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Daily Beacon Article: "Robinson Remembers University Discrimination"

Commission for Blacks

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Robinson remembers University discrimination

By JACKIE WILSON

This year's Homecoming theme, "Bringing it back," takes on quite a different connotation for black students at UT.

"Bringing it back" recalls a time 12 years ago when three black students were admitted as undergraduates—the first black undergraduates at UT. Before this time, the University had been admitting blacks as graduate

students after a Federal Court decision in 1951 required UT to accept blacks in programs not offered in black state-supported institutions.

Theotis Robinson, Jr., incumbent City Councilman for the 6th District, recalls those days well. He was one of the three undergraduates. In an interview, Robinson described what it was like to be a black student at UT in 1961 during the days of sit-ins,

picketings, and marches.

Robinson said he had applied and received a scholarship to attend Knoxville College, but he changed his mind when he read an ad in a newspaper. The ad had been placed by a civil rights

IRA to sponsor sponge throwing

If you need to release your hostilities toward the administration, the Inter-Residence Hall Association has the booth for you.

As part of the Homecoming Carnival, the IRA will give you a chance to throw a wet sponge at Chancellor Jack Reese. For a small fee, you can also throw sponges at some of your other favorites.

Victims, besides the Chancellor, will be Student Senate President Bill Haltom, Interfraternity Council adviser Nick Wunder, Vice-Chancellor for Student Affairs Howard Aldmon, and Director of Housing Jim Grubb.

The Homecoming Carnival is from 2-6 p.m. today on the intramural field.

organization and cited several grievances, one of which was the exclusion of blacks from white state-supported universities. "That very night," Robinson said, "I wrote a letter applying for admission to UT explaining that I wanted to major in political science and that UT offered the best facilities in Knoxville."

Robinson said he received the customary apologetic reply. However, he and his parents then visited Dr. Holt, president of UT, and informed him that if the Board of Trustees did not alter its policies concerning the admission of blacks, a lawsuit would be filed. The Board changed its position and allowed blacks to enroll. Integration of classes at UT proceeded without incident, at least overtly, he said.

Robinson said he did not run into any real problems in connection with students and instructors. The issue of housing for the three new black students was skirted because all of them

lived in the city. But off-campus it was a different story, he said, since nearly all the businesses along what is now the "strip" were closed to blacks. He recalled sit-ins at many of the places.

Robinson said that there was also considerable resistance to change in athletics and student government. He remembered an incident that caused quite a bit of commotion. One spring quarter there was an upcoming track meet and the opposing team included some black athletes. He said that the late Robert Neyland, then director of UT's Athletic Department, decided there would be trouble if this team fielded their black members and asked the coach to exclude them from running. When the coach refused, the track meet was called off.

At this time student government was greatly influenced by the fraternities, Robinson said. The first time blacks entered a slate for election, they came in a poor last. But this

was the beginning of an effort that eventually culminated in the election of Jimmy Baxter as Student Senate president some years later.

There were no black professors or instructors in the early sixties. Robinson recalled this was such a touchy situation that when Marlon Berry, a black candidate for a doctorate, applied for a teaching assistanceship, he was given the money but was not required actually to teach.

Robinson said that UT has made progress but "is in greater need of progress now than when I was there." He added, "Now the whole of college life needs to

relate to black students." This was not a pressing problem when he was a student since there were no black students living on campus. Now, with the enrollment grown to 625 black undergraduates and 181 black graduate students, there is an urgent need for changes in this area, he observed.

He pointed out one other area in which changes are needed—the Athletic Department's policies of recruiting, especially for basketball. He said recruiting should be based on ability, not on a quota or any other system. "I'm not convinced that that's the way it is being done."

Zwingle is Grand Marshall of Homecoming festivities

Earl Zwingle may live in San Francisco, but he still has ties in Tennessee.

Zwingle is the Grand Marshall of this year's Homecoming festivities and will present trophies during half time of the Homecoming game Saturday afternoon.

Zwingle, a 1931 graduate of UT, has long been active in alumni activities. He was an

out-of-state representative to the Alumni Board of Directors, and he is currently chairperson of the Steering Committee of the Vic Davis Torchbearer Scholarship Award. He is responsible for the Vic Davis Memorial Plaque to be unveiled at 10 a.m. Saturday in Circle Park.

Zwingle is vice-president of Consolidated Millinery Corp. in San Francisco.

