

## Project 500: a plan meant to include African Americans in a public research university in the United States and its challenges, 1968-2018<sup>1 2</sup>

### *Projeto 500: desafios da inclusão de estudantes negros numa universidade pública de pesquisa nos Estados Unidos, 1968-2018<sup>3</sup>*

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#### **Abstract:**

This article analyses an inclusion policy of black students in an important public research university of the United States since its implementation, through the Project 500, at the end of the 1960's until today. It takes into account race relations and peculiarities of the North American higher education system in the contextualization of this affirmative action policy. It examines how a group historically discriminated in higher education institutions that train the white elite questions not only the internal organization of the institution, but also the relation between university and society.

**Keywords:** affirmative action, diversity, Project 500, university, race relations

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**Resumo:**

*O artigo analisa uma política de inclusão de estudantes negros em uma importante universidade pública de pesquisa nos Estados Unidos, desde o período em que foi implementada, através do Projeto 500, no final da década de 1960, até os dias atuais. Levam-se em conta relações raciais e peculiaridades do sistema de educação superior norte-americano na contextualização dessa política de ação afirmativa. Examina-se o modo como um grupo historicamente discriminado em instituições de educação superior que formam a elite branca do país questiona não apenas a organização interna da instituição, mas também a relação universidade e sociedade.*

**Palavras-chave:** *ação afirmativa, diversidade, Projeto 500, universidade, relações raciais*

## Introduction

An inclusion policy of black students<sup>4</sup> in a research public university, predominantly white, in the United States is the object of analysis of this article. It follows the period from which the policy was implemented, in the academic year of 1968-69, until today. To contextualize the implementation of this policy, during half a century, we take into consideration the racial relations, the protagonism of black students in university *campi*, and the particularities of higher education in the United States.

This research, developed in 2016 and 2017, in the campus of the University of Illinois in Urbana Champaign (UIUC), is based on different methodological strategies: analysis of bibliographical material, research on the university website, archives and photo registries, creation of a table based on data raised, participation in activities involving themes of interest for the African- American community (conferences, forums, seminars, meetings and art exhibits) as well as going to the Bruce D. Nesbitt African American Cultural Center during the activities open to the public.

In the late 1960s, UIUC significantly increased the number of African American students in its campus, through a policy of affirmative action, known as Project 500. The Project was one of the biggest among North American universities in the number of students initially

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<sup>4</sup> While in Brazil, the world *preto* (black) gave way to *negro* (negro), among militant movements as MNU (*Movimento Negro Unificado*), in the U.S. the opposite happened. *Negro* (negro) became a negative term while Black (*preto*) assumed a positive connotation due to *Black Power*. In this article, we will normally use the word black or African American, but *negro* when using the terminology of the 1960s or quoting works of that period.

participating; it reached important national visibility, with both supporters and critics; it has a well-documented trajectory of half a century, allowing a comparative perspective of the inclusion policies of other groups that are currently part of ethnic and racial minorities in the U.S.

This 5-decade historic experience deserves to be known in Brazil, where the current aim is to democratize university through the inclusion of sub-represented segments, as is the case of poor and black students.

## University of Illinois: past and present

The University of Illinois, a public state university, is one of the 37 higher education institutions originated in the land-grant<sup>5</sup> colleges. Created in 1867, until today it praises the influence of its origin in its mission towards the solution of regional problems and the development of science and technology. Twenty one Nobel laureates have either been professors or students at UIUC. Its library is the third biggest in the country.

Out of the University of Illinois three *campi*, the one of Urbana Champaign is the oldest and the most relevant in terms of research. In 2015, it had 44,087 students (32,878 undergrads; 964 in professional tracks, and 10,245 in grad school).

UIUC students have accommodations, aiming for them to have an experience of profound immersion in their Alma Mater<sup>6</sup>. To reach such objective, the university has 23 residences for undergraduates, receiving 8,550 students. Besides this, 6,000 undergraduates live in 16 certified private houses and 62 Greek Houses (fraternities meant originally for male students and sororities, originally only for female students (Oliven, 2005)). Freshmen who wish to live in non-certified places must ask for an exemption of this demand. The university also has apartments and residences for graduate students and even some professors.

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<sup>5</sup> Land-grant colleges originated from the donation of land from the federal government so that each state could use it to create a state university focusing on attending the more practical needs of the region.

<sup>6</sup> *Alma Mater*, represented by a female figure, translates the spiritual atmosphere that marks during life, all those that have attended the same college or university.

A majority of students do not work, dedicating themselves full-time to their studies and extra activities in the university. There are more than one thousand registered student organizations, such as coalitions, honorary societies, and sport teams. For the university, living in the campus means living with friends, being close to the classrooms, having access to helpful resources and feeling connected to the university.

## Project 500

UIUC conceived a plan aiming to bring, from the academic year of 1968, 500 black students and students from socially disadvantaged backgrounds through the Special Education Opportunity Program (SEOP) whose objective was to recruit and support African American poor students. It became known as the Project 500 and it originated to answer the pressures on democratization of higher education in a period of profound tension in North American society.

It was one of the biggest programs in the US to benefit black students in predominantly white public universities. To assume the leadership of the program, they hired the director Clarence Shelley, an African American from outside the state, with a recognizable work in attracting and maintaining minorities in universities (Williamson-Lott, 2017).

Apart from being ambitious, the project was unique in the intensity of students' participation. A key actor in this process was Black Students Association (BSA), which was then recently created. University students, mainly connected to the BSA voluntarily visited highly segregated schools, to disseminate the new university policy. Within the definition of disadvantaged students, there were white students and Puerto-Ricans, but the greatest majority was composed by African Americans.

As the population in Illinois tended to perceive that less qualified black students were taking the place of more prepared white students, the managers of UIUC tried to be careful when communicating about the project, aiming not to antagonize the state government, the financial supporter of the university. They argued that other higher education institutions were becoming more diversified, which would enrich the experience of traditional students. They guaranteed that the university would not compromise its high academic standard and highlighted issues connected to social inequality, rather than racial discrimination.

There was a strong pressure for more educational opportunities, accentuated by the baby boom, a sharp increase on birth rate after WWII, so young people born at that time wanted to enter in university. In parallel, university students were, generally, spared from enlisting for the Vietnam War, in which the U.S. was involved. Universities, as microcosmos of society, reflected the atmosphere of social and racial tensions in the country.

From the perspective of young African Americans, segregation was a reality, although it was illegal. In UIUC, the few black students were banned from restaurants, barber shops, sport teams, white students' associations, among other places.

The university experience of blacks in predominantly white institutions in the U.S., during the period of legal segregation, led to suffering. This is well documented in the report forwarded to Chancellor Willard of UIUC, in February 23rd, 1938, based on a research about black university students in 10 universities<sup>7</sup>.

In the case of the campus Urbana-Champaign, the answer to the first question “Do you have a ‘a negro problem’ among your students?” was “Yes”. Housing being the main problem, it is worthwhile to note that the problem mentioned between quotation marks was negro and not white. In the end of the report the situation in Illinois is summed up:

“Our negroes are in a difficult situation. This community is far enough north to give them a feeling of independence and equality, yet far enough south to give us many white students who do not feel this way. They do not have an easy time. The University, generally gives them the same privileges as white students, but the community does not, and is not likely to.” (University Archives 020901 Box N. 64, p 6, our emphasis)

Three decades later, the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr<sup>8</sup>, on April 4th, 1968, only aggravated the longstanding racial tensions. In a reaction to the death of Martin Luther King Jr, Chicago had nine days of intense protests, with a final toll of nine deaths, 500 injured and whole buildings burnt. In this context, the Project 500 gains an even stronger relevance in a specially troubled year in the U. S.

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<sup>7</sup> The ten universities were: Chicago, Indiana, Illinois, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, Northwestern, Ohio, Purdue, Wisconsin.

<sup>8</sup> It was up to Robert Kennedy, brother of former president John Kennedy, assassinated in 1963, to announce to a crowd of black people in Indianapolis the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. Two months later, in the campaign to be nominated the presidential candidate of the Democrat party, Bobby Kennedy was also assassinated.

The arrival in campus of 565 new students<sup>9</sup> connected to SEOP, in the beginning of the 1968 academic year, also affected part of the existing black community in the campus. Some older students did not want to be confused with the freshmen, who had less cultural capital and depended on a special support program to keep them at the university (Williamson, 2003).

Before classes started, the new students connected to SEOP, were invited to spend a week in UIUC as a period of adaptation. They were housed in comfortable student residences inside the campus that, during vacation, were empty. During that time, the university had an atmosphere of confraternization and tranquility which was then drastically changed with the arrival of regular white students.

## **A dramatic episode and its developments**

On September 7th, the new students of SEOP were informed that they should leave the place they were temporarily residing and go to precarious residences, outside the campus, giving space to the regular students about to arrive. UIUC keeps the tradition of the old colleges created in colonial times, where students lived and teachers were in loco parentis, i.e. in the role of parents. This tradition of students living in residences connected to the campus increases the fees paid by students, even in the public institutions that normally charge enrollment fees in their courses.

In its great majority from poor families, the newly arrived students were informed that the financial aid they expected was not available. They would possibly have to get loans or work to pay for their studies. Twenty students who were in female residences refused to leave until the accommodation situation was resolved. Based on negotiations, they were given an extra day in the temporary accommodation.

The female students left the residences at the night of September 8th, staying in front of the historic building of Illini Union, where a meeting was held between student leaders and the university administration. A group of around 100 people, among students and members of the black community in the town, joined the university students. As it started to rain, they

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<sup>9</sup> Professors involved in the project thought it would be difficult in the beginning to attract 500 news students, a number that was already surpassed in the first year, 1968. For a detailed description of the events preceding the Project 500 and the first steps of its implementation, see Williamson, 2003, p 56-80.

entered in the building which normally closed at midnight. The fact was communicated to the administration who with the BSA representatives, tried to reach a solution with no final agreement.

At 2 o'clock in the morning, some students had already left, but most stayed, for various reasons: some stayed because they were afraid to leave so late, some to demonstrate solidarity with the colleagues, others felt pressured to stay. They also were tired and lacked information on the possible consequences of their actions. Fearing the potential repercussions the university might face from the state, the administrators contacted the Chancellor and decided to call the police to evacuate the building. Those who stayed in the building were arrested. The campus witnessed a student rebellion on September 10th. The result was a toll of around 250 people arrested accused of non-authorized demonstrations and inciting disorder in the campus, among which more than 200 were SEOP freshmen. Due to the great number, they were taken to the Memorial Stadium (Williamson, 2003).

The incident at UIUC had a broad national repercussion. Chicago press, the biggest city in the state, published exaggerated numbers on the damages of the occupation. Even though they were later corrected by the University of Illinois, such information led many students' parents who were concerned with their children's future, to position themselves against the demonstrations. The university sent a letter trying to calm them: stating that their children were enrolled, attending classes, and receiving legal assistance.

The BSA newspaper pointed financial and bureaucratic issues as the main causes of student's discontent. A report on the occupation of the university building registered the presence of people from outside the campus involved in the destruction of property. BSA refused to "divide its loyalty" and "rat out" local black community members. It assured administrators that "all actions taken by participants in the confrontation were collective actions" that represented a united front against the racist attitudes of the university. (Williamson, 2003 p 91).

This event radicalized life in campus. White students criticized the event, some referring to the new students as the Privileged 500. At the same time, there was the support of black students from various local and national groups. The arrested students were freed, under bail, with the help of Champaign black community and, in 1970, the charges against them were dropped. As a result of these troubled days, there was an increase in the number of BSA

members that started to redefine its political role at UIUC. It reaffirmed its connection to the Black Power and the Black Campus Movement influenced by Marxism and Pan-Africanism.

## **Metamorphosis of Negro into Black**

At UIUC, BSA started then to define blackness as a positive expression in synch with the Black Power and the Black Campus Movement. Black Power rose the recognition and pride of African cultural heritage, strengthened the sense of community, defined their own objectives and incentivized the control of their own institutions through strengthening the union among blacks (Williamson-Lott, 2006, p 309).

The Black Campus Movement was a nationwide organization that emerged in 1965 and declined in 1972, distinguishing itself among other black movements due to its focus on higher education reform. One of its main objectives was to establish a more relevant experience of education, based on the valorization of African American and third-world literature that would give them the instruments to change society. Alterations in the *campi* were thus necessary.

Initially, it demanded a curricular change. The Eurocentric curriculum of the predominantly white universities was the only one considered legitimate, which was seen, by the Black Campus Movement, as White Studies or a whiteness mask.

Secondly, they criticized the traditional ideal that the social mobility of one African American would serve as a model that would open the doors of higher education institutions for new generations of black students, referring to it as “vertical altruism”. This model of individual mobility kept away black students from their communities in economic, political, and cultural terms. The militants of the Black Campus Movement were more aligned with horizontal altruism, grassroot movements connected to the community. Therefore, they needed to destroy the institutional ladder that privileged individual mobility.

Thirdly, the Black Campus Movement pointed out that even though the number of black students in white universities had increased after WWII, these students, besides being exceptions, were excluded from many activities and there were few black professors. For these reasons, they aimed to be more than exceptions in the universities that formed the elites; they demanded the standardization of inclusion (Rogers, 2012).

BSA at UIUC was critical to an academy that encouraged the distancing of black university students from the oppressed masses. The Civil Rights Movement started to be seen as a movement guided by bourgeois liberals whose conquests kept the white supremacy in the spheres of power and prestige, as well as in the elite universities. These universities continued to be hostile and indifferent to the needs of the great majority of the black population in the U.S. These liberals represented the older, more accommodated, generation. The new generation saw itself as a united front against the system, in which their parents tried to adjust. Negro became a negative term. There was the need to kill the negro with white influence, so that the black could flourish. African- American students saw themselves as revolutionaries, not reformists.

Black leaders rejected the approximation of black and white students. During the Civil Rights Movement, until the beginning of the 1960s, it was common for whites affiliated to the Students for a Democratic Society to take part in the protests in favor of racial integration. In the late 60s, white students were excluded from the activities led by African Americans. University students were increasingly separated by color. Racial frontiers were strengthening and closing themselves.

At UIUC, the arrestment incident in September 1968, together with the influence of more radical movements outside the campus, strengthened by the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. and the re-valuing of the figure of the black leader Malcom X<sup>10</sup>, led BSA to assume an increasingly restricted definition of black identity. On one hand, the unity of the association gave more power in the negotiations with the administration, on the other hand, it was seen by some UIUC black students as a way of control.

Blackness, a concept developed by Aimé Césaire<sup>11</sup>, started to be translated as a way of life that encompassed all aspects of behavior and consisted of an uncompromising adhesion to liberation. BSA exerted an ideological control of its members, the negro was seen as someone who complied with the oppressive system. These kept away some black students of UIUC, as

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<sup>10</sup> Martin Luther King Jr and Malcom X, assassinated in 1965, fought against racism and white supremacy. The first defended integration between whites and blacks through non-violence politics, while the other was in favor of a black nationalism, based on the separation of races to reach true political equality. Despite their differences, both leaders got closer ideologically by the end of their lives. <http://revistapesquisa.fapesp.br/2008/12/01/a-historia-negra-viva/>

<sup>11</sup> Césaire, black intellectual and politician, born in Martinique, considered the founding father of the blackness concept, extended his radical criticism of European colonialism to North American society after WWII, with its segregationist laws from the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century until the 1950s (Césaire, 2010)

the demands were too strong: the distance between what was expected and what some would like to be was growing. Those who did not correspond to the proposed ideal felt uncomfortable. Those more orthodox were called Super Blacks and accused of a rhetoric that divided more than added. But, after all, what did it mean to be truly Black and who defined the criteria? This was a question of power (Williamson, 2003).

Belonging to a black fraternity<sup>12</sup> was to go against the objective of uniting the black community, it was elitist, a way to imitate whites' style. The popularity held by some black fraternities in the beginning of the 20th century decreased in the late 1960s. Fraternities are important places of sociability in American universities, including at UIUC. They act as social filters and have a whole aesthetic that identifies their members: T-shirts, jackets, keychains, folders with Greek letters, among other signal objects. These was opposed to the principles of Black Power and Black Campus Movement, as well as BSA, because belonging to a fraternity is a diacritic symbol, a mark of distinction (Bourdieu, 1979) that praises the Eurocentric culture of the campus.

## **Demands, conquests, and impasses**

On the list of 35 demands of BSA, presented in February 1969 to the university, they wanted the charges against black students detained in September to be dropped; racial quotas for the graduate school; hiring of 500 new black professors; financial support to SEOP; and the university involvement with the black community of Champaign. Two demands can be highlighted: the creation of the African American Cultural Center, ran by BSA, and the establishment of a Department of African American and African studies, which would have an important role in the reforms introduced in UIUC.

Black students had at the time a choir and a dance group, as well as a temporary headquarter open to all university students and Champaign residents, though only frequented by blacks. The aim of the Cultural Center was to develop activities to strengthen group identity.

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<sup>12</sup> Fraternities, founded since the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, are exclusive groups of students who live in houses that can be identified by Greek letters in their forefront. They form the 'Greek system' which nationally unites them and act as an important network of contacts.

They promoted workshops in literature, gender discussion, photography activities, and theater. They had their own communication media: a newspaper and a radio. The Center strengthened the establishment of a new ideology for BSA, that reinforced an artistic movement with the celebration of black aesthetic based on African cultural traditions. One of the objectives was freedom from white-referenced standards in terms of art and aesthetic. The artists, by contributing to this liberation, built the bases for the Black Cultural Revolution. In 1970, the Center got a permanent headquarter (Williamson, 2003).

The program of African American Studies took longer to be institutionalized. In 1969, UIUC organized an extremely successful experience inviting nationally renowned lecturers to participate in a course on African American culture from which students could receive one credit. Three hundred students enrolled in the course and, in order to receive the certificate, needed to write an essay on a theme related with the lectures. More than a thousand students watched the conferences between enrolled and attendees. Two years later, the number of enrolled students grew to 875.

In spite of the interest of the students, the institutionalization of African American studies faced difficulties to find enough permanent professors with academic qualifications. Students and teachers diverged on the definition of a qualified professor.

The program of African American Studies and Research was institutionalized in 1974, making students demand a major in African American studies. However, only in 1987, UIUC began to offer a minor, and not a major as was asked<sup>13</sup>.

The Cultural Center due to its non-academic nature was more easily accepted than the Program of African American Studies as this would interfere in the power structure of the university by qualifying students, through offering credits, minors, and majors.

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<sup>13</sup> By the end of the four-year college which, contrary to the undergraduate programs in Brazil does not have a professional orientation, the student should do a major and a minor, that is, subjects related to an area or theme, such as anthropology, biology, mathematics, Latin American studies, gender studies, etc. Majors and minors do not have to be related; as shown by the name, a major demands more credits than a minor. In North American higher education system, the professionalization takes place in graduate school, through a PhD, and in the professional schools of medicine, law, engineering, etc.

The ideals of black liberation movements in the U.S. in the beginning of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century guided African Americans to approximate university to a model of fair institutions that represented the community. At UIUC, even though the administration had had an important role in incentivizing black students' permanence and satisfaction, it tended to interpret the friction as an issue of cultural privation and inclusion as a way to increase diversity in the campus. The reforms introduced aimed mainly to improve individual opportunities rather than to alter the institutional structure and the relation university-society (Williamson, 2003).

In the national context, Yuill (2006), analyzing the affirmative action policies in the Nixon period (1969-1974), highlights the President's deliberate effort to prevent that the racial issue could be used as a weapon against the "system". His actions showed an incentive to the stability of black middle class, followed by a desertion of the ghetto (p. 238).

## **From apogee to decline in the initial decade**

Up to the mid-1970s, BSA had among its accomplishments: the increase in black students' enrollment; more administrative involvement on these students' requests; the hiring of black professors; the reexamination of the policy of staff admission; the creation of outreach programs to the black community in Urbana-Champaign; the Cultural Center and the Program of African American Studies and Researches. About UIUC, Williamson (2003) concludes: "BSA forced the university's hand and precipitated aggressive and far reaching reforms that the university had not previously entertained. The interaction of initiatives helped change the campus forever" (p. 133).

At UIUC in the end of the 1960s, BSA and the black fraternities were the main existing organizations among African American students. In 1975 there were more than 30 organizations of black students, some connected to the courses of Law, Engineering, and Graduate programs, others to different types of residence or sport activities. Many of them started to develop activities that incentivized more sociability than political organization. This new context

contributed to the dispersion of black students. Some activists graduated and left the university. Others were tired of the rigor of political fight. “They were anxious to be students rather than agents of social change” (Williamson, 2003, p. 136).

Besides this, after the four years of college, black students faced an immense racial hostility in the more competitive and elitist environments of professional courses and graduate school. It became more difficult to answer the academic rigor of professional formation and, at the same time, get involved in political militance.

In parallel, BSA changed its name to *Coalition of Afrikan People* (CAP), widening the focus of the association objectives, which started to include the support to the liberation of African colonies. The new Pan African guidance drove away part of the black students in UIUC connected to the old BSA. CAP became one more association among many, dissolving in 1976.

## **Institutionalization of the hyphenated diversity**

Up to the beginning of the 1960s, UIUC was an almost exclusively white campus. The organization and political participation of new students, since the Project 500, had a great repercussion in the administrative decisions at the university.

The success of the inclusion policy led to the decrease of black university students in committees. In the beginning of Project 500, representatives of BSA played the role of charismatic leaders with whom black young people, who aspired to enter in the university, could identify. In the 1970s those leaders started to be replaced by bureaucratic workers in charge of the selection process and monitoring of new students (Weber, 1963).

Once the African American inclusion policy was institutionalized, other sub-represented groups pressured for more opportunities. The university administration took on more control and started to shape the programs following its interests, which did not always coincide with those of black students (Williamson, 2003).

These black students can be seen as the pioneer group of hyphenated Americans (African- Americans)<sup>14</sup> to rupture with white exclusiveness in UIUC. Other groups of students started to pressure the university to create cultural centers and study programs focusing on their interests and that would give them support and visibility in the campus.

Table 1 maps this inclusion process of sub-represented minorities at UIUC: which groups were benefited; how they were organized; which objectives they reached and when. It encompasses the period between 1967 and 2016, that is, half a century, presenting data grouped by decades (Hoghes, M. & Hoxie, 2017).

**Table 1 – Minority inclusion at UIUC, 1967 to 2016**

Decade	Period	African Americans	Latinas/Latinos	Asians	Indigenous
1st	1967/1971	Student association and Cultural Center			
	1972/1976	Study program	Student association and Cultural Center		
2nd	1977/1981				
	1982/1986			2 Student Associations	
3rd	1987/1991	Offers a <i>Minor</i>			
	1992/1996		Study program		

<sup>14</sup> An interesting analysis comparing the use of the hyphen by different minorities in the construction of the national identity in the U.S. and in Brazil was developed by Lesser (1999).

4 <sup>th</sup>	1997/2001  2002/2006		Offers a <i>Minor</i>	Study Program and Cultural Center	Cultural Center and Study Program
5 <sup>th</sup>	2007/2011  2012/2016	Department	Department	Offers a <i>Minor</i>  Department	<i>Minor</i>  Crisis

Source: Table created by the author with data grouped by temporal critérium

## We hope for nothing, we demand everything

In the first decade, from 1967 to 1976, African-American students, following the motto “We hope for nothing, we demand everything”, form in 1967 the BSA, an association aiming to “promote solidarity and union among black students, celebrate and disseminate positive aspects of black culture and promote training for political and leadership action” (Williamson-Lott, 2017, p. 79).

Still in that decade, in 1969, they could establish a Cultural Center and in 1974 a Program of African American Studies and Researches. This was only possible thanks to the organization and combativeness of black students, as well as the support of teachers and administrative staff in a moment of great ebullition in the *campi* around the country. Following the example of black students, the Latinas/os in the beginning of the 1970s, created their association, *La Coletiva*, and in 1976, established a Cultural Center, *La Casa*.

The coming decade, from 1977 to 1986, had an inexpressive trajectory in terms of action and accomplishments of the minorities in the campus. Only two associations of students with Asian origins were created: *Asian-American Association* in 1985, and *Asian-Pacific Coalition to Combat Oppression, Racism e Discrimination* in 1986.

In the first year of the third decade, from 1987 to 1996, the Program of African American Studies started to offer a minor. On its turn in 1992 and, after some protests, the Latina/o students could establish an academic program targeting themes focused on their culture and social reality.

In the next decade, from 1997 to 2006, the Latina/Latino Program offered a minor. From the 2000s, two demands related to themes of Asian students' interests become a reality: the Asian American Studies Program, in 2002, and the Asian American Cultural Center in 2006. The Indigenous also started to have a Cultural Center (Native American House) and a Program in American Indian studies, with its first permanent professor.

More recently, between 2007 and 2016, minors related to Asian American and Native American studies started to be offered. Three programs started to be organized into departments: *African American Studies*, in 2008; *Latina/Latino Studies*, in 2010; *Asian American Studies* in 2012. In 2014, the non-hiring of a selected professor created a crisis in the Program in American Indian studies, from which many professors left.

Regarding human resources, the Department of African American Studies has 12 permanent professors; Latina/Latino Studies, 11; and the Asian American Studies, 10.

Besides the permanent professors, these departments have affiliated professors of other departments and institutions: the Department of African American Studies have 30 affiliated professors in Anthropology, History, Linguistics, Gender and Women Studies, Sociology, among others; the Latina/Latino Department has 12 affiliated professors in Communication, Media and Cinema as well as Spanish and Portuguese and the Asian American Department has 6 affiliated professors from the departments of History, Social Service, Anthropology, Gender and Women Studies.

Students belonging to each minority present specific needs and different forms of action and socialization. For example, African American students value cultural expressions in search of their roots (as dances and choir), alongside a strong commitment with the black community outside the campus, in both North American society and African countries. It is worth highlighting the celebration of *Congratulatory Ceremony*, which assembles graduating black

students in undergraduate, graduate, and professional courses. It originated in 1972, when the first students of Project 500 graduated, and takes place in the campus after the *Commencement Ceremony*.

Among the groups referred as minorities, in 2016, Asian Americans were overrepresented: they were 14.7% of the freshmen, but only 4.6% of the State population. The opposite happens with African Americans: they are only 5% of freshmen, but 14.5% of the population in the State. Latinos are 8.7% of freshmen, though corresponding to 15.8% of Illinois population. The number of Native Americans is very small and from different groups, which hinders comparison. The percentage of international students has reached 24%.

The overrepresentation of Asian American students has become a reality in elite universities in the U.S. in the last years. This tendency started to be counterbalanced by preferential policies that pointed towards students' diversity as a seal of quality of the institution. Harvard is being sued by Asian descendant students for relativizing the question of merit, translated by high scores in academic tests, in favor of choosing students with different individual trajectories, considering ethnic-racial belongings (Hartocollis, 2018; Kristof, 2018).

The diversity policy towards minorities in UIUC is reflected in the curricular options offered to students, as well as the cultural centers that represent different groups. Examples include the African American Cultural Center; *La Casa* Cultural Center; the Asian American Cultural Center, and the Native American House, which are located close to each other.

Presented in the website as offering to "... the entire campus community opportunities to learn about and to experience the rich historic traditions and modern living cultures that shape our world."<sup>15</sup>, these spaces have an ethnic mark, meaning that they differ from the standard. It is important to highlight that there is no European Cultural Center.

In fact, these cultural centers are spaces to socialize and recover traditions and histories/stories from groups that, for many years, were subjugated by the dominant culture in North American society. It is worth mentioning that, besides the ethnic-cultural centers, there is the Women's Resource Center and the LGBT Resource Center.

<sup>15</sup> Taken from <https://illinois.edu/>

## The future of UIUC and the legacy of Project 500

After half a century, what are the marks left by Project 500?

Now there is a qualified presence of black leaderships in the top administration of UIUC and more than 80 tenured black professors, or on the tenure track. However, the number of African American students has decreased in last years.

As a result of university inclusion policies, more than 500 black students enrolled at UIUC in 1968; in 2014, the number of African American freshmen decreased to 356. In 2008, the total number of African American enrolled in undergraduate, graduate, and professional schools was 2,524. Seven years later, the number decreased to 2,126, what represents a reduction from 6.08% to 4.87% in the university enrollment. Furthermore, these students continue to be the target of multiple microaggressions (Harwood et al., 2015).

One reason that drives away black students from UIUC is the price of the fees charged. A decade ago, students who lived in the state payed around US\$ 15,000.00 per year. In 2014, the price has increased to US\$ 25,000.00. On the other hand, foreign students pay almost double the fees charged to local students. These students have a high purchasing power and tend to take an increasing number of places in the university. The higher selectivity of UIUC in the past years decreased students' chances, mainly African American ones, who attend economically segregated schools.

To put into context, in 1954 the U.S. Supreme Court when judging the principle "separate but equal", based on the case *Brown v. Board of Education*, considered segregation unconstitutional and forbade schools exclusive to whites. It was explicit that "separate is inherently unequal" regarding the educational opportunities for blacks and whites (Martin Jr., 1998).

After this historic decision, the country has lived a period of school desegregation, forcing, when needed, the integration and stimulating experiences that increased the coexistence of children from different colors during their school trajectories. Since the 1980s, due to policies

of residential segregation and a process of income concentration, among other reasons, the country has been experiencing a strong school re-segregation.

In 2011, Illinois occupied the second place among states with the highest school indexes of segregation by race and ethnicity in the country: 61.3% of Black students attended schools in which the student body was composed of 90% to 100% of minorities, who generally belong to the poorest strata of the population. This can be considered a double segregation: by race and by social class (Orfield, Frankenberg, Jongyeon, & Kuscera, 2014).

In this scenario, the program Demands for a Transformed University was presented by Black Unified Front and supported by different associations. On the agenda were new demands, such as the release of an annual report of the university investments showing the disinvestment in associated corporations which are socially and politically negligent and the re-investment in ecologically and economically sustainable entities, as well as socially responsible.

Old demands continue, mainly those of strengthening the connection with the black population of Champaign and the improvement of the quality of life of UIUC staff. There is a great concern with vulnerable populations, such as LGBT people and former convicts, to give them opportunities and respect their needs.

Fraternalities which tend to conceal episodes of sexual violence from their members are harshly criticized. There is also a strong repudiation of loan policies to pay for studies, which has left students in debt for long periods, thus, pointing towards the need to stabilize the price of fees. There are long term demands, among which that, until 2032, the number of students, professors, and staff should reflect the demography of Illinois in economic and racial terms. The group has released Project 1,000 which foresees the enrollment of a thousand new black students starting in the academic year of 2020.

It is important to highlight that the number 'thousand' represents a goal, as racial quotas are considered unconstitutional in the U.S., since the case *Regents of the University of California v. Bakke*, in 1978. In this trial, the Supreme Court, by five votes against four, signaled however the possibility of considering race as one of the classificatory criteria in student selection, taking into account the inequality of opportunities when comparing whites and blacks. In the casting

vote, diversity in the student body was pointed out as an important factor in university formation (Chang, Witt, Jones, & Hakuta, 2003).

Compared to Brazilian public universities, that have been adopting affirmative action policies through racial and social quotas, since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, North American elite universities, with their student residences and fraternities as part of the campus, are much more isolated. The debate on the use of ethnic-racial criteria in student selection tend to center more on the objectives of the institution, than as a reference to a project for the nation.

Considering their historical protagonism in UIUC and the deep divisions in current North American society, African American students are an important group to inspire new pathways for the university. They show that UIUC has disinvested in them, in terms of quantitative representations, and that it needs to return to it.

Together with black students' protagonism, the Department of African American studies has been benefited with a share of a million dollar fund granted by Andrew Mellon Foundation to develop, in cooperation to the university library, innovative programs of digital publication and release of material related to themes of its interest, which will certainly widen its scope of action. The professors of the department, inspired by the historic motto of the African American Studies program, "Academic Excellence and Social Responsibility", signed a letter of support to Project 1,000 which was inspired on Project 500.

In May 13th, 2017, Robert J. Jones, African American professor and UIUC chancellor, presided the graduation ceremony of around 3 thousand students. Significantly, the festivity took place in the Memorial Stadium, exactly the place to which more than 200 detained university students were taken in 1968.

Robert Jones is in a privileged position to guide the new directions of UIUC. He was born in the countryside of Georgia, a southern state, in 1950 – during the period of racial segregation – and had a brilliant career as a researcher and administrator. In his message when assuming the position at UIUC, he remembered his own trajectory and referred to the possible new paths for the university in the next years:

The land-grant mission is in my blood, and I am a proud product of it. And as chancellor at Illinois, one of the original land-grants established by the Morrill Act, I have the opportunity to help ensure that my experience is one that any student can have in this century of higher education. (Heckel, 2015)

Celebrating its 150th year in 2017, the University of Illinois is in a special moment to take stock of its trajectory. The legacy of Project 500 will certainly be a significant factor to think on the new directions of the university.

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