

Midwest Archives Conference Newsletter

Up & Comers Article

This past year I participated in a history conference at which the theme was “hearing silences” in records at archives, libraries, and museums. This theme implies that there is an awareness of missing voices, perspectives, and experiences at record-keeping organizations. But it is not enough to acknowledge that silences exist, it requires a response to address the absence. This is where I take pride in the origins of my position as Archivist for the Black Experience at Northwestern University—it was established by way of student protest and a collaborative initiative between the university and black alumni. In 2015, a decision was made to move administrative offices into the Black House, a community space and refuge for black students at Northwestern. This was not just any campus building, it had great historic significance as it was established as a direct result of an earlier student protest, the 1968 Bursar’s Office Takeover. Fifty years ago, black students at Northwestern presented a list of demands to the administration protesting discriminatory campus policies and for an improved social climate. When the administration did not meet their demands, more than 100 black students occupied the Bursar’s Office. The 38-hour protest led to lasting change at Northwestern such as the creation of the Department of African American Studies and the Black House. Therefore, the decision to move offices into the Black House without regard for its origins concerned students and alumni alike about the erasure of black



Crowd outside of the Bursar's Office, May 3, 1968



Students supporting the Takeover on the steps of the Bursar's Office, May 3, 1968

history and vulnerability of safe spaces on campus. Therefore, one of the many settlements was to establish my position, to designate someone to document and preserve the history and presence of black students, faculty, staff, and alumni of Northwestern University.

I began working at Northwestern University Libraries in July 2017. I made the transition to a research library from the museum field. I previously, worked as the Librarian/Archivist for the Kumeyaay-Diegueño People of San Diego at Barona Cultural Center & Museum and the Library, Archive, and Museum Collections Manager at the Women’s Museum of California. I feel particularly honored to have the opportunity to work with African American collections as someone who is originally from San Diego where African Americans collections are sparse. My interest in archival work peaked when I did graduate research on the San Diego Young

Women's Christian Association's (YWCA) segregated Clay Avenue facility for African American women and girls from the 1920s to 1950s. It is a fascinating story of black women



The Black House at 1914 Sheridan Road

who transformed a traditionally recreational organization at the local level into a body that serviced the larger black community. It was the first and only social services agency for African Americans that provided employment opportunities, housing, and functioned as a space to mobilize for civil rights in the city. Still the local collections do not reflect a wide array of additional stories about the black experience in San Diego. The realization that there are possibly hidden and forgotten histories about African Americans in San Diego was my motivation for building a career around safeguarding accounts of African American

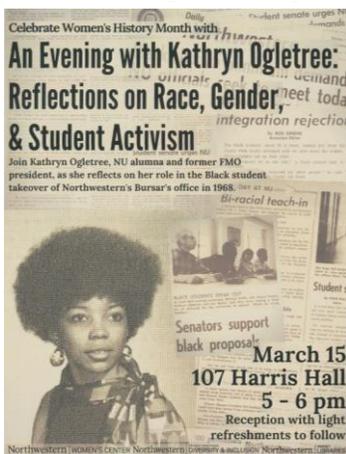
history in archives. Therefore, I recognize how special and important my responsibilities are at Northwestern University.

My main focus in my first year at Northwestern was to work on projects to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the Bursar's Office Takeover. Further, to honor those who risked personal safety, enrollment status, and financial aid on behalf of all students. There was a campus-wide effort to plan and develop a series of programming to celebrate the student protestors and educate the community about this history and legacy. Even in my brief time at the university, I was responsible for advising university units and external groups about the history of the Takeover; provide archival material for social media campaigns, contribute to a video and documentary about the Takeover, and speak to this history to the media.



Takeover-related archival material from Northwestern University Archives

Overall, it was most gratifying meeting and interviewing Bursar's Office Takeover student activists. Each person I spoke with offered different perspectives on the event. Different



Flyer from the Kathryn Ogletree event, March 2018

perspectives were often attributed to the year they enrolled, their gender, and involvement in campus activities. This led to an interesting discovery regarding the historiography of the Bursar's Office Takeover. The contributions of women to the protest were overlooked as represented in archival sources, especially in press coverage and administrative records. However, black women were organizers, offered unique perspectives regarding housing discrimination and harassment. Kathryn Ogletree namely played a key role as the leader of the black student organization, For Members Only (FMO). She was an advocate for black undergraduates, an editor of the demands, and a negotiator. We

“heard the silence” and realized that her story needed greater attention. Therefore, University Archives partnered with the university’s Women’s Center to invite Ogletree to campus to talk about her activism, to speak to the role of women in the protest, and offer advice to current activists. It was also important for us to speak critically about historical memory and the role of the archive in documenting these moments in history. We also spoke to the significance of recording the event and having a lasting record of Ogletree literally speaking in her own voice and telling her story. Lastly, Ogletree was enthusiastically awarded the Women Center’s Gender Equity in Action Award.

In an effort to further acquaint the Northwestern community with the history and legacy of the Takeover, I curated an online exhibit and a physical display at Deering Library based on interviews and archival material both titled, *They Demanded Courageously*, <http://bursars1968.northwestern.edu/>. It features key documents, a timeline, participant biographies, photographs and bibliographic resources. This was a great opportunity to bring attention to existing archival material, such as audio recordings of James Turner, a student leader in the Takeover, even making photographs and a 30 minute documentary called “One Generation Ago,” a story about the 1968 protest that was created by several Takeover participants more accessible by digitizing them and storing them in the Library’s digital repository.

The display also features newly acquired and processed material from Takeover participants and alumnae Daphne Maxwell Reid and Eva Jefferson Paterson. In 1967, Daphne Maxwell Reid



**Daphne Maxwell,
homecoming, 1967**

became the first Black homecoming queen at Northwestern. The responses she received from the campus community revealed the very acts of racism that black students were addressing. Maxwell Reid has gone on to have successful careers as a model, fashion designer, photographer, and actress (most recognized for her role as “Aunt Viv” on the TV show, *The Fresh Prince of Bel Air*). Eva Jefferson Paterson was the first black Northwestern student body president. She is credited for leading Northwestern students in a peaceful protest in the aftermath of the May 1970 Kent State and Jackson State shootings. Paterson received attention in the local news and the national press. In September 1970, Paterson

represented views of student activists, criticizing the Nixon



**Eva Jefferson speaking to a crowd of
students, May 1970**

Administration’s response to the war in Vietnam in a debate with the then United States Vice President Spiro Agnew on “The David Frost Show.” She was also a witness before the Scranton Commission on “student unrest.” The library display ran May 1–July 31, 2018.

My first year at Northwestern culminated with the 50th anniversary of the Bursar’s Office Takeover, May 3-5, 2018. About forty Takeover participants

returned to campus for yet another historic moment in Northwestern's history. Many brought their families and friends. And alumni from post-1968 years also took part in the reunion. The weekend was filled with laughter as well as opportunities to hear firsthand from the protestors. Also, beloved deans of the Department of African American Student Affairs returned to campus to also participant in a panel discussion. Finally, the Northwestern Community Ensemble, Northwestern gospel choir, offered a musical tribute and the Department of African American Studies graduate students presented a theatrical performance.



Reunion of 1968 Takeover participants, May 4, 2018, courtesy of NUBAA

I feel privileged to do this work. I recognize that it is a unique opportunity. I have yet to find another archivist at a university, that is not at a Historically Black College and University (HBCUs), that shares this mission. I look forward to doing future projects and educating the community about other aspects of the black experience at Northwestern University.