

Blacks Commandeer Room In Burling



Walker Said "Please remove yourselves from the Twentieth Century Room so we may close the doors within five minutes or I shall have to . . . deem this preventing the availability of certain curriculum," Walker said.
photo by Mark Sableman

20th Century Room Taken, Made Into Black Library

Thirty to forty black students and History and American Studies professor Virginius Thornton deshelled books in Burling library's Twentieth Century Room last evening and moved most of the black studies books in Burling onto the shelves.

Shortly after a joint meeting of the Executive Council and the Women's Search Committee, the students, assisted by a few white students, began moving the regular collection of current books and selected bound periodicals from the room, to make room for black studies books.

The transformation of the Twentieth Century Room, which began quietly at approximately ten o'clock p.m., was ended abruptly at 10:39 p.m. when Acting President and Dean of the College went to the room and informed more than fifty assembled students, faculty, and administrative staff of a portion of federal laws which forces immediate termination of U.S. Office of Education grants and National Defense Loans to students involved in "the seizure of property under the control of an institution of higher education to require or prevent the availability of certain curriculum or to prevent the faculty, administrative officials or students of such institution from

engaging in their duties or pursuing their studies at such institution."

"Please remove yourselves from the Twentieth Century Room so we may close the doors within five minutes or I shall have to . . . deem this preventing the availability of certain curriculum," Walker said.

Mr. Thornton told students to stay in the room for at least four-and-one-half minutes, but all students did leave and Walker and head librarian Henry Alden locked the doors.

Walker told some black students as they were leaving the library that he really didn't mean to be so hard-nosed about it, that it was very smart of them to do it, and that he really admired their courage for doing so.

All black students left the library by 11:00 p.m., and shortly thereafter began a general meeting at the Black Cultural Center.

Thornton spoke with the S&B several times during the evening, and indicated that he and the black students "might have to be ordering a bus to all leave over the weekend, which would be good strategy, and that makes nice TV coverage. Sixty black students leaving would make 5:30 to 6:30 news around the nation."

"That sure isn't what we want," he said. "But if it takes that to make certain people to do certain things, then we'll have to do it."

Asked what things in particular he was referring to, Thornton replied, "to make the administration and the faculty honor its commitment to get black faculty and to implement the Black Manifesto which was negotiated."

The action of transforming the Twentieth Century Room into the black studies library followed two recent meetings with the library

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Thornton Sees Racism

by Don Dagenais

Dissatisfaction of Grinnell blacks which culminated last night in the takeover of the library's 20th Century Room has apparently been brewing under the surface since last semester. In an interview with the S&B last week, Virginius Thornton III, History and American Studies, indicated dissatisfaction on the part of the black community with the administration's treatment of last semester's list of demands.

"The administration . . . apparently negotiated in bad faith," Thornton said, noting that they used stalling tactics to "get the black students back to classes, and go back to business as usual."

"If the school were responsible, it would have organized a task force to analyze the cause of the black unrest last semester. But Grinnell is not committed to doing this; it is mostly just interested in public relations. What has been done with the black library indicates how the administration is willing to deal with black people."

The library, Thornton feels, would be an aid to the education of Grinnell's whites as well as a service to the black community. White intellectuals do not read the large body of black literature and therefore do not understand the true situation of the black man in this country. "No white intellectual can be legitimate unless he sees things from other than the colonial perspective. We are a part of the total American community."

Thornton feels that the various Black Studies courses here are ludicrous; they do not survey the subject matter adequately "because of ignorance and racism." Because of the "invisibility of blacks," the professors are miseducated about the very subjects they are supposed to teach. "This is the kind of racism that aided Hitler in the 1930's."

Thornton also complains about the Search Committee procedures which "fuse the search for black and women faculty members. This is an insult to the blacks. No one should be hired unless they are qualified and a black person." Furthermore



the school is unwilling to pay black faculty members the salaries they must be paid in order to get them here. Thornton suggests that the school look in the black community itself for qualified professors, whether they have the Ph. D's or not.

"We have one basic question," Thornton said, "Why are black people here at Grinnell? What is it doing for black people?" Grinnell reinforces the stigma of black inferiority and reinforces the white feeling of superiority, Thornton noted, and if the school does not become more responsible to the needs of the black students the blacks here may simply leave. "Time is running out. We can go somewhere else where our brothers and sisters need us instead of wasting four years here. I came to Grinnell out of a sense of commitment, but I may leave it because of a lack of commitment here."

"The black students here are reaching out against a system that is racist, and it takes many manifestations," Thornton said. "The black revolution does not mean stomping white people in the face, but the institution of equity in American life."

Carolyn Reid Wallace Is Center Of Controversy

Carolyn Reid-Wallace, Adjunct assistant professor of English at Howard University, who gave a lecture here January 25, has been under consideration for next year's opening in the English department, according to Virginius Thornton, History and American Studies.

Mr. Thornton told the S&B that primarily because of opposition to Mrs. Reid-Wallace from women faculty members here and because of constant checking and rechecking of Mrs. Reid-Wallace's credentials, she will probably not come here next year.

This may have been a central reason for a lot of the recent conflict on campus, Mr. Thornton said.

Mrs. Reid-Wallace is independently wealthy and she is currently teaching for free at Howard; her salary is going directly into a trust fund for scholarships for law students.

A major point of contention among people here was apparently the salary she would make. When she was here, she gave the figure of \$18,000 as a negotiable figure for a salary.

However, she would have given the college \$10,000 of her salary for a scholarship fund for black students even if the salary were negotiated to as low as \$12,000 Thornton said.

What many people here do not realize, Thornton told the S&B, is that there is a "a growing number of young black professionals who will plow back a lot of money for scholarships for black students."

Mrs. Reid-Wallace talked to many people here last month, and she was persuaded by them to apply for the English opening, Thornton said.

Thornton said that she is already giving a "professional input" into the college; fifteen to twenty students have already written her for help and advice on different kinds of projects they are doing, and she has replied and given them suggestions.

Mrs. Wallace is a dedicated scholar who was sincerely interested in coming to Grinnell, Thornton said, and it would have been a great opportunity for Grinnell if she had come.

The "nonsense" and double and triple checking of her credentials, and the doubts expressed by some faculty here, however, have almost persuaded her to go instead to Germany or India to teach next year, he said.

"We have blown the opportunity," Thornton said -- and the reasons that has happened have been a very central point of contention of students and faculty in the last weeks.

