to supervise quality. While his report was not clear on what quality standards he has issued, he was clear in his aim to secure from the Illinois State Sunday School Association “such literature as to enable … [him] to get in touch with the most advanced work” (Lee, 1912, p. 7). What is more telling, however, is his greeting to these colleagues, where he identified himself and others as “strategic leaders … who
are factors for the uplift of their people, as well as agents for the extension of Christ’s kingdom” (Lee, 1912, p. 1). He further contended, “[W]e are the better enabled after lifting the veil of futurity, to design further plans for progression on the work to which the Master has called us” (Lee, 1912, p. 1). To Lee, racial uplift entailed a strong Christian development.

In a 1927 letter sent to the campus members of the Kappa Alpha Psi (Beta Chapter) and the Alpha Phi Alpha (Tau Chapter), Lee appealed to the young black men in both fraternities, and encouraged them to participate in the Baraca Bible Class (men’s class) in Bethel as he argued for how critical such class had been in the lives, uplift, and cultural experiences of black university students. “The Baraca Bible Class of Bethel A. M. E. Sunday School in the twenty or more years of is existence, in its efforts to uplift and help young men,” Lee began his letter, “has closely related itself to Students of the University of Illinois” (Albert R. Lee, 1927, October 7, para. 1). Lee further contended how religious training is a wise addition to a scholarly one; he indicated that students’ participation in this class had been traditionally steady, but noted as well how “in the last year or two … the attendance of Students has been indifferent and fluctuating” (Albert R. Lee, 1927, October 7, para. 2)—the signs of apparent decline of alternative sites, or rather one of increased opportunities such as those offered by black fraternities. Lee provided as evidence of the significance of the Baraca Class a list of prominent African American graduates, sportsmen, musicians, teachers and architects who had participated in Bethel’s Sunday school.127 Lee ended his letter by observing how these upper classmen, as well as the freshmen who were already participating in Bethel, needed a Christian education and could find one in Bethel’s premises despite “the lure of social life” on campus (Albert R. Lee, 1927, October 7, para. 4).

127 The names of these prominent African American students, as characterized by Lee, are listed in chapter 3, Relocating Racial Discourse section.
Lee positioned himself through such letters as a symbol of racial integration locally—a man knowledgeable about opportunities for African American students on campus and in the black neighborhood. His image supports well-repeated and non-apologetic University discourses about its alleged non-discriminatory practices. In an exchange (of sorts), his advocacy was heard (or partially so), and his local interventions in favor of black students were permitted. In doing so, in granting Lee with a visibility at a President’s Office, with a rhetorical space on campus from which to offer recommendations and intervene in housing matters for black students, the University gains an intermediary who fulfills a social service: With the University not fully vested in offering integrated accommodations or even enforcing them, Albert Lee, via his liaisons to African American families, assists in black students’ needs. Accordingly, the University aligns, too, with national discourses of the time on the gradual integration of the deserving and virtuous African American, for Lee was not a representative of the Negro problem, but of the “talented” ones, and as such, able to identify others with his (and Bethel’s) moral and cultural traits.

4.2 Contesting Institutional Memory: Senior Bethel Women’s Collections

While Lee’s racial work highlights the interplay of the official and the private, Bethel senior women’s work foreground the domesticity of historical documentation. These women understood race work as their everyday responses to living as African American church-going citizens (and as young women and some as university students then) in Champaign-Urbana, IL, during the early twentieth century. They built their social and activist spaces from within
Bethel’s initiatives. They documented their lives with race texts (written, pictorial, and experiential); surrounded their homes with such texts; offered frequent programs as reminders of their history and experiences; and taught their own folk (and interested outsiders) of their racialized histories. Their systematic acts of documenting alternative experiences, some collective, most individual, align with how other educated (and well-known) African Americans had imagined their own work—responding by way of writing, publishing, remembering, and engaging publicly. While most of their recollections refer to the interwar period, when Bethel’s lyceum was at its height, and during Lee’s tenure as its President (most of the 1920s and part of the 1930s), these women recall their continued support (both materially and socially) toward black students even until the late 1960s, the decade when the church resurfaced locally. The scope of their archival work suggests longer trajectories that originated in Lee’s times (or were most visible then) during their youth, but continued to their activist Civil Rights years when they brought back Lee and his racial work on campus to the black and the university’s collective imaginary. As a practice inherited from relatives, and nurtured by Lee, they enacted long-standing traditions found in black women’s clubs, for instance, which they continue to perform today.

These senior women reconfigured race work from within their safe spaces (Bethel’s premises and their private ones) by foregrounding and trusting their domestic experiences as valid history; they have collected evidence of such experiences in albums, memory books, on their walls, securing memories in the process. They did so in response to the conflictive spaces that African American students and university employees, and Bethel members had encountered

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128 Bethel women, those of Lee’s times, had established such tradition with the writing of church histories. Such is the case with the 1938 (Bethel, 1938) and 2008 (Bethel, 2008) texts, with the first one organized by Lee.
in Champaign, in Urbana, and at the University of Illinois as these women traversed racialized educational, civic, and city boundaries marked both by racism and the railroad tracks. They did so—just as Albert Lee had done before them with his interventions on behalf of black university students—by tending to those who were to become part of the “Talented Tenth,” African American university students navigating a white educational venue “without discrimination.” Not departing from a focus on education, they directed their activist pursuits to support the body and soul of these students; they provided rooms and meals along with religious, social, rhetorical education to black students. Bethel senior women conducted their work at exclusionary (campus) and receptive (black neighborhood) locations. They crossed over racially divided spaces back and forth from a predominantly white university and city to their residence locations at times when wide acceptance of African Americans in public spaces was not the norm, and when service was frequently delayed on campus establishments and city ones.

Few official (read county historical archives or university ones) or published records document pictorially such divided landscapes, and when they do, we learn about such divisions by inference only. A close examination of Champaign’s and Urbana’s photographic history in the early twentieth century, as found in the collections *Images of America, Champaign* by Raymond Bial (2008) and *Images of America, Urbana* by Ilona Matkovszki and Dennis Roberts (2009), reveal pictorial evidence of both cities in the early twentieth century completely devoid of race differences.¹²⁹ Public images of black citizens might not have been produced extensively

¹²⁹ An earlier collection by Raymond Bial (1993), *Champaign: A pictorial history* reproduces a 1936 photograph of the Champaign Police Department, with Patrolman Allen A. Rivers (Bial, 1993, p. 109). He was an African American man, Bethel member, Eunice Nelson Rivers’ late husband, and artist Angela Rivers’ father. He became the first African American police officer in Champaign, IL, in 1935 (Bial, 1985, Allen Rivers, para. 2). In summer 2009, a block of Park Street, where Bethel is located, was renamed Honorary Allen Rivers Sr. Street.
or at all, because, as a less conspicuous and geographically contained minority,\textsuperscript{130} African Americans were not subjects in the official photographic record. Domestic archives did a better representational work. Scenes from downtown Champaign and Urbana, images of patrons and employees in stores, street vendors and all sorts of trades, town parades, and city life on the train tracks and on campus erase or ignore the African American experience. Instead, such experience was taking place elsewhere—in northern Champaign, in the black neighborhood. When images did include a representation of African Americans (Figure 24, top, left and right, and bottom), they did so in problematic ways—either ridiculing, or displaying African Americans in service positions, their customary employment sources—thus contrasting with Lee’s self-presentation and senior women’s collections.

\textsuperscript{130}Population size for Champaign-Urbana in 1900 was 14,826, including 475 African Americans (3.2%) (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2013a). In 1940, the population had grown to 37,366 with 2,126 African Americans (5.7%) (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2013b).
Publicly, African Americans were seen in service positions (top, left and right, Urbana) or depicted in blackfaces (bottom, Champaign).

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131 Top, left and right: These photographs were part of the John Hubbard Collection, Illinois Traction. These photographs were provided by Dale Jenkins, President of the Illinois Traction Society (Parlor car, 1912, July 23a; Parlor car, 1912, July 23b). Parlor observation service (July 23, 1912) originally published in 1989 in Illinois Terminal: The electric years (Stringham, 1989, p. 38). Electric interurban railway connecting Champaign-Urbana to Danville in ca. late 1890s republished in Images of America: Urbana (Matkovszki & Roberts, 2009, p. 71). Reproduced by permission of Dale Jenkins, Illinois Traction Society. Bottom: Presidential candidate William B. McKinley visited Champaign-Urbana in 1914, which prompted a parade to honor him (Bial 1993, p. 101; Bial, 2008, p. 20). This photograph is in the public domain, but after careful and repeated searches assisted by Anke Voss, Director of Special Collections at The Urbana Free Library, it was not found in the Champaign County Historical Archives. A Raymond Bial collection (1993), Champaign: A pictorial history, reproduces this 1914 photograph (Bial, 1993, p. 101); a later Bial collection, Images of America: Champaign, reprints it too (Bial, 2008, p. 20). Reproduced by permission of Raymond Bial.
Instances of third-party representations are photographs (1912) of the Interurban Railway (Urbana) depicting an African American parlor car porter wearing a white uniform and welcoming passengers (Figure 24 top, left and right). These photographs “were taken on July 23, 1912 by the publicity department of the Illinois Traction System, promoting the new parlor car service” (D. Jenkins, personal communication, June 26, 2013). “The railroad system served as transportation for migrating African American as well as an employment sources” (Through the years, 1998, p. 1). The second instance that I have encountered is a photograph of a town parade (Champaign) in March 1914 welcoming Representative William B. McKinley\textsuperscript{132} to Champaign-Urbana and which included the Y-Minstrels float with its blackface performers (Figure 24 bottom) (Bial, 2008, p. 20). Not surprisingly, these images, prior to their publication and circulation in these collections had been originally stored in the Champaign County Historical Archives of the Urbana Free Library, one of our local institutional, or “imperial” archives.

In contrast to these archived depictions of public life in Champaign-Urbana, IL, in which the African American experience had not been recorded, another collection of images compiled by Raymond Bial (1985) did focus on older black citizens living in Champaign-Urbana, IL, in the 1980s. Some of these citizens were Bethel members or relatives of the senior women with whom I have worked during my research. Not surprisingly, this collection offers pictorial glimpses into these individuals at their domestic locations and own businesses in the black neighborhood. Overwhelmingly, in vignettes accompanying their portraits, these senior black citizens offer reflections about their settlement experiences in the twin cities as children or young.

\textsuperscript{132}William B. McKinley was a Champaign local, former university student and trustee at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. He was a business man instrumental in the water, electric, and traction system of the twin cities (Bial, 1993, p. 76). He served in Congress from 1905 to 1913 and from 1915 to 1921 as a Representative, and from 1921 until his death in 1926 as a Senator (United States Congress, n. d.b).
adults and recall stories of early migration from Southern locations because of the affluence of jobs that Champaign and Urbana afforded in the early twentieth century. Most notably, the images included in this collection deviate from the ludicrous stock characters of minstrelsy and foreground the dignified domesticity and countenance of black middle-class citizens, such as the following photograph of Carrie Nelson (Figure 25), Bethel member, who wrote poetry and belonged to the Philathea Bible class, and whose daughters became key participants in my research. The granddaughter of slaves, now deceased, she posed here in the mid-1980s showing some of outward signs of middle class visibility: Wearing a classic, yet casual outfit, she sat comfortably on an ornamented chair in front of a curtain panel, surrounded by a buffet and an end table, many flowerpots, a vase, and indoor plants; her poodle dog accompanied her.

Figure 25. Mrs. Carrie Nelson, Bethel member (1985)\textsuperscript{133}

Member of the Nelson family—one of the earliest black families establishing in Champaign-Urbana in the late 1800s.

\textsuperscript{133}Photograph of early Bethel member Carrie Earnest Nelson included in the pictorial book \textit{In all my years} (Bial, 1985, Carrie Nelson, n.d.). Reproduced by permission of Raymond Bial.
Reverend James R. Wilson, a local minister, recalled, however, a “restriction on where colored people could live” (as cited in Bial, 1985, Reverend James R. Wilson, para. 3). Ruth Hendricks shared that “no matter how qualified [they were] … [they] could only get jobs in the service areas as maids and cooks” (as cited in Bial, 1985, Ruth Hendricks, para. 4). In ways that parallel Lee’s experiences, these African Americans (Bethel members or not), directors of recreation centers, editors of black periodicals, religious leaders, and entrepreneurs in their black neighborhood, performed as housekeepers, maids, cooks, janitors, dishwashers, stock girls (in their own words), and laundry and field workers in white homes and establishments and on campus. These older blacks, like Bethel senior women, recalled segregation at the University, in local restaurants, movie theaters, and stores.

To senior Bethel women, these racially divided spaces became their “overlapping social circles,” which is how Jacqueline Jones Royster and Gesa Kirsch (2010) have identified women’s social circulation. These spaces have become their social realms where they “travel, live, and work” across times (Kirsch & Royster, 2010, p. 660). These circles should include as well those where women worship, namely, their black church, a critical location, from which they have derived their impetus to exercise full citizenship and their desire to document experiences. I have inspected with them elements of their material culture and archival choices (texts, photographs, and ephemera); I have witnessed, too, their oral testimonies expand and even modify the existing institutional archive. The homes of these women are therefore valid domestic and learning sites of history. As rhetorical agents in their own locations, these women’s work parallels traditional archival practices—provenance lies within them as creators of their collections; order and classification aligns with subject matter rationale (e.g., church matters, local NAACP, fraternal organizations, housing concerns, Albert Lee, or black war heroes); they
preserve their collections in terms of enclosing, light, and temperature control; and use them in support of presentations, revivals, programs, and the instruction of their young. Few practices depart from more formal or institutional archival work, except for the domestic locations of their texts and the consolidation of the familial, communal, and racial in private repositories. Where the additional or spare material could not be displayed on the walls, it was stored and cared for in attics and basements, or office cabinets. My visits with Bethel women were not merely organized around the texts and images that I had brought to our sessions or my interview protocols, but involved as well active engagements with their space and their materials. Such engagements entailed examinations of their archives and walls with photographs, strolls around the neighborhood to draw memories from deceased members’ names imprinted on street markers (all of my mentors live in the North End), and impromptu and extended conversations with other church members (relatives or neighbors) who joined our walks, and confirmed or modified information they were sharing.

Their familiarity with their documents and their careful framing of materials for my research took the place of a finding aid and descriptions of collections, and revealed these women’s curatorial decisions; they also managed my access to their lived experiences. Like experienced archivists, they made decisions about what should be chosen, preserved, discarded, and, when prompted, they chose what could be shared with me, the researcher. In doing so, they signaled self-identification as the keepers of their local history, but revealed as well their private policies about access for research use: Since I am not a black woman, since I was conducting research out their racial boundaries, I had to be mentored by the women maintaining black domestic archives. I have witnessed these women unbundle newspaper collections and work with me through their content. I have seen them select from their storing cabinets the texts which they
judged I needed to read according to my inquiries. They have shared these texts one at a time, and have guided my learning. Hence, these acts of safe-keeping, of controlling the materials under their purview, and of selecting what to bring forward from their storing places to our discussions, has prompted me to acknowledge these women as agents in their own archival locations. In describing the roles of researcher-agents, Cheryl Glenn and Jessica Enoch (2009) observe, “Archivists catalogue the materials, decide what to preserve, and determine how to catalogue [them] …, thereby controlling the materials we can access and the processes we take to get to them” (p. 329). Even as these women tended to my inquiries, they defined who the historians for our recovery project were.

The women who became my mentors are African American, middle-class, church-going women whose ages range from eighty-six to one-hundred years of age. Erma Pauline Scott Bridgewater, a ninety-nine-year-old woman, was a choir member, former director of the local black community center (Douglass Community Center), and a 1937 university graduate (Bethel, 2013; Lee, 1932; Lee, 1936, p. 3) with a bachelor’s degree in Sociology (Seniors, 1937, p. 116) and a minor in Psychology (Bethel, 2013), who after graduation could only find a job as a maid on campus, at Newman Hall where her mother was working (Bethel, 2013; Merli, 2013, April 3, para. 20; Powers, 2013, April 3, para. 13). Erma Bridgewater, who later became a community activist, classified her documents according to subject matter in hanging folders in office cabinets. As a young woman, she was invited to sing for lyceum meetings. She held a collection of newspaper articles and photographs on Bethel’s choir and its performances on campus with Lee as its President (E. Bridgewater, personal communication, date). Mrs. Bridgewater was one of the students prompting Lee’s intervention on campus in the mid-1930s (Pringle, 1996) on a

134On April 2, 2013, Erma Pauline Scott Bridgewater passed away in Champaign, IL.
case of classroom discrimination on the part of an instructor. She was conceivably the most interviewed black woman in Champaign-Urbana. Lucy Gray, one-hundred years old, enjoyed a longtime friendship with Albert Lee and his family. An advocate for women’s voting registration and former antique-store owner, Lucy Gray studies local newspapers and their accounts of Bethel members’ work and compiles them in acid-free albums. Lucy Gray was the first black woman to run the elevator at Kaufman’s department store (downtown Champaign, IL). She was subsequently promoted to cashier, sales woman, and finally to clothes buyer (L. Gray, personal communication, September 18, 2009).135

Estelle Nelson Merrifield is an eighty-six-year-old nurse, and the church’s recognized historian for her collections of texts, photographs, triptych displays, and memories. She stores her materials in archival boxes, in her attic and basement, under temperature and light control, some of which she has displayed with her sisters—Mrs. Hester Nelson Suggs136 and Mrs. Eunice Nelson Rivers,137 also Bethel members—in local events and at a public television series, Illinois Pioneers. The three Nelson sisters have continued their parents’ work—their mother, Mrs. Carrie Mae Earnest Nelson (Figure 25 shown above), wrote poetry for various publications and for Bethel’s lyceum meetings, and belonged to the Philathea Bible Class (E. Merrifield, H. Suggs, &

135 Both women, Erma Bridgewater and Lucy Gray, participated in the boycott of a local department store during the Civil Rights movement in Champaign, IL (L. Gray, personal communication, September 18, 2009; Merli, 2013, April 3).

136 Mrs. Suggs was the former principal of the Booker T. Washington K-5 Elementary School, located in the Douglass Park Neighborhood in Champaign, IL.

137 Mrs. Rivers “worked for Champaign Unit # 4 School District as a teacher’s aide and the as the Title I Parent Coordinator, retiring after 30 years of service to the district” (Revisiting, 2010, p. 28). She is Angela Rivers’ mother, the artist who in 1978 painted the “A Pictorial History of African Americans of Champaign County” mural at the corner of Fifth Street and Park Street. I have reprinted images of the mural, in its original and last fading condition (2009), in the introduction and conclusion of this research. Mrs. Eunice Nelson Rivers was also an artist, a reproduction artist for the encyclopedia Our Wonderful World (Revisiting, 2010, p. 28).
E. Rivers, personal communication, November 12, 2009). Their father, Cecil Nelson Sr., World War I veteran, co-founder of the American Legion Post 559 (Champaign County) in 1932 (Fallen warriors, 1995), became an activist for equality and housing later in his life. The Nelson sisters collected images and references of Lee’s work which later served as sources for the notes on Lee published locally in periodicals.

The historian label the community ascribes to these women extends beyond mere recognition of their status as the oldest members still active in the church to habitual resort of memories. When I first approached the church in spring 2009, I was directed to discuss my project with them. These women were also the most vocal congregants, have participated in producing numerous church histories, collecting materials from the church when manuscripts were discarded in a bonfire at some time during 1970-1971 (D. Lomax, personal communication, February 14, 2013). In contrast with decisions by the clergy of the time to burn documents stored in church premises, these women chose to maintain some of them along with art work in their homes. Not all could be saved, however; some texts were not reclaimed, and it is still not clear what was ultimately lost or distributed. While the burning of documents responded to a changing geography of church spaces, these women, but most notably the Nelson sisters (Estelle Nelson Merrifield, Hester Nelson Suggs, and Eunice Nelson Rivers) and Erma Bridgewater conceived their domestic ones as suitable repositories. Years later, most likely in the 1980s, decisions to re-build their church library came from these women as well. Their efforts faced resistance, and no texts or artifacts were ever returned; they too decided to maintain in their homes what they had saved from the bonfire incident. As Bethel women articulated their contributions (symbolic of their racialized experiences) to this recovery work, they have practiced history by producing narratives that official documents have excluded, and acknowledged the objectifications and
neglect that such documents have promoted. Furthermore, their memories, with their discursive forms and the artifacts connected to them, when contributed as oral histories become archival texts—archives grounded in memory (Burton, 2003, p. 28).

The materiality of family archives—such as the ones maintained by the Nelson sisters—is intended to instantiate for insiders and for the researcher (for me) a racial path from a Southern location to a Midwestern one, nearby a university center. Accordingly, senior Bethel women, by documenting their experiences with images, manuscripts, and print material, have constituted within their domestic sites “private, black–owned and –operated gallery space[s] where images could be displayed, shown to friends and strangers” (hooks, 1995, p. 59). Estelle Nelson Merrifield has created “curatorial spaces in the home” (hooks, 1995, p. 61), an alternative archive affirming black cultural experiences. She has further developed what bell hooks (1995) has called “genealogies” of texts (p. 63), a written and pictorial evidence of her family origins and journey from Chuckey, TN, where her great-grandparents were freed in 1865, to a farm in rural Homer, IL, in the late 1890s or early 1900s. The journey brings her family to Champaign-Urbana, IL, where they finally settled in 1915 so that a family member, Sargent William Frank Earnest—the first African American casualty from Champaign County during World War I—could attend the University of Illinois (Carrie Nelson, as cited in Bial, 1985; Fallen warriors, 1995).

As I was initially studying Bethel’s lyceum, the Nelson sisters were connecting the literate activities taking place there to their everyday lives, and to their chosen modes of service—religious, civic, choral, and military—thereby extending the notion of race work beyond the educational and rhetorical training of a lyceum or a Sunday school class. Estelle Merrifield’s archive, for instance, was mobilized to meet my inquiry when she considered how
her newspaper pieces documenting Lee’s work, the University’s indifference toward black students, or Champaign-Urbana black veterans, might offer my research the larger context she imagined I needed. Her domestic archive was further mobilized by her sisters—Hester Nelson Suggs and Eunice Nelson Rivers—when they articulated racial narratives out of family portraits they had all guarded. Most notably, during our first individual working session (which did not include her sisters), Mrs. Merrifield turned to her pictorial evidence, with the aid of her son who brought archives from her storing locations, before we could examine the written material I had found. She shared how critical black soldiers had been in American military history, and produced the only panoramic photograph in existence of her father, Cecil Nelson Sr., and the all-black Company L of the 370th Infantry during World War I. Before I could learn more about the lyceum during the times when it was barely active (World War I), I had to learn, in her view, about Bethel’s most relevant contribution then—black soldiers’ participation in the war and her father’s medals as evidence of such service\(^\text{138}\) (E. Merrifield, personal communication, March 10, 2009). She was pointing me to a kind of visibility that spoke of another aspect of citizenship—war duties as demonstration of African American civic engagement. She was further pointing me to lived experience and how it had affected her archival choices. These memories are, therefore, not anecdotal or pure familial histories, but local representations of national black citizenship.

I read her mentoring, her display of agency on our first session, as a form of establishing racial pride, one which I had experienced not long before. Before I could learn about their

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\(^{138}\)When I met Mrs. Estelle Merrifield on March 10, 2009, she made sure to show me the Coir de Guerre medal her father, Cecil Nelson Sr., had received during World War I from the French government as a military honor. It was an important for her to establish that this medal had been given to him by a foreign institution and not by the American government.
lyceum, I had to know of their good character, long local history, and their middle-class status and I had to do so via their visual collections. In my first visit to church premises (February 25, 2009), such moments of pride, of self-representation via portraiture, served as their intended introductions as I met Bethel congregants and spoke of my nascent work to them. bell hooks (1995) asserts that black elders maintain these practices—pictorial representation—to avoid the loss of their histories and experiences (p. 65). Individually and collectively as Bethel members, these women displayed family portraits and group photographs which demonstrated the kind of character that should have granted them entrance to any social, educational, and civic circle they had wished to join. Such attempts to enter the conversation, to represent themselves pictorially, aligns with Kevin K. Gaines (1996) and his observations about local and family visual productions: “At a broader, grass-roots level, there is an extensive photographic record of African Americans’ concern to infuse the black image with dignity, and to embody the ‘representative’ Negro by which the race might more accurately be judged” (p. 68). I further posit that such learning involved as well an understanding (mine), given my affiliation to the University of Illinois, of campus racial climate. Hence, as an instance of racial consciousness and before discussing Bethel’s lyceum and their Bible classes, these women made sure I was exposed to a variety of newspaper clippings, one of which (Figure 26 top left) taken from The News Gazette, spoke of unequal opportunities for African American students (Pringle, 1996).
Bethel senior women have developed the habit of collecting texts that documented their experiences locally.

In studying such archival (and historical) engagements, I am drawing parallels between the Nelson sisters—Merrifield, Suggs, and Rivers—and librarian Dorothy Porter Wesley, who was the foremost agent, from 1930 to 1973, in the assembling of the archives at the Moorland-Spingarn Collection at Howard University, in Washington, D.C. (Findlay, 2001, p. 6). Not only did the timelines of these women coincide, but their work involved the searching and storing of historical materials within domesticated black spaces. Porter Wesley has been recognized as a historian by scholars in the field (Dagbovie, 2004; Findlay, 2001) for her archival and library experience, but foremost for the cultural work she conducted at a time when black women who lacked a doctorate were not deemed capable of producing history. Even as she conducted her

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work within the confines of an institutional archive (at Howard University), her searches involved the private spaces of African Americans, thus implicitly recognizing their curatorial skills. As librarian James A. Findlay (2001) observed, “She [Porter Wesley] would personally search in attics, basements, closets and boxes for materials that, to the untrained eye, were often thought of as trash” (p. 8). This not only reinforces how African Americans have been constructing community memory with private documents, but highlights the unexpected and hidden locations in which such evidence is to be found.

In my work with these senior women, I encountered contradictions to the official texts stemming from their memories. Specifically, such contradictions have served as sites of resistance, a way of speaking back to the official record, recalling their experiences as black women in a white location, and using these memories to teach their youth about local black history. John Duffy’s (2007) work suggests that researchers should expect contradictions—oral testimonies might contradict official documentary evidence. Furthermore, scholars who have also conducted historical work through archival inquiries, and for whom such research entailed a familial, personal, and ethnic connection, support the counter rhetorical moves made by “alternative” archives (Eubanks, 2008; Okawa, 2008). Malea Powell (2008), following her visits to what she has called ‘imperial archives’ and from her observations on the “damage done by documents” (p. 116), reminds researchers (and citizens) that if they have been written on, they should speak back to the archives (p. 118). Bethel senior women have spoken back by contributing to oral histories projects locally, and by compiling their own work, speeches, newspaper articles, and any relevant text or artifact directly connected to the accomplishments and hurdles of being African Americans in a Midwestern university location, even if such texts have remained in domestic locations and in less-traditional storing enclosures.
Official university discourses about black students’ experiences on campus during the early twentieth century articulate a simplistic view of access to campus venues for African American students. The “Negro Students” report (University, 1940), amply discussed in chapter 1, under Campus Racial Climate, and again in chapter 3, under The Baraca-Philathea Lyceum, persistently invoke a non-discriminatory treatment to imply African American students’ unproblematic access to a predominantly white campus. Yet these women’s memories locate black students in less than comfortable ways and question the significance of university locations for its black students, for themselves (as students), and for the black community in Champaign-Urbana, IL. Erma Scott Bridgewater recalled an instance when she felt mistreated and most embarrassed in an English Literature class—when her instructor, regarding her as a black woman only, determined her place of learning as secondary; in the classroom arrangement the instructor offered privileged accommodations to white students. After our co-examination of the “Negro Students” report and its claims during my visit to her house, Erma Bridgewater offered a challenging narrative, documented earlier in the local press (Pringle, 1996, p. E1) and contributed to the Oral History Project of the University of Illinois Archives, Student Life and Culture Archival Program (Scott Bridgewater, 2001, March 22, p. 4):

This English teacher, the first day of class, she had us lined up around the wall, and she called us all alphabetically to be seated. And my name then was Scott, and there was another black girl there; her name was Barbee. And when she got to the B’s, she passed on by her; she got to the S’s, she passed on by. And we were left—the two of us,

\[140\] Sadie Barbee was an African American student at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, who according to Lee’s records enrolled in the Fall semester of 1931 (Lee, ca. 1937a). He had her listed too as a senior in 1935 (Lee, 1932), but there is no archival evidence of her graduation.
left standing there, and she then, seated us [in the back of the classroom]. (E. Bridgewater, personal communication, September 17, 2009)

To Erma Bridgewater, studying this report and its references to university access entailed positioning her own experiences as a black student as counter-evidence. In particular, the complex racist geographies of classroom participation, visibility, and seating etiquette were therefore embodied, personal, and racially charged.

Mrs. Bridgewater observed as well how through a “network” of black employees at the University—two African American men: her father, Raymond M. Scott, who was a mail carrier, and the chief clerk at the President’s Office, Albert Lee—the incident was brought to the attention of the University President\(^\text{141}\) and was resolved favorably. Her teacher, she continued, after being summoned to offer an explanation, “gave some foolish reason for what she did; she thought we wanted to sit together” (E. Bridgewater, personal communication, September 17, 2009). Mrs. Bridgewater rejected as a sensible account, hence her characterization as “foolish,” that two young women should be left to the end of an attendance list so that they could sit together, but in the back of a classroom, inhabiting locally their own segregated space. When black citizens were imagined publicly in the far balconies of theaters, at a counter but not at tables of restaurants, and off-campus living in the black quarters, and when they had to wait until after-school times to use swimming pool facilities (another of Mrs. Bridgewater’s struggles as a young woman), she positioned herself, then as a student and today as a black woman, as deserving of front visibility. Because of her sober outlook on life, she rejected assumptions of classroom seating preferences based only on the legibility of her race. From her teacher’s

\(^{141}\)This president was most likely Arthur C. Willard (1934-1946) (Dr. Arthur Willard, ca. 1934), given how Mrs. Bridgewater graduated from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign in 1937 (Pringle, 1996, p. E1; Scott Bridgewater, 2001, March 22, p. 1).
explanations, she reasoned, “we could sit together in the front row even.” Sadie Barbee’s visibility is limited to 1931 index card that Lee created for her (Lee, 1937a) (Figure 27 top), for the 1935 yearbook and the student ledgers do not record her graduation (C. Bertram, personal communication, April 19, 2013), if it indeed took place. At her graduation in 1937, Erma Scott Bridgewater was granted visibility, “without discrimination,” in her yearbook (Figure 27 bottom).

Figure 27. Sadie Barbee’s index card (1931) and Erma Scott’s portrait (1937)

These photographs support a visibility granted to black students at graduation, for instance.

As a matter of interest, among the early twentieth-century classrooms photographs that the University of Illinois Archives holds, there is visual evidence, such as the following 1912

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photograph of what the Archives classified as a mixed class (Figure 28). In an auditorium, about one hundred students are sitting at individual desks, with their books and writing tools in hand. They are all formally dressed in dark garments—the men in suits and the women in long dresses and most wearing hats. They all look quiet and sober, and pose intently for the camera.

Figure 28. Mixed class at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (1912)\textsuperscript{143}

This photograph, part of a photographic folder (1891-1921), Subject Instruction, is labeled “mixed” by the University of Illinois Archives.

While it remains unclear what was meant by “mixed”—possibly coeducational more than racial\textsuperscript{144}—and in light of the campus climate of the time, it is hard to imagine any fraternization among these particular students given the size of the class, and the overwhelmingly white and

\textsuperscript{143}Photograph of a 1912 mixed class at the University of Illinois (1912 Class [Photograph], 1912) housed at the University Archives. In the back of the photograph there is an inscription indicating that the image was a gift from E. L. Bogart (August 1938). No additional information on this origin of this gift is recorded in the University of Illinois Archives. According to the university archivists, the room appears to be one in the former College of Agriculture. It is now, according to Archivist William Maher, a room at the present Henry Administration Building. Reproduced by courtesy of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Archives.

\textsuperscript{144}This photograph also shows three students who might have been Asian American (third row; third, fourth, and fifth positions from left). A few women can also be seen sitting toward the back of the left aisle.
male constituency depicted here. The photograph foregrounds a front seating arrangement (first two rows) granted to women as students (and possibly, as a minority), with one young African American student sitting amid this crowd—to the right, in the first row (Figure 29 top).

![Image](image.png)

**Figure 29. Mixed class: A focused view (1912)**

This focused view places this young African American student at the center of the claim about having mixed classes at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. This student, whose name we ignore, wears a formal plaid overcoat—a distinctive piece among the rest of the attires in the room. The photograph presents this woman prominently in ways which contrast sharply with Mrs. Bridgewater’s memories, and which depict an enduring isolation, albeit her front visibility in a “mixed” venue (Figure 29 bottom).

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145 Two closer views of the front row of the mixed class of 1912 focusing on a black female university student (*1912 Class* [Photograph], 1912). Reproduced by courtesy of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Archives.

146 I have asked some of the senior Bethel women if they know who this young African American woman was. I have not been successful in identifying her thus far.
Given how images produced for display are never “innocent” (Rose, 2007), a critical examination of this photograph suggests it serves the University a rhetorical purpose, back then and today. In this university classroom, white males constitute the majority; women, although not originally conceived as students, are becoming part of the educated elite in 1912; and black individuals, if interested, can partake of the university’s offerings “without discrimination” as the photograph seems to suggest. A rhetoric of exclusion and inclusion is visually worked here to demonstrate the University’s openness to its minority constituencies—women and African Americans. Thus, this kind of institutional rhetoric, through images, aligns nicely with the kind of neutral ways in which the University would later define access for its African American students. The front row of this photograph (Figure 30) is currently used as the banner of the online page of the Student Life and Culture Archival Program of the University of Illinois Archives (SLCAP).

Figure 30. Student Life and Culture Archival Program: Online banner

The SLCAP’s online banner uses the front row of the “mixed” class 1912 photograph.

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147Front row of 1912 Class placed at the top center of the Student Life and Culture Archival Program webpage (University of Illinois Archives, 2010b), http://archives.library.illinois.edu/slc/. Reproduced by courtesy of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Archives.
This is the first image one encounters when investigating online early twentieth-century student history (Figure 30). And it serves as the banner too for information about African American students’ enrollment—Guide to Student Life and Culture Collections (SLCAC), Student Services, African-American Students) (Figure 31). This last choice for representation, when paired with a description of the kinds of materials available about African American students (e.g., matriculation lists, honors, awards, degrees, sororities and fraternities, and housing), only highlights their minority status. However, the former choice, I contend, reinforces simplistic views of campus integration.

Figure 31. Student Life and Culture Archival Program: African-American Students

The SLCAP’s uses the front row of the “mixed” class 1912 photograph to introduce archival information available for African American students in its Guide to SLCAC, Student Services.

A conflict of experiences emerges when institutional discourses (such as those discussed in chapter 1, under Campus Racial Climate), define African American access in seemingly

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148 Front row of 1912 Class placed at the top center of the Student Life and Culture Archival Program (webpage) of the University of Illinois Archives in its African-American Students section (University of Illinois Archives, 2010a), http://archives.library.illinois.edu/slc/collections/collectionsguide/studentservices/africanamerican.php. Reproduced by courtesy of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Archives.
unproblematic terms and ignoring extra-legal forms of segregation, while these senior women do so in terms of black students’ (and their own) material circumstances, and their sense of dignified participation on campus. Mrs. Bridgewater, who deems this seating incident a humiliating one (Pringle, 1996), has challenged official archives in ways that demonstrate what Jacqueline Jones Royster (2000) has called situated ethos, that is, with an understanding of the hardships of negotiating her own visibility as a black student on campus. Where the “Negro Students” report (University, 1940) persistently argues for a non-discriminatory presence to demonstrate black visibility in a predominantly white university, these woman’s memories locate black students on campus in less than comfortable ways. Senior Bethel women invoked in their narratives the subjectivities that marked their access to the University. While campus visibility, in institutional terms, is a relevant analytical category—enrollment, class participation, and graduation rates—these women’s narratives introduce other analytical priorities such as quality of access to classroom and services. They further interpret the landscapes they gazed (and experienced), and not merely echo university discourses: They resist the purported neutrality of visibility, and address a mainstream need to contain African Americans’ participation in education. These women have spoken back to the archives given that they have been written on. Embodied memories are offered as evidence.

Student housing and convenient eating spaces for African Americans on campus have been recurrent themes as well in these women’s narratives, for their civic and racial awareness entailed student services such as shelter and food, which could have been offered on campus, but were not, at least not comfortably (Just like Dixie, 1945, August 4). Lucy Gray remembered five African American students attending the University in the 1930s when she first moved to Champaign from Paris, IL. She recalled Bethel’s interventions:
There was not a place for Negroes to stay on the campus; so there were six or seven women in the church, Bethel Church, and we decided to take these students [in] … We put a bathroom at the top of the steps, and the outside entrance; [we] fixed it so we could have three student boys, who came here on this VA [Veterans Affairs] scholarship. Nice boys … and they came here because they wanted an education. So those boys [black university students] helped my husband fix that room upstairs [at her former house across the street from Bethel on Park Avenue, Champaign, IL], and we fixed it; so we fed them leftover food; we just opened our home to them, and everybody did [the same]. So those three boys stayed here and graduated from the University of Illinois. (L. Gray, personal communication, September 18, 2009)

Elsewhere her memories are confirmed: “After the Second World War, Mrs. Gray kept students. … The five young male boarders also worked as waiters at the sorority where Mrs. Gray worked; that meant that they could get meals there” (Revisiting, 2010, p. 8). Mrs. Gray ended her narrative for my project with memories of these black graduates, and how they used to contact her frequently during their professional lives. By not being fully obliging—by offering a bland enforcing of housing covenants or no enforcing at all—the University conditioned these women’s activist practices, thus highlighting black students’ needs which Bethel women supplied from their own domestic spaces.

Albert Lee and senior Bethel women perceived and described their spaces and rhetorical work as anything but secondary to them. Their legacy cannot be isolated from the significance of their church in their secular lives, from the community work they performed, and most importantly, from their racial identities. Church spaces, both religious and secular, have been important sites
for their rhetorical practices. Individually, however, Lee and these women have also devised for
themselves particular locations, functions, and practices to organize and perform civic work as
private citizens. From a strategic position on campus and from seemingly feminized
professions—nurses, teachers, and high school principals—Lee and these women managed to
subvert official meanings and create new, local ones. Local agency and enhanced visibility were
key elements in their rhetorical aims.
CONCLUSIONS

RECONCILING COMPETING REPRESENTATIONS

Many of my experiences conducting archival research have been intensely isolating. Deep in university libraries, opening dusty boxes and leafing through yellowed papers that haven’t felt a human touch in decades, I experience the stark contrast with the qualitative research projects I’ve conducted in which social interactions—interviews, participant observations, talk—are the research methods.

—Neal Lerner, “Archival research as social process”

My project is a model of the meaning of local analysis, with implications for American Studies, African American Studies, Rhetoric and Composition, and archival work. My research exemplifies scholarly learning with close attention to communities’ own self-determination, and a methodological approach to working with archives, cultural memory, and community members. It is a collaborative mode of articulating a past, with participants co-constructing narratives, interpreting texts, and mobilizing memories right where lived experienced had taken place. Most importantly, my project contributes directly to Rhetoric and Composition Studies by modeling how historiographic practices, when applied to archival texts, offer new and intriguing evidence of community writing and rhetorical initiatives. Specifically, with conscious attention to the archival turn in Writing Studies (Eubanks, 2008; Hogg, 2006; Kates, 2001; Lerner, 2010; Okawa, 2008; M. Powell, 2008; B. Rohan, 2008), and by attending to the texts stored in private archives and placing them in conversation with institutional ones, my research elucidates modes of including neglected constituencies (e.g., women, African Americans, immigrants, senior
citizens, and working class and incarcerated populations) as valid rhetorical actors and of channeling local histories into the mainstream one. In doing so, we gain increased understandings of the use of rhetorical tools in the context of community projects to assert citizenship; we uncover new literate texts, cultural contexts, and rhetorical habits beyond academic literacies. We further learn of multiple modes of citizenships—economic, political, literary—when “usable” texts from the past speak of current educational concerns. Most notably, we learn of resistance, of how smaller communities respond to in light of larger, more imposing venues.

Given how cultural memberships (and educational ones, more broadly) are still crucial for uplift projects today, this research leads to conclusions that inform contemporary community education as rhetorical. What I have learned about archives and counter-archives transcends Champaign-Urbana, IL, and the African American community with which I have worked, and is applicable to citizens conducting activist rhetorics and organizing community, regardless of how fluid their shared bonds—gender, sexual orientation, legal condition, religious affiliation, cultural interests—could be. The work of scholars in Composition Studies focusing on smaller locales (Gere, 1994; Gere, 1996; Gere, 1997; Logan, 1995; Logan, 2008; Moss, 2001; Moss, 2003; Royster, 2000; Sharer, 2004) has identified, too, in communities a desire for self-determination which in turn prompts members to act rhetorically. Accordingly, my work suggests that the struggles to assert citizenship and education are found in communities and in lesser-known individuals—lesser-known by scholars or the national publicly, that is—who become visible locally, engage their worlds, speak about them, offer criticisms or observations, and attempt to enter public conversations. My work elucidates a need for rhetoric and composition scholars to conceive of class and uplift beyond economic definitions, and to
understand cultural capital as an unstable, always conflicting, community construct. My project suggests, too, the need to complicate the educational choices made in smaller communities, and to revisit uplift for what it means for community members: What are the rhetorical projects/markers that participants have chosen for themselves and their community? How do they reposition their identities to fit their notions of citizenship and civic tasks? Who becomes excluded from such configurations? Historiographic and archival work that answers these questions is democratic, inclusive, and less partial.

I have contended that members of African American communities have asserted citizenship in predominantly white locations via rhetorical work that is self-sponsored rather than scripted by the expectations of white-dominated institutions, such as universities and workplaces. As a rhetorical critique of institutional discourses, my dissertation is an argument for finding, reading, and writing about local narratives of uplift as they emerge within communities—an argument for bottom-up historical explorations of how national discourses around education, community, and activism play out at the local level to accomplish particular uplift projects. My work has examined three rhetorical practices advanced by Bethel AME Church—educational, literary, and historical/archival—which members have deemed foremost religious and civic. Using archival findings from university, public and private repositories, and oral testimonies that I collected from church congregants, I have argued that Bethel became a crucial activist site for both its members, some of whom have engaged most of their private lives in historical and archival practices, and for the black university students who availed themselves of Bethel’s educational, literary, and social offerings when comparable university places did not fully (or comfortably) accommodate them.
Focusing on a Midwestern locality, lesser-known African Americans, and their uptake of the national project of racial uplift, I have argued for the relevance of examining hybrid nooks, as with Albert Lee’s university post, his sheltered (and respected) site of advocacy for black students at the President’s Office in a white university—the intersection of black activism and white administration. Lee’s texts—the letters, manuals, programs, and histories he composed and the material on the African American experience he collected—strongly suggest he consciously behaved as an archivist, curator, and historian performing race work from his university site and his church locations. He did so by promoting and sustaining local ties to campus, training members in elocution, debates, and recitations, and hosting monthly public articulations where black university students could display their literary character and congregants could model middle class propriety. Similarly, I have argued for the relevance of studying “alternative” sites of archival practices and history-telling as with the homes of senior Bethel members. Refusing to be contained and written by institutional texts, senior Bethel women and Lee, in particular, conducted racial work by supporting the education of black university students with food, shelter, and what members have identified as their literary and religious “culture”—and by archiving and sustaining with texts a memory of neglect, self-support, and dignity.

By foregrounding race work as conducted by lesser-known black community members, by dismissing the prevalence of histories informed solely by institutional records and imperial archives, by imagining multiple forms of citizenship as variations of rhetorical performances, and by attending to the intertextuality of space, text and embodied memories, my project, and Bethel’s work during Lee’s times, reconfigures racial uplift. In particular, my work contributes to the scholarship on African American rhetorical tradition by articulating a theory of race work that encompasses the domestic as a site of political literacies, local black rhetors, and their
middle-class choices, and by adding local black archives and memories to historiographic work. Literacy scholars have already established that black churches have been safe sites for the development of religious literacies; moving beyond religious citizenships, the black church, following long-standing traditions of self-help, has demonstrated, too, an understanding of sociopolitical ones. I contribute, too, to Gender Studies. While my work focused on the racial dimensions of uplift, studying its gendered dimensions is much needed when conducting historiographic work. The invisible forces that have kept women in certain domestic roles and their socialization into becoming teachers, for instance, as was the case for Bethel senior women, have also conditioned their abilities to transform the domestic into sites of historical production, into systems of archiving, thus framing the “nurturing” as affirming sites of memory. That is, my work points to the intersections of documentation practices (as persistent rhetorical habit) and women’s work as a revision to the official record.

I have moved beyond the problematic (read elitist) project of middle class aspirations—beyond the troubling intra-racial tensions of racial striving—to analyze local uplift more closely as a “cultural” enterprise of distance and proximity to feared and chosen modes of moral class, respectively. That is, educational aspirations and racial advancement have been highly rhetorical and survival responses—modes of distinguishing from perceptions of lack of civility and education. Because Bethel’s project took place in a church, uplift entailed religious, musical, literary, and advocacy components. Because this project took place in close proximity to a university venue, congregants have designed comparable educational services, which were indeed supportive of their racial discourses. I have studied here a particular configuration of uplift. Mine, however, is a study that argues for research on localities, for shifting sites of interrogation, for breaking the hierarchies between the private and the official, the domestic and
institutional, and the racialized/gendered and the mainstream canon. When we do so, we uncover the private as valid rhetorical and archival locations, as critical and never alternative, and as sites of production of history.

My work offers three methodological frames for the analysis of lesser-known communities and local activism. In particular, such frames are useful in the understanding of dignity, and its role in community formation and citizenship building. First, by working at the intersections of text, embodied memory, and place, archival research is not limited to what the researcher encounters at an archival location. Interpreting text requires memory, a re-living of a history which members reproduce for and with the researcher—an enactment of the dignity of the community’s history and purposes. Second, because communities make place out of space, and because the latter, for marginalized populations tends to be limited, their literacies/places overlap: Same places could be used for the developing of different literacies. Such overlapping matters for it reveals multiple agencies, interests, and citizenships—reveals uplift as a complex enterprise. And third, racial traversing, or simply traversing when applied to any constituency—the mobilizing of racialized, gendered, or marginalized bodies, for instance—offers a way of understanding how individuals from segregated communities move across the mainstream ones back and forth in a performance of both dignity and visibility. Such moving of bodies places the community in the public eye, but could prompt resistance from mainstream venues too. Such mobilizing highlights the researchers, with their identities and memberships—whether they are part of the community or not. In its metaphoric sense, traversing reveals the fluidity of community boundaries and could validate the crafting of legitimate places from which to speak about the community. It does condition how the research unfolds, how community members and researchers work together, and the development of trust. I, for instance, have done my share of
racial (and material) traversing, not just to learn the neighborhood, but I did so when I became visible in the black home, church, and neighborhood, but was nonetheless trusted with texts and memories.

Archival researchers need to continue to find community in the domestic, the unexplored, and the hidden. Lived experience is transformative—it interprets uplift, and mobilizes memory to interpret archived texts. Researchers, working closely with community members and engaging in what Neal Lerner (2010) has identified as the multiple social worlds uncovered by archival research (p. 203), should be successful in producing new rhetors, activist sites, multiple citizenships, and sites of resistance. I close my research by revisiting productive instances of archival work, community interactions, and embodied learning on site, by foregrounding a community’s re-construction of an early twentieth century history from texts, memory, and space. In the coda to this chapter, I offer a narrative of scholarly and personal attachments, mentorship, and trust, which grew out of learning from space, texts, and testimonies. I reveal here a trajectory of learning through interrogating meaning, by being moved and surprised, and by avoiding. I do so to illustrate the social nature of archival work and collective memory, and to highlight the histories left behind.

The memories, events, and struggles that I document here become crucial methodological moments—a model of archival and historiographic work as social interaction and lived experience. In particular, I choose moments of interpretive tensions for me and community members—a shifting of where I was standing and learning, and where Bethel members perceived and interpreted their lives as African Americans in this location. In such moments, I had to pace my thinking, my work. I contemplated institutional and domestic texts, “alternative” and conflicting ways of recalling access to campus venues. Members have chosen to define
themselves, and Bethel, as religious, social, always politically informed, responsive to black students’ needs because of Lee’s interventions and their community “culture”, and as actively engaged in their own and these students’ education. I have seen Lee being analytical, strict with black students, not critical enough with the University but also, most likely, strategic and cautious. I have perceived racial bonds and troubling class distinctions dividing the African-American community. I have seen archives, some offered, others guarded. Some were burnt and dispersed; others found their way to some of our imperial archives (e.g., Urbana Free Library, Urbana, IL), but not to the University Library.

Mine has been a fraught learning process, because, while all church parties have actively engaged in remembering, overlapping and conflicting readings have emerged. Not only have Bethel’s domestic archives and oral testimonies challenged institutional archives, but, given how memory is partial and focused, members’ interpretations—of their work, history, people, and places—have occasionally (and productively) clashed. Furthermore, my approach has not been entirely affirmative. And while race has been the overarching construct, the utmost bond in this community, I have not deemphasized here past or contemporary intra-racial conflicts based on cultural class, and the implications of such conflicts for educational access. The project of racial uplift has left many African American citizens behind in socio-economic and educational terms when cultural access was not always possible and where racism has prevailed. Nor have I neglected to attend to the gendered dimensions of their lives, revealed in a seemingly gendered division of labor. While Lee was a recognized man on campus, while he became the male exemplar of decorum and the authoritative image of the black community, senior women were in charge of supplying—in Bethel, their homes, and in the black neighborhood—the material needs for black students that Lee had identified or had been asked for. The domesticity of some of
these African American women continued on campus; specifically, the gendered prescriptions of employment would prevail as black women worked as maids and black men as janitors. In spite of this socially sanctioned visibility, Lee did not escape such racially-defined logic, for even as he accompanied university presidents on stage during speeches and wrote letters of recommendation on behalf of black students, he served as doorman, too, for their presidents’ private parties (Lee, 1942b, President’s House, p. 33).

A Model of the Meaning of Local Analysis

Following traces in the most mundane spaces, I have documented here the work performed by Bethel, Albert Lee, and senior Bethel members (the women especially), as they became educators, local activists, rhetors, historians, and archivists in the early twentieth century, in particular, during the interwar period. The memories and emotional engagements revealed in Bethel’s archives, Lee’s writing, and congregants’ narratives (especially senior women’s accounts) drew me in, and opened research spaces and practices which I had not originally contemplated. These realizations have not only expanded the scope of my original inquiries—the life and practices of Bethel’s lyceum—but they have prompted me to interrogate how I have represented, via archival, ethnographic work, and oral testimonies, this African American community and myself, as both researcher and frequent guest in Bethel members’ homes and programs. I revisit the voices in Bethel once more to illustrate a trajectory of interactions and interpretive tensions which we have all inhabited, a natural consequence of our collaborative work.

My project began as a historical reconstruction that I was conducting and that I felt I was solely responsible for—a type of intervention into Bethel’s rhetorical past and a recovery of
lesser-known African American rhetors. However, the rhetorical strength of Lee’s letters, histories, and manuals, the cultural memories that senior members brought to our meetings, and their sense of ownership of artifacts, neighborhood places, and recollections, disrupted my locations, my sense of methods, and prompted me to acknowledge new archivist-researcher places—those Bethel members had inhabited. Bethel women’s domestic archives and Lee’s hybrid nook emerged as such places, for these congregants behaved as rhetorical subjects and historical agents in their homes and university posts. I have realized too that, during the initial stages of my research, as I was requesting texts and memories (and bringing to the church’s library those that I had encountered in institutional archives), Bethel senior women had been sharing their recovery projects and racialized histories with me, but most notably, they were intervening in my research process, in my learning, in our ways as scholars of conducting local research. And reading Albert Lee, and seeing him engage Bethel in Sunday school teachings, Biblical plays, debate societies, parliamentary training, Masonic meetings, lyceum programs, housing for black students, and choir presentations on campus moved me to critically imagine a longer history (even longer than the University’s) and a rhetorical habit beyond Bethel’s lyceum.

In the process, despite the arbitrariness of race constructs, my lack of a racial bond prompted some curiosity in the community and, quite possibly, some initial distrust. My positionality (also read as my scholarly interest in Bethel’s history) became a matter of concern for congregants. I was an outsider; I was plain university folk. Throughout the years, other university people had already come to the church for information, so I was indistinguishable then from those who had preceded me. More importantly, I was not racially legible—to some church members at least. Congregants had to know if I was a Negro (Lucy Gray’s term when she met me on September 6, 2009), and they needed to determine me early, before sharing archives with
me. My racial determination mattered: It conditioned our working sessions, our social process of articulating a local African American history from texts, memories, and the trust placed on my use of the artifacts.

While I comfortably accommodated every question about my origin, I too struggled to articulate in writing why a history, not mine, mattered to me. I had made assumptions about an unproblematic use of racialized archives by any researcher; hence, articulating my activist curiosity seemed enough. I had not read into the complications of building cultural capital, the legitimacy of an interest, and the ethical responsibilities of researchers who are outsiders to the community they work with. Some members, however, had me determined already—regardless of my country of origin, I was not African American. So, they have made apologies for observations about white privilege—about the additional burden placed on black students’ educational performances for instance. Eunice Nelson Rivers, the youngest of the Nelson sisters in town, looking intently at me, and prefacing her assertion with “I don’t mean offense,” remarked how African Americans “had to know the work better than what white people had, because otherwise … [white folk] wouldn’t give you the respect that you were due” (E. Rivers, personal communication, November 12, 2009).

Overall, these concerns suggest that members had to know what my plans for their narratives were, and such questions emerged with my visibility, or with members’ perceptions of my racial distance. Hester Nelson Suggs, also a Nelson sister, made sure I knew about what she deemed the fallacy of the University’s awareness on black community matters. During the Civil Rights years (beyond the scope of my research), when the “university crowd” (her term) approached the church to know its history and assess its involvement in the local movement, she emphatically proclaimed, “[You ask us] ‘what were you doing?’ We were getting Champaign
ready for you to be able to come” (H. Suggs, personal communication, November 12, 2009). She added how back then members had taught the university folks about Albert Lee and Bethel women’s activist work feeding and hosting black students (H. Suggs, personal communication, November 12, 2009). With these pieces of information, which she assumed I did not know or had not yet encountered (I knew about Lee pretty well by then), she articulated what she had anticipated would be the dynamics of her sharing and my learning. Furthermore, she constructed Bethel women as equally able to the University to be instructive. Race, research, and trust (through the “expected” researcher’s racial identity) have productively, I claim, intersected here to remind all involved, community members and me, of the ethical implications of research involving the uneasiness of racial experiences and the discontinuity of memberships—both racial and scholarly.

Frequently, I have invoked in my analyses what I have called racial traversing, both in its metaphoric (the intermingling of races) and its literal sense (the crossing over railroad tracks). Bethel members and most other black citizen living in the northern part of Champaign, IL, and black university students who could seldom find decent (as in non-overcrowded) accommodations on campus during the interwar period, typically walked over the railroad tracks, which have served as racial boundaries, but also as markers from which to guard the safety (and containment) of black families and the distance of white ones. These black citizens did such traversing early in the twentieth century, back and forth from campus to the African American quarters, to educate themselves, find food, shelter, and social support and, when possible, work at the University, in most cases, in service positions. In doing so, they have demonstrated awareness of the mainstream-alternative dichotomy. I have introduced this customary practice as an illustration of the meaning of embodied race work: Racial climate locally demanded a
performance, a visibility, and a mobilizing of black people from a white location to a safe black one. But beyond imagining such circulation as disturbing the racial order, I invoke racial traversing as a metaphor for disciplinary knowledge-making—another fluid, and at times unsteady, learning habit. I too have crossed the railroad tracks from Archive to “archive” to meet people, experience distance (as in bodily distance), and to simply contemplate and reproduce, camera in hand, one landscape and the “other.” The “racial” label in the knowledge-making tool that I have introduced here—traversing—has applied to me as well given how Bethel congregants have foregrounded, albeit initially, my memberships, or the lack thereof—university and racial.

I struggled with the complexity of Albert Lee. Not every Bethel member knows today who Lee was. There is no marker in the church and on his tomb on campus, there is no marker either. His marker, his memorials, is at the University Library—the Archives holding his texts. Albert Lee, a man who passed away 65 years ago, held multiple memberships, on campus and in Bethel. He knew his value and made others (i.e. University of Illinois presidents) notice this. My first learning moments involved his archives, forceful letters, annotations on programs, and his signature over the title of President—of Bethel’s lyceum that is (Figure 32).
Albert Lee signs, over the title of President, one of his customary evaluative letters to lyceum officers.

Earlier (in chapter 4, Advocacy from within section) I discussed how Lee had already been in charge of correspondence—responding, not just delivering—as a messenger in the Office of the President, but had used these scribe duties as arguments for his promotion from messenger to clerk during President James’ tenure (1904-1920).  “I owe my official advancement to Doctor Kinley [1920-1930].” Lee recalled in his 1942 institutional memoir, “University of Illinois

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149 Text and signature in January 3, 1923 letter which Lee sent to lyceum officers (Albert R. Lee, 1923, January 3). Letter found at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Archives, in the Albert Lee Papers, 1912, 1917-1928, Record Series 2/6/21, Box 3, Baraca-Philathea, 1920, 1922-1924 Folder. Reproduced by permission of Bethel AME Church.
Presidents I Have Known” (Lee, 1942b). Lee further noted, “[President Kinley] … promoted me to a head clerkship in 1919 and chief clerk in 1920, with a substantial increase in salary” (Lee, 1942b, David Kinley, Personal Relationships, p. 24, para. 1).

Lee took initiative, and designed most filing and administrative work—his office routine, a reminder of his overall sense of discipline, which presidents had adopted (Lee, 1942b). He was aware of most occurrences on campus, but most notably, he received his official correspondence as unofficial dean of African American students at the presidents’ office (e.g. letters from the Dean of Women about housing were frequent). Once, feeling very displeased with an office helper, he had planned to discuss the matter with President James. Their walk toward James’ home was filled with other matters and at their arrival his anger had subsided. When the “offending assistant” resigned, Lee felt free to show his approval on James’ cue. But James observed, “Albert, Albert, I thought you were a better Christian” (E. James, as cited in Lee, 1942b, Edmund Janes James, Appearance and Personality, p. 34). In reference to James’ kindness, he further recalled, “If in the selection of his office help he [James] found that he had made a mistake, he would bear with patience the consequences, not letting them go until they went away on their own accord. I suppose that is why I am still here. I did not leave on my own accord, and he was too kind to fire me” (Edmund Janes James, Appearance and Personality, p. 34). He was indispensable. At his early retirement in 1942, he was asked to return to the office. With other recollections, however, I have been troubled. I was compelled to imagine Lee differently. Beyond the president’s office, he was a black man and the son of a former slave (William Lee, 1908, March 3, p. 5, para. 2). I had to consider the implications of his race—his dual position, serving his community and a white administration.
Albert Lee worked at the president’s office for fifty-two years (1895-1947), and by all accounts, he became a legitimated figure during such historical time. “He loved the University” (L. Gray, personal communication, September 18, 2009), and felt genuine admiration for the presidents he had worked with, especially for Edmund J. James (1904-1920), with whom Lee had spent the happiest (his descriptor) sixteen years of his professional life and “reached …[his] highest usefulness” (Lee, 1942b, Edmund Janes James, Personal Relations, p. 36). Lee (1942b) had fond memories of his times with James, not all of which included the seriousness of university affairs. Reporting with certain sadness a few changes in the location of the President’s house,150 and how he had helped President James arrange his library in his new home, Lee (1942b) wrote:

I could recall occasions when the family was at a meal and Mrs. James would invite me to partake, but my modesty would lead me to invent excuses, and I would hie myself to the kitchen and get a snack. It was from that same kitchen that President James would bring oranges and other fruits to the Office and put them on my desk for myself and others of the force. … I recall the parties there when my wife made the cakes for Mrs. James, who paid her liberally; the Prince Albert coat, once work by Dr. James, that Mrs. James gave me and ou grown clothes worn by Herman James [the son] that she gave me for my boys; the time when I acted as doorman for parties given both by Dr. Draper [the former president, 1894-1904] and President James, and I received the usual one dollar per evening.151 (Edmund Janes James, President’s House, p. 33)

150In ca. 1918, President James’ house located in the W. F. M. Goss property, on 1203 Nevada Street, Urbana, IL (Lee, 1942b, Edmund Janes James, President’s House, pp. 31-32).

151Lee places these services during President James’ tenure, 1904-1920. He offers no specific year, but implies they took place more than once. Based on the annual average consumer price index, I have calculated that a 1913 $1 dollar payment had a 2012 purchase power of $23.19; while a 1920 $1 payment is equivalent to a 2012
Being used to his lyceum letters, I rejected seeing him as the recipient of such loftiness. I had not encountered his modesty anywhere either. But I was beginning to understand, too, how the church, despite its crafting of a cultural ethos, had validated, with a clear sense of place, the dignity of the menial jobs they could attain.

Reflecting on what he interpreted as President James and his wife’s generosity, Lee, the man who knew his worth and all the mores of this university office, removed himself from these social gatherings, even if private. He knew social hierarchies; he knew his “place” too, or at least the one accorded to him then, because of his job and racial location. How do we reconcile this decision, not to partake in a meal, and his confessed modesty, with the rhetorical savvy of a man who had shared a convention panel with a United States Senator? President James, who had always encouraged Lee’s attendance to his district Sunday school association, excused his absences, and forbidden him to resign from these duties, had once observed, “Albert, I hope he [the Senator] made as good as speech as you did” (E. James as cited in Lee, 1942b, Edmund Janes James, Personal Relations, p. 34). Not once have I read him complain about race relations, but he removed his lyceum from campus too. Only once have I seen him disclose his race (Albert R. Lee, 1924, February 23). Such decisions, concerning his visibility are highly rhetorical—even political, I claim. Race was here inextricably bound to this rhetorical situation, to the ability of performing an actual crossing over—an intermingling and cohabiting of races.

My visits with Bethel women were not merely organized around the texts and images that I had brought to our working sessions, my interview protocols, or the artifacts that senior women were sharing, but involved as well an active engagement with space, on both side of the tracks.

$11.48 payment. This difference is explained by the higher inflation rates (for urban consumers) for 1916-1919 (U. S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, ftp://ftp.bls.gov/pub/special.requests/cpi/cpiai.txt). These amounts ($23.19 and $11.48), nonetheless, suggest a gratuity more than a wage for an evening of services.
Such engagements entailed examinations of their archives and walls with photographs, and strolls around the neighborhood to draw memories from members’ names imprinted on street markers. Through shared working and learning sessions with Bethel members, race work emerges, borrowing Jacqueline Jones Royster and Gesa E. Kirsch’s (2012) inquiry tool (p. 101), as a sustained social circulation of archives and lived histories across racial places and time.

Early in my research, while I was expecting to collect documents only, Bethel senior women had decided otherwise. I had to learn about their history by following certain framings they had conceived. Not only did they take their time in announcing documents and releasing them at later dates, but I had to learn, far beyond my initial focus on the lyceum, by inhabiting their spaces, participating in church events (even in the exclusive men’s Bible study to which I had once been invited), and by re-living moments of traversing neighborhoods, even if such strolls posed no harm today. I had to experience more than my original inquiries. Hence, members took me on many walks. We talked to people seeing us pass by and I gathered names of many potential contributors—people who knew or remembered Bethel’s lyceum (e.g. the granddaughter of the woman who had been a lyceum secretary). Onsite, I had to imagine their past, a house which had looked differently over sixty years ago, all while taking notes of the names of black individuals whom they think could help. Not unlike how I had been getting to know Lee, during my visits I was reading them too. So was I.

Debrae A. Phillips Lomax and Leon N. Lomax, Bethel members and my hosts in the church, accompanied me on one of these first walks (March 10, 2009). After some time walking, we approached a corner, the intersection of Nelson Court and Phillips Drive (Figure 33) in the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Subdivision (North End).
These two street markers, Nelson and Phillips, represent the blending of two prominent families in Bethel.

While it is customary to find streets named after deceased African Americans (national and local) in the North End, this intersection was significant to the Lomax couple, for it also marked the junction of two prominent families in Bethel—the Nelson and the Phillips families. The granddaughter of Charles E. Phillips Sr. (Debrae) and the grandson of Cecil Nelson Sr. (Leon), the descendants of a housing activist and a World War I veteran respectively, had also merged their lives, just like these street markers implied. Whether they had been walking toward this intersection or we had simply found that corner during our visit, I have not asked. But this encounter, and the later walks by myself, prompted me to critically imagine more histories of uplift colored by the mundane, the local, and the familial. I imagined even more intersections: Other Bethel families had intersected; black university students and Bethel had once intersected.

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152 The photograph, which I took, captures the corner of Nelson Ct. and Phillips Dr. in the African American neighborhood, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Subdivision, Champaign, IL.

153 Some names/streets of national recognition found in the North End, Champaign, IL, are Bethune Court, Carver Drive, Crispus Drive, and Dorie Miller Drive.
Lee and senior Bethel women, back in the interwar period (and earlier) had also intersected paths and projects.

One such project, another intersecting of lives, entailed African American university students. While memories and archival texts document Bethel’s material support for students, agency is placed once more on Lee. After discussing archives, Nathaniel Banks, Bethel member and Lee’s relative, reflected on the differences between what seemed collegiate and communal in nature to him. “The black community prides itself in saying ‘we took care of the black students when the campus wouldn’t and … we did,” he admitted. However, upon further reflection, he asserted that “because he [Lee] was in Bethel that’s where they [black students] came” (N. Banks, personal communication, March 13, 2009). Indeed, black university students had attended Bethel frequently, its lyceum and Sunday school, during Lee’s time; not as often in later years. “They didn’t need us anymore,” Erma Bridgewater has observed in reference to black students’ leaving Bethel, or staying longer on campus (E. Bridgewater, personal communication, March 10, 2009). Nathaniel Banks has agreed. Even Lee had once acknowledged declension when he sent a letter to the black student associations (Kappa Alpha Psi and Alpha Phi Alpha) prompting them to attend the Baraca Bible class (Albert R. Lee, 1927, October 7). In fact, when campus conditions improved, traversing practices, at least for students, seldom occurred. “I used to walk that walk,” Banks remembered. “That’s a long way between the black community and the campus when you have to do that every single day” (N. Banks, personal communication, March 13, 2009). He therefore reasoned that with increased opportunities for black students on campus, “these activities which the community had them engaged in will slowly over time diminish” (N. Banks, personal communication, March 13, 2009). And they sure did.

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154I offer an examination of this letter in chapter 4, Advocacy from within section.
Remembering carries its tensions too, for a lyceum program, for instance, can become at once a source of pride (rhetorical savvy) and of painful memory (outsiders’ intimidation). Actively working on texts and images, reviewing lyceum letters, and at times reading them aloud, together at her dining table, Erma Bridgewater observed in amusement, “I can see why you’re interested in this.” We had been reviewing lyceum programs and Lee’s letters to student officers. She frequently smiled and made a comment about Lee’s writing; I had done so too. Erma Bridgewater had once performed a solo number for a lyceum meeting, but added “I really didn’t realize what kinds of subjects they did discuss. Of course I was a little young then” (E. Bridgewater, personal communication, September 17, 2009). Indeed she was; at the height of the lyceum (mid-1920s), she had been in grade school. One extempore lyceum topic, however, caught her attention. “The Klan,” she said and paused, “I remember some of their antics” she ended (E. Bridgewater, personal communication, September 17, 2009). Her narrative included some of the customary features of intimidation—an African American family with the “temerity” to move to a block where no other black family had lived before and a burning cross. Here, once more the railroad tracks played a significant part in African American life: Her father, she recalled, “and other black men in the community, were up on the tracks, to make sure, to guard” (E. Bridgewater, personal communication, September 17, 2009). By mobilizing such memories, expanding on Lee’s texts, Erma Bridgewater illustrated how lived experience has circulated across generations, making meaning out of forgotten records. Most notably, I have seen how text (and place), when shared with the community, elicits memory. I have seen too how activism could also take the form of memory. But realizing how Bethel is an aging church, I ask, who will maintain the archive when these women have passed?
Other senior women had their own agenda for my visits and exercised a good deal of control over the subjects. In a session scheduled to last one hour, I stayed three discussing with Lucy Gray (September 18, 2009), the oldest member alive in Bethel today, key figures and moments in Bethel—she had known Albert Lee and, like Erma Bridgewater, she had lived throughout the Depression, wars, discrimination, and Civil Rights. During our working session, she focused on Bethel’s socials on Saturdays, which were members’ only social outlet according to her. She insisted, however, that “everybody was at church on Sunday” (L. Gray, personal communication, September 18, 2009). She has challenged with her visibility conventional jobs by running the elevator in a department store; she had also picketed another one in the 1960s, also with Erma Bridgewater, when employment was denied to African Americans locally. Yet, she seemed to resist my questions about Bethel’s activism, which I had been hearing and reading for months. She framed Bethel as religious and social, not political. She was emphatic, and while others have failed to agree with her (I do too), she announced that Bethel had never been “political” or even organized. Seeing my own insistence on learning more about Bethel’s societies—religious or literary—she promptly moved me, as she had done throughout our session, to another subject by firmly asserting, “I don’t know. Ask me other questions” (L. Gray, personal communication, September 18, 2009). And I did. But she stayed on task, and identified for me some of the families which had helped black students—the Scotts, the Banks, the Popes, the Lees. So I had to see her landscape too, and imagine a place where a social service is purely religious and not necessarily a pivotal enactment of black citizenship. Was her picketing a Champaign store in the 1960s a political, civic or activist pursuit to her? I failed to ask.

When the institutional met the domestic, a reconciling of narratives—the official and the private—was hardly possible. Textual learning and circulation, in time and space, have been
crucial throughout my writing. Interpretive tensions were present here too. In chapter 1, I introduced the “Negro Students” report (University, 1940) as seemingly neutral but problematic narrative only highlighting an equally problematic locality. Throughout my writing (especially in chapters 3 and 4), women’s memories of university experiences (e.g. Erma Bridgewater’s classroom visibility) and Lee’s lyceum texts (his racial topics) have placed the report at odds with the realities of campus racial climate in the early twentieth century. Yet, Albert Lee was author, co-author, editor—he was a contributor of facts on prominent students, Bethel’s lyceum, athletics, academics, churches, and black alumni. Lee’s authorship validated this text and made it both communal and institutional. The University had most likely commissioned it, like had been the case with many of Lee’s productions about the University (or its institutions) and statistics on African American students (e.g. Negro Matriculants List archival collection, 1942). Yet, what I perceived as an apologetic tone—the reports’ frequent characterization of access to main events as taking place “without discrimination”—was troubling.

I had been studying the report since the spring of 2009, which while located in President Arthur C. Willard’s archives, had been filed under both General Correspondence (University, 1940) and Negro Matriculants List (Lee, 1940, June 25), with only the latter carrying a cover with Lee’s name on it. My working copy had always been the former. Its multivocality, its collaborative stance, had not been clear to me until I found a copy of the report in a Chicago Public Library155 and discussed provenance and authorship with the university archivists in Illinois. While Erma Bridgewater, Lucy Gray, and the Nelson sisters, Estelle, Hester, and Eunice, were articulating racial struggles, the report insisted on unproblematic access, “without discrimination.” And while I had found many African American students in the pages of the

155 The Vivian Harsh Research Collection at the Carter G. Woodson Regional Library, in Chicago, IL, holds this report under the Illinois Writers’ Project (IWP), documenting the Negro in Illinois Project.
student yearbook, as seniors (Figure 34, top and bottom), I had to consider once more what that yearbook visibility—those middle class dignified portraits—entailed.

Figure 34. Access “without discrimination”: Senior yearbook portraits (1912-1936)

Julian H. Lewis (class of 1912) and Marian O. Bartlett (class of 1936), prominent African American students, featured in their yearbooks.

Those portraits conceal the mundane, the railroad tracks, and the everyday struggle for a meal. Perhaps there had been no concealment, if these particular visibilities on campus might have fallen under the “exceptional” African American label. I had to critically imagine where Lee had been standing this whole time, his own landscape. The black rhetor had known the slow pace of racial tolerance locally. I reminded myself too that he had moved his lyceum to the safer location.

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156 Both portraits were originally published in the yearbook The Illio. I took these photographs at the University of Illinois Archives. Top: Focused view of Julian H. Lewis (Seniors, 1912, p. 66). This image is in the public domain. Reproduced by courtesy of the Illini Media Company. Bottom: Focused view of Marian Bartlett (bottom) (Seniors, 1936, p. 51). Reproduced by permission of the Illini Media Company.
Images can argue, represent, conceal, and materialize people and landscapes long gone. I introduced my work with the image of a now demolished mural, “A Pictorial History of African Americans of Champaign County” (Rivers, 1978) (Figure 35, left and right).

This focused view of the mural (lower left corner) as art and memory. Until the summer of 2010, the mural used to be located on the corner of Fifth Street and East Park Street, in Champaign, IL. It was artistic, commemorative, and a response to a local employment act and to the Chicago mural movement in the 1970s. This was not Bethel’s mural, even as it was on its block (not its property) on East Park Street, and had as its main artist Bethel member Angela Rivers. But it was a black community mural. I am closing with a focused view of a local African American representation (Figure 35, left)—a black image. Tensions followed this mural too. When the artist was working on it during the summer of 1978, Ray Hines, community member, recalled that “some people wanted it and some people didn’t … but there was a struggle in doing it … it displays the way … [African American citizens] feel about the

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157This sequence (two focused views) shows the lower left corner of the mural on Fifth Street and Park Street. Left: Original painting (1978) (Rivers, 1978). Reproduced by permission of Angela Rivers. Right: Deteriorated view as it looked in 2009 before its demolition during the summer of 2010. I took the photograph of the fading mural (right). Angela M. Rivers was the main artist in this community painting (Lenstra, 2010; Revisiting, 2010).
town” (as cited in *Revisiting*, 2001, p. 21). In the spring of 2009 when I first encountered the mural, it was fading (Figure 35, right), and even a year later in close proximity to its demolishing, the mural was a matter of discussion and mostly of memory, on campus, in Bethel, and in the black community. It even initiated a memory workshop—a mapping session—with attention to space and testimonies, in which the senior women and I participated.

The materiality of this representation, with its tensions and memories, has served as a reminder of my process of local analysis. “Performance becomes the argument,” observed Shirley Wilson Logan (2004) in reference to nineteenth century mainstream reactions to the “articulate Black body” (p. 36), to well-known African American speakers and to evidence of their “exceptional” eloquence. Performance has also revealed here who the black rhetor is: Through a dignified visibility, by claiming to be community beyond reproach, not embodying a citizen-to-be, but an already uplifted one, Bethel, Albert Lee, and the senior women have shifted the focus to their own locality, to their own uptake of racial uplift, and to the intersections of race and education.
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158 Hereafter, unless otherwise noted, all primary (archival) sources included this list are housed in the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Archives—Room 19 Library (1408 West Gregory Drive, Urbana, IL, 61820) or at its Student Life and Culture Archival Program location (Room 105, 1707 South Orchard, Urbana, IL, 61801).


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