

## Dr. Blyden Jackson

by Maggie Wilkes

### Features

Dr. Blyden Jackson, Professor of English and Special Assistant Graduate Dean was the first Black Professor hired at Carolina. Dr. Jackson is a native of Louisville, Kentucky but he attended Wilberforce University in Ohio, where he received his AB in English in 1930. He spent his first year of graduate school at Columbia, while residing at the YMCA in Harlem. Dr. Jackson says that it was his good fortune while living there to meet and become very close friends with one of the Harlem Renaissance's greatest writers, Langston Hughes. Although he was forced to leave Columbia in 1932 because of financial problems, he said that was one of the most enjoyable periods in his life.

Upon returning home he obtained a job with the WPA (Works Progress Administration) as a censor of public housing. Many houses, Dr. Jackson said, were in very poor condition and with more than one family residing. He also taught night school for the WPA, his students being adults who had never finished high school. Dr. Jackson said "Many of these people were very eager to learn because they had never had the chance; it was an inspiration to me to see someone trying that hard." He felt that this job was as good as any for him to get teaching experience. After working for the WPA for two years he taught English at a junior high school in Louisville.

Dr. Jackson remained there until 1945, interrupting his stay in 1938 to earn his Masters at the University of Michigan. He left in 1945, accepting the position of Assistant Professor of English at Fisk where

he stayed until 1954. While at Fisk Dr. Jackson acquired a leave of absence in order to obtain his Doctorate at the University of Michigan after receiving a Rosenwald and a University of Michigan Fellowship.

When asked about the Fellowships he said very little except that they were given to many others like him. Dr. Jackson changed positions again in 1954, after being appointed head of the English Department and later Dean of the Graduate School at Southern University; there, he stayed until coming to Carolina in 1969. Dr. Jackson failed to comment in any detail on any of these appointments.

## FACULTY

This semester he was presented with the honor of being the first visiting scholar to lecture at Tuskegee Institute under a program funded by the Portia Washington Pittman Fellowship in Humanities. When asked why he felt this honor was bestowed upon him he said, "I don't know why," with a sort of solemn expression, "they didn't specify any qualifications and I didn't ask."

However he did elaborate that Mrs. Pittman was the daughter of the late Booker T. Washington, founder of Tuskegee, and that "She was just one marvelous woman to work with and to know." The program asks the visiting scholar to deliver two public lectures and a class lecture weekly. The lectures include Black Literature and a seminar in Humanities. Although the position is very time consuming Dr. Jackson said that he found the experience very gratifying.

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## Dr. Douglas Gills

by Debra Parker

### Features

Mr. Douglas Gills, Afro-American History Instructor, is relatively new to the UNC campus. However, he is not new to the field of Afro-American Studies nor is he new to the perpetuation of the Black Struggle. Mr. Gills has virtually dedicated himself to helping Black people in the Black Liberation, a movement he defines as "anti-racist and anti-exploitative." However, Mr. Gills is a realist. He recognizes that "Blacks themselves bear the burden of uplifting and liberating themselves."

For Doug Gills, the realization that he must become actively involved in the Black Struggle, came during his second year at North Carolina Central University in Durham, where he later received his BA and MA degrees. Mr. Gills says he had to go about it

## PROFILES

in his own way, and adds, "But I'm not a maverick." By that he means that he must go about aiding his brother through the proper channels.

As part of that channel, he tutored local Black elementary students as an extra-curricular activity. Among Mr. Gills and his co-workers were several white students who volunteered their services to the Black community. As the tutoring sessions progressed, Mr. Gills saw that the youngsters were more receptive to the white tutors. Because they wanted the youngsters to understand that "there was something innately good in being Black," Gills and others asked the white tutors to resign. According to Mr. Gills this was exactly the type of thing that Blacks wanted to de-emphasize—the old adage that if it's white, it's right.

Later, about 1968, he became involved in the Malcolm X Liberation University in Durham, which was instituted by Black students from Duke who wished to set up an Afro-American Studies Program as part of the curriculum. With no permanent

base of operation, the students moved the "University" to A&T campus in Greensboro.

Mr. Gills was active in a number of organizations in Greensboro (from 1972-73). He worked full-time in the Association of Poor People, "a political organization." Full time, Mr. Gills explained, meant that he often worked eight hours a day without pay. He says, "We had to make our own salaries." This non-profit, non-federally funded program helped poor people in civil matters such as police brutality. Gills also supported the African Liberation Support Commission, which drew attention to the international struggle of Africans against imperialism. Doug Gills and others like him were instrumental in establishing the UHURU Bookstore in Greensboro, which has one of the largest selections of Black literature in the Southeast.

At some time during the years between 1968 and 1973, Mr. Gills was a salesman for the Xerox corporation. Not liking the schedule and the routine that he was confined to, he resigned, saying that he was not cut out for the "successful, accomplished Black male type." Having material wealth and riches are not that important to him, he says. Above all, Mr. Gills values his "principles." This is one of the reasons why he was drafted eight times for the Viet Nam War. He says he could not see himself fighting a war that he did not believe in when Blacks were still having so many problems at home. Next, Mr. Gills was offered a teaching position at St. Augustine College in Raleigh. At St. Augustine, he became involved in the North Carolina Conference on Black Studies. Currently, he serves as one of the two vice-presidents of the Conference. Working with the organization, he had the good fortune to meet Dr. Sonya Stone, who is head of the Afro-American Studies Department at UNC. To further enrich his knowledge of Afro-American Studies, he plans to study next year at Northwestern University working on his Ph.D. During the interim, he plans to do "all that (he) can for the Black cause."

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