

# Professor Takes on Challenges, Woodcrafts

*Editor's Note: This is the third in a series of profiles focusing on African-American professors at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.*

**By Felts Lewis**  
Ink Staff Writer

Hundreds of people crammed into Memorial Hall in the late 1970s to see "Down Home," a student-produced play sponsored by various academic departments and student organizations at the University.

Several professors and students displayed their unheralded talents before a diverse audience that expressed their appreciation with boisterous cheers throughout the performance.

One of these unknown talents was J. Lee Greene, associate professor of English and Bowman and Gordon Gray teaching chair.

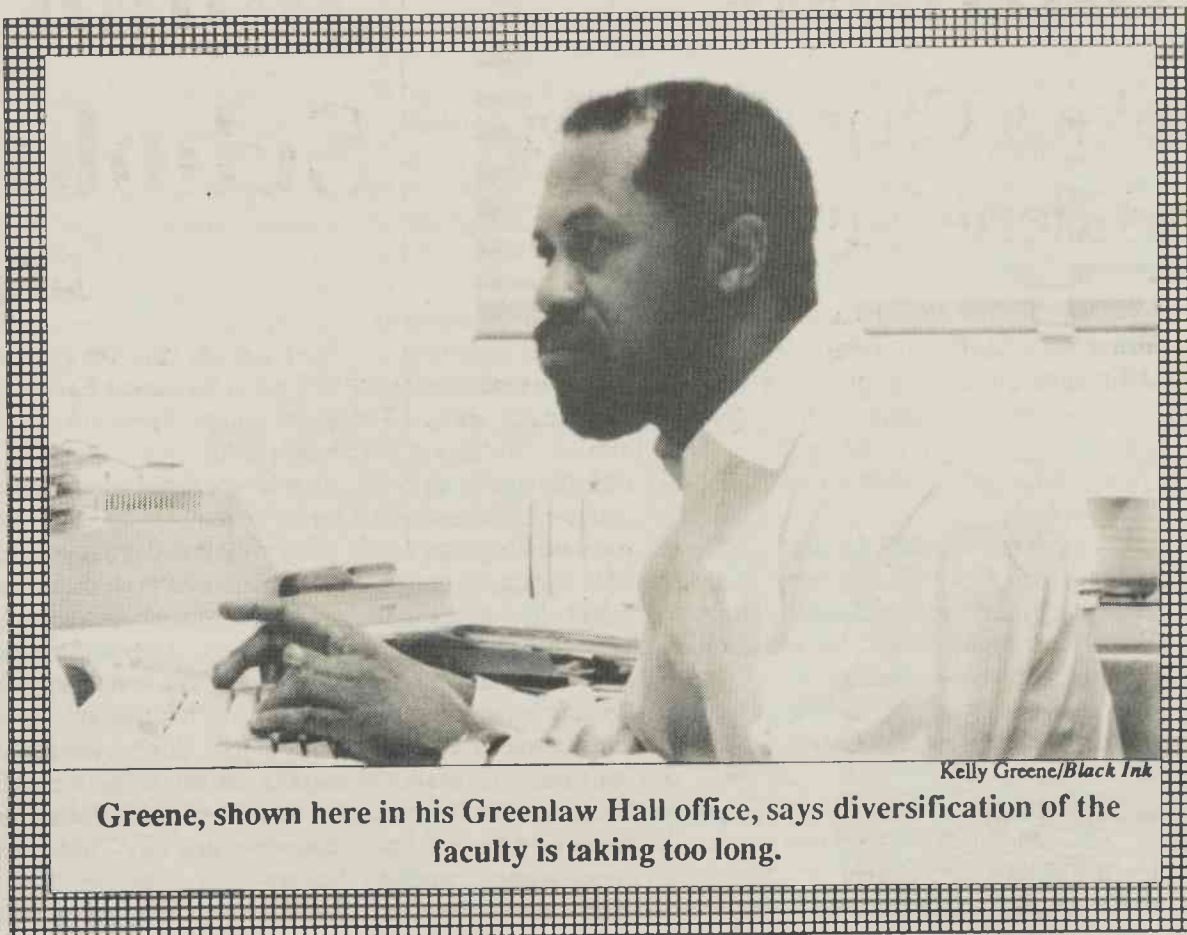
Greene, 47, a native of Rutherford County, said the play is his most memorable moment at the University, where he has also earned bachelor's, master's and doctorate's degrees and taught for 16 years.

"The play was to have students and administrators together in a form of unity," Greene said.

The professor of 19th and 20th century literature and Afro-American studies said the production attracted black students' family members who usually spent little time on campus for any type of activity.

"It brought black parents to the campus, instead of dropping (their children) off or picking them up," he said.

The easy-going, humorous professor said he likes to challenge himself by doing new things.



Kelly Greene/Black Ink

Greene, shown here in his Greenlaw Hall office, says diversification of the faculty is taking too long.

During his earlier days, Greene did just that by writing two poems for the play.

Greene takes on challenges today through his creation of wooden crafts in a self-made wood working shop in his Chapel Hill home.

He said he made most of the tables and chairs that furnish his home.

When asked if he made little items such as ornaments or trinkets, he responded, "I don't make anything little!"

When Greene is not working with wood in his shop, he is working with students.

If a list of places Greene has traveled prior to his teaching career was made, it would be far from being little. The initial "J" in his name could stand for "journeyman."

## The Black Professors

As a teenager, Greene worked in Connecticut, making neon signs.

After graduating with an English education degree from the University in 1967, he taught grade school in Maryland. Then he moved to the Virgin Islands to teach high school for a short time before returning to Chapel Hill for graduate school.

After receiving his master's and doctorate's degrees in English, Greene taught English at the University of Michigan. Shortly afterward, he returned to the

University as an assistant professor in 1975.

Greene has been an associate professor at the University ever since and said he loves his job.

"Teaching does not produce stress for me because teaching is something I enjoy doing," Greene said. "Dealing with the students is enjoyable."

A pivotal reason why he continues to educate college students is the individual impact he has made on those who are not as academically-gifted as others, he said.

"I've seen students come (to the University) without honors . . . and leave with honors," he said. "To have made a difference is especially gratifying."

During the 1970s, when Greene was a graduate student, a major

campus issue was the massive protest against University administrators who would not increase wages and foster better working conditions for campus cafeteria workers.

The rally, consisting of predominantly black students, proved effective because students witnessed improvement in the employees' better working environment.

After the demonstration, the Black Student Movement was recognized as an official organization.

Greene said black students need to continue the legacy of pro-activism on campus and in the community.

The persistence of students who rotested against "The Student Body," a group of statues placed in front of Davis Library last year that many thought represented racial stereotypes, was admirable, he said.

However, he said students should protest issues that affect them financially and culturally, like the steady decrease in financial aid for black students and the lack of a permanent site for the Black Cultural Center.

"Students should be involved in issues of substance that will affect their lives here," the professor said.

Greene's major concern with the University is the lack of diversity within the faculty.

"Diversity is not occurring rapidly enough (or) broadly enough to keep up with the changes in our society," Greene said.

The racial make-up of the faculty is not representative of the state's population of Native Americans, he said. There is no Native American professor at the University.

Greene said the reason why the University has not rectified this deficiency is because of "pure ignorance, pure malice."

### Lecture:

**"Meaning and Mission in African History: Culture, Struggle, Achievement"**

February 13, 7:00p.m. Carolina Union Auditorium

Dr. Maulana Karenga

Professor and Chair Department of Black Studies

California State University, Long Beach

Author of several books and scholarly articles including: "Introduction to Black Studies"