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Langston University, A History: Education and Programs from 1897-1994

Monica D. Lee

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The Edwin P. McCabe Honors Program

Senior Thesis

“Langston University, A History:
Education and Programs
from 1897-1994”

Monica D. Lee

May 1994

Langston University
Langston, Oklahoma

LANGSTON UNIVERSITY, A HISTORY:
EDUCATION AND PROGRESS FROM 1897-1994

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Submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements of the
E.P. McCabe Honors Program
April 1994

M. B. Tolson Black Heritage Center
Langston University
Langston, Oklahoma

REFERENCE
NOT TO BE TAKEN FROM THIS ROOM

LANGSTON UNIVERSITY, A HISTORY:
EDUCATION AND PROGRESS FROM 1897-1994

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To my father and mother, Willie and Linda Lee, I thank you for instilling in me the background and desire to learn and grow spiritually, emotionally, and educationally.

Thank you to my committee members - Lester LeSure, John Hilbert, and Ron Keys. Your time and support are appreciated.

Also, Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc., thank you for the sisterly support (especially Soror Alicia M. Atkinson). Finally, I wish to express my sincere appreciation to the "Langston University Family" for teaching me how to discover who I am and what I can do.

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND

Originally known as the Colored Agricultural and Normal University, Langston University is Oklahoma's only historically black college and the only institution of higher education in Oklahoma and perhaps in the United States which has both a land grant and urban mission. Founded in 1897 as a result of the Morrill Act of 1890 and Oklahoma Territorial House Bill 151, Langston University has been providing higher education in Oklahoma for almost a century. Originally the University's purpose was to instruct "both male and female colored persons in the art of teaching various branches which pertain to a common school education and in such higher education as may be deemed advisable, and in the fundamental laws of the United States in the rights and duties of citizens in the agricultural, mechanical and industrial arts." Now Langston University offers some thirty-six degree programs supportive of both its original land grant mission and the urban mission assigned by the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education in 1978. As the University approaches its centennial it continues to strive toward excellence from "Langston to the World."

STATEMENT OF TOPIC/PURPOSE OF STUDY

The topic LANGSTON UNIVERSITY, A HISTORY: EDUCATION AND

PROGRESS FROM 1897-1994 was selected for this study because of the need of a current working history of the University and its progress. The purpose of this study is to compile a comprehensive up-to-date history of Langston University to serve as a tool of reference for students and interested scholars and readers alike and to assist in preserving the heritage of the historically black institution. The documentary production (videotape) that accompanies the research reflects current technology in the media.

Because of poor recordkeeping, many historical facts relative to activities and accomplishments of Langston University during the early years have not appeared in previous studies. The few written materials are, in this study, supplemented with interviews of persons knowledgeable of the University in its earlier years and of its early history. The value of this thesis and documentary production will be its availability as a research tool produced in the decade preceding the centennial, a study which includes some data omitted from previous studies.

OBJECTIVES TO BE INVESTIGATED/QUESTIONS TO BE ANSWERED

The project's research and video documentary production leaves several objectives to be investigated. The overall project is designed to present the history of Langston University and its impact on higher education for blacks and the state of Oklahoma. As the University approaches its

centennial, public interest in it has increased and those aware of Langston and its history have begun to recognize the rich heritage that has become a legacy of the institution. With only one book written specifically about the University's founding and progress, the need for this study is obvious. Therefore, several questions will be answered in this research: What prompted the founding of the University? Who were the persons involved in the founding? How has the original mission of the University changed over the years? What significant events and persons have impacted the growth and development of the University?

ASSUMPTIONS IN THESIS

Several assumptions were made about what would be encountered in the process of doing research on the early history of Langston University. The lack of written records during the early years of the school's existence is an obstacle. The assumption was made that there are persons who hold significant keys to the history of Langston University in their family archives, in their memories, and in the experiences of others with whom they have talked. These are points that make this work distinctively different from other studies.

SCOPE OF PROJECT

The scope of this study is limited. It will merely

provide a resource for later study and guarantee that a document of University history will be available for those to come in the years ahead. Also, it will serve perhaps as motivation to uncover still more information not included in any existing study.

OUTLINE OF THESIS

The thesis consists of Chapter I, the Introduction, and four additional chapters. The Review of the Literature, Chapter II, provides an historical background of the topic and summary of existing information found in researching the history of Langston University. The literature review reveals when and where the latest studies were completed and the methodology used by the persons doing the studies. The need for this historical study of Langston University is further established, including the opportunity to record meaningful, relevant, and significant information never before published.

The topic LANGSTON UNIVERSITY, A HISTORY: EDUCATION AND PROGRESS FROM 1897-1994 grew out of concern to have a current working history of the University and its progress. Chapter II also reveals the types of literature considered in the study, i.e., books, bulletins, annual reports of the University, historical still photographs, contemporary shots, and, most important, interviews with persons who have lived the history of the University for the better part of its existence.

Chapter III, Methodology, consists of a description of the

approach to the research. This includes an indepth discussion of the videotaping of interviews and other relevant materials as well as additional information that appears in the body of the thesis. It gives details of the instruments used in completing the paper and video such as the interviews and equipment used to edit, dub, and enhance the video or graphics. This chapter states assumptions about the results of this project as well as obstacles encountered during the research and production process.

In Chapter IV, Analysis and Presentation of Findings, results of the study of the university and the production of the video are presented. These findings support the theory that information can still be uncovered about historical events never discussed in previous publications.

In Chapter V, Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations, a brief summary of the history as well as methods for producing the documentary are described. Conclusions of the findings as well as an analysis of the results of the completed video are presented. In addition, recommendations for implementing the findings and recommendations for further research on the history of Langston University are given.

Particular attention should be given to Appendix A because of the non-traditional method used in this project. In Appendix A is a script for the video documentary written in standard broadcast writing format following rules set forth by the Associated Press (AP) and the Federal Communications

Commission (FCC). Appendix B contains photographs that were uncovered to give visual documentation of the buildings and events described in the thesis.

Finally, the documentary production evolves from the research done for the written portion of the project. It is an addition which reflects the use of modern technology in the media as well as providing a never-before-produced tool of study and information for the University archives.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Langston University was founded as one of Oklahoma's land grant colleges as a result of the "separate but equal" state of mind in the late 1800's. Blacks were allowed an education only if they had an institution which they could attend in which they would be separate from white society. Although at this time the separate schools for Negroes were inferior in even the most visible, rudimentary ways, proponents for the establishment of an institution of higher learning in Langston, Oklahoma, set out to create a school that would break this cycle. Through the second Morrill Act of 1890 and Oklahoma Territorial House Bill 151, blacks in Oklahoma realized their dreams of pursuing higher education. In 1897 the University was established in the small black pioneer community of Langston, Oklahoma Territory, not far from what was then the capital of Oklahoma Territory, Guthrie.

Within a year of its establishment Langston University formally opened. On September 3, 1898, the first classes were held in the legendary old Presbyterian Church. There were four faculty members and forty-one students under the presidency of Dr. Inman E. Page. During his administration from 1898 to 1915 the enrollment grew from 41 to 650. Staff increased from 4 to 35. The foundation was set to continue a tradition of growth and achievement that has lasted nearly a century.

Langston University has served as purveyor of knowledge for nearly 100 years, but to discover the history of Langston University, one must first become familiar with the early day town of Langston and realize that the institution grew from an idea which early settlers in the township and other black Oklahomans developed.

Langston, Oklahoma Territory, was billed by its promoters as "the only distinctively black city in America." It was established just eleven miles northeast of the capital, Guthrie, exactly one year after the opening of Oklahoma Territory for settlement by opportunity seekers searching for land and a start at building "American" communities.

The planning of two men - one white and one black - created this town: Charles H. Robbins, a white entrepreneur, and Edwin P. McCabe,¹ a black activist. Although McCabe's role was primarily to persuade black settlers to come to the land actually owned by Robbins, McCabe is to this day considered the founder of the City of Langston because of his diligent work to settle the community and establish the University. Heavy advertising promoted the town. On flyers, McCabe was listed as the founder of the town to ensure that black settlers would not question the authenticity of the "Black Town" idea. The

¹Because of poor recordkeeping, McCabe's first and middle name have been noted differently on a variety of documents. Edward Preston and Edwind Peter are a few examples of variations found on government documents during research.

town was eventually founded as much because of the economic prowess by Robbins as on the idea of the first all-black city. On April 22, 1890, Langston City was official in the Oklahoma Territory governing books.

The town was rumored to have a population of more than 200 settlers one year after its founding, but no official records exist. The town was said to be more developed than it is presently, excluding the University of course. There existed a hotel, barber shop, bakery, shoe repair, etc. A common school for the settlement's young children was established, and soon after, a boarding high school was built.

Following the settlement of the town, discussions arose among its settlers about the need for a school where blacks could pursue higher education. As founder and publisher of the Langston City Herald, E.P. McCabe was able to promote the idea of black colonization and education in his publication. As a result, a committee was organized to examine the notion a bit closer. Under the watchful eye of McCabe, three citizens Edward Robinson, R.E. Stewart, and D.J. Wallace appeared before the Oklahoma Industrial School and College Commission to petition that Langston have an institution of higher learning. Through their efforts and McCabe's close association with Territorial Governor Cassius Barnes, the Oklahoma Territorial Legislature passed a bill to establish a separate institution of higher learning in the settlement that would be for blacks only.

The town was to provide forty acres of land for the school that would be purchased by the townspeople. An enormous amount of planning by the citizens went into devising a plan to raise the money for the land. The citizens of the township sponsored picnics, bake sales and auctions that were attended by citizens from nearby townships. Finally, adequate funds were raised to actually begin the school.

The citizens were vying for an institution that would be above the standards of most black institutions at that time. Ironically, in 1896, one year before Langston University's founding, the Supreme Court Plessy v. Ferguson decision caused the constitutionality of separate schools to be questioned. Lawyers argued that this "equal" that was spoken of in the separate but equal clause had by no means been reflected in black institutions. They argued that blacks were being forced to learn in subhuman conditions. Proponents for the school in Langston set out to abolish this "unequal" standard of education. The institution in Langston was to defy the odds. On March 12, 1897, more than seven years after the founding of Langston City, the Colored Agricultural and Normal University was founded. Langston started with accommodations that would have been unheard of at a white institution. Holding its first classes in the Presbyterian church in the community, Langston University began what was to become a pattern of having to overcome one hardship after another.

Langston University has thrived since that time despite

the many obstacles. One of the major changes that have occurred is the establishment of a new urban mission, which was implemented in 1978. The new mission was assigned to the University as a part of the state's response to charges that it was not in compliance with civil rights mandates and was filed with and approved by the U.S. Office of Civil Rights in 1978. Prior to 1978 Langston's enrollment reflected its restrictions and limits of serving students under the legacy of segregation.

SUMMARY OF EXISTING STUDIES

LANGSTON UNIVERSITY: A HISTORY by Zella Black Patterson is the latest indepth historical study on the University. Published in 1979, the objective of the author's work was to describe the growth and development of Langston University from its establishment to the time of the writing of the book. Unlike this study, Patterson's book describes many facets of the school in detail, e.g., changes resulting from legislation, financial problems, political controversies, and presidential tenure. This study is neither as broad or as indepth as the Patterson study; however, the video production covers much information that Patterson discussed as well as events not mentioned in her book or in previous studies.

Patterson's approach toward research is similar to the method used in the video portion of this project. Interviews and the retrieval of historical documents are the primary

sources in both studies. There was a need, however, to update Patterson's information and to uncover information that contributes to the meaning and significance of Langston University's history and which gives the Langston University story a more readable, personal touch.

THE BLACK OKLAHOMANS, A HISTORY: 1541-1972 by Arthur L. Tolson (1972) touches briefly on the founding and development of Langston, Oklahoma. He offers a description of the location and founding dates and events. The works of both Patterson and Tolson provided information used in this study.

LITERATURE REVIEWED

The publications to be considered in any study of the history of Langston University include the following books: **LANGSTON UNIVERSITY: A HISTORY** by Zella Black Patterson (1979); **A HISTORY OF LANGSTON, OKLAHOMA: 1890-1950** by Clarence Mozel Hill (1952); **THE BLACK OKLAHOMANS, A HISTORY: 1541-1972** by Arthur L. Tolson (1972); **FREEDOM AND CITIZENSHIP: SELECTED LECTURES AND ADDRESSES** by John Mercer Langston (1969); **Separate and Unequal** by Louis R. Harlan (1976); presidents' annual reports, and interviews.

M. B. Tolson Black Heritage Center
Langston University
Langston, Oklahoma

REFERENCE
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CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

DESCRIPTION OF RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study was researched and developed to provide a current tool of reference on the history of Langston University. The findings were based on historical University documents, photographs, yearbooks, and audio and videotaped interviews. Additional information was received from the Oklahoma historical society. An interview questioning guide was developed, but each interviewee was encouraged to speak about any subject which he or she found pertinent in the research-gathering process.

LANGSTON UNIVERSITY: A HISTORY by Zella Black Patterson was used as a guide in organizing materials for this study., In the video documentary, the preliminary portion consists of videotaped interviews. Interviewees were asked questions about their links to the University. The second element of the video consists of audio interviews to be used as a voiceover method for action as well as including still photographs. Last, footage from tapes in the Department of Communication video library are used in making transitions. An introduction, narrative, and conclusion have been incorporated into the video to establish continuity. The tape was reviewed and edited for clarity and quality. It was edited on a VHS-compatible editing machine, and graphics were added via Atari computer system. The written project is a result of the information gathered in

doing preliminary research.

DATA COLLECTION

The preliminary data collection for this project was done by an INFOTRAC search which resulted in an annotated bibliography for the thesis prospectus. After the bibliography was developed, a list of possible interviewees, as well as a list of primary interview questions, was developed. The final list of interviewees is listed below:

1. Dr. Melvin Todd, Special Assistant to the President, Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs Emeritus, and Langston University alumnus
2. Mr. Ronald Keys, Curator, Melvin B. Tolson Black Heritage Center
3. Dr. Ernest L. Holloway, President, Langston University, and Langston University alumnus
4. Mrs. Viola Jones, Mayor, City of Langston, Oklahoma
5. Mrs. Almeda Parker, Professor of Business Emeritus, former Chairman, Department of Business of Langston University and Langston University Alumna
6. Mrs. Rubye Hall, Former Chairman, Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education, Oklahoma educator, and Langston University Alumna
7. Dr. Jean Bell Manning, Vice President for Academic Affairs, Langston University
8. Curry Ballard, Historian in Residence, Langston University

(This list reflects the limitations of time and interview availability for the video production. Many other persons could have contributed significantly to a project of this nature.)

The primary interview questions are listed below:

1. State your name.
2. What connection, direct or indirect, do you have with Langston University, past or present?
3. How long have you had an association with Langston University?
4. How far back does your family lineage connect with Langston University?
5. Can you describe physical changes in the University and community structure which you have witnessed?
6. Were you present during any significant University events, e.g., presidential inaugurations, protests, building improvements, fires, curricula changes, etc.?
7. Do you have a story about Langston University that would give this project a personal touch?
8. Do you have in your possession any artifacts, photographs, etc., that you would share to make this research more complete than do past studies.

LIMITATIONS

The only limitations that were encountered were failure to contact all possible interviewees, time limits (unfortunately, time limits and schedules prevented some persons listed as interviewees from being included in the video portion of the project), and the lack of availability of information.

CHAPTER IV
PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

RESULTS

There are several results of this study that warrant highlighting.

In respect to the first question asked in the study (What prompted the founding of the University?), political and social information was found that was not in previous studies. This information adds clarity and understanding of the social climate during the time of Langston University's founding. It was found that much research had to be done in government policies of the time to complete the research for this particular question. One had to understand the social climate of the time and the laws that governed that climate in order to fully give an accurate and concise description of Langston's founding. Two of the major points of political information found were the materials involving the Separate But Equal clause and the Plessy vs. Ferguson Supreme Court decision.

In respect to the second question asked in the study (Who were the persons involved in the founding?), much of the information was repetitive of the contents in previous studies. There was never a question or discrepancy as to who the proponents of the founding were and what role they played in achieving their goal. There were, however, a few persons that were given more mention in this study than in others. Key

persons involved in politics and legislation were mentioned because of the more indepth research into government policies and social practices of the time. Names of persons who served on planning committees for the school as well as government officials were named and their direct or indirect roles involving the founding were explained. Persons such as D.J. Wallace, who led the committee that appeared before the Oklahoma Industrial School and College Commission to petition that Langston have an institution of higher learning, were given particular mention because of their vital roles.

One problem that was never resolved was E.P. McCabe's true name. It was found that E.P. McCabe's name had been listed in several documents differently. Some listed Edwin Peter and Edwin Preston, while others listed Edward Peter, and Edward Preston. A search of early documents was done to clarify the difference in name listings, but no birth certificate or official signature could be found. McCabe's true name is still a mystery.

In respect to the question as to how the original mission of the University has changed over the years, several findings were made. As relates to the original mission to instruct "both male and female colored persons in the art of teaching various branches which pertain to a common school education and in such higher education as may be deemed advisable, and in the fundamental laws of the United States in the rights and duties of citizens in the agricultural, mechanical and industrial

arts," Langston University has changed significantly. With the changing of the name came a changing of curriculum and purpose. The name university warranted research. In 1978 the school was assigned an urban mission to accompany the already established land grant mission. The University Center at Tulsa and the Oklahoma City Urban Center were established. The University is in a constant state of change with respect to the times and continues to let its mission reflect current societal needs.

The final question in the study (What significant events and persons impacted the establishment, growth, and development of the University?) uncovered many facts and persons who were significant but are mentioned briefly or totally excluded in other research. Charles H. Robbins, the owner of the land on which Langston was founded, was discovered to have impacted the establishment and growth of the town of Langston tremendously. His entrepreneurial spirit aided in the quick advancement of the town. Langston township citizens Edward Robinson, R.E. Stewart, and D.J. Wallace, who petitioned for the institution are highlighted in this study.

E.P. McCabe's relationship with Territorial Governor Cassius Barnes and the results of how that association aided in the passing of the bill to establish the institution are discussed.

The findings in relation to the research assumptions established at the onset of the project are accurate. Persons

interviewed were found to hold significant keys to the history of Langston University in their family archives, in their memories, and in the experiences of others with whom they have talked. The lack of written records during the early years of the school's existence was a research obstacle. The city of Langston, Oklahoma, lost many records due to fire and water damage over the years. Langston University has no archives or historical preservation programs. There are historical documents being preserved and cared for in the Melvin B. Tolson Black Heritage Center but those are few. Many photographs were found scattered in several locations on the campus yellowing and rotting from lack of care.

One other unforeseen obstacle was the video production. Finding quality equipment was a major problem. Once equipment was obtained, time-consuming training had to be completed before any editing of graphics work could be done. Production costs were high, and only one day of graphics production could be afforded. Therefore, only limited graphic designs were utilized in the video production.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

CONCLUSIONS

The assumptions that were made about what would be encountered in the process of doing research on the early history of Langston University were accurate. The lack of written records during the early years of the school's existence was a major obstacle. Unforeseen difficulties editing the video were also an obstacle.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the implementing of the findings be a major concern for Langston University and its student body. Perhaps the research and video can be used as a teaching tool for future students to learn about the rich background of the institution. Once students realize where the institution has come from, they will take a greater interest in ensuring the positive places the school is yet to travel.

Further research and interviewing of several persons and events are also recommended. Research of descendants of the first settlers of the town of Langston could lead to more information. The interviewing of persons such as Ada Lois Sipuel Fisher, Arthur Tolson, and others was regrettably not included in this research but will hopefully be included in later studies.

It is strongly recommended that the University as well as

the town of Langston develop an archives. Valuable photographs and memorabilia are being lost because of lack of care. Decaying photographs should be retrieved and copied. The originals should be restored and placed in an archive so that they will not be lost, stolen, or mishandled. This is the only way Langston's history will be preserved.

Overall, the project was a tedious and timely labor of love and reflects a thirst for knowledge. It is hoped that it may be of educational use to some and a treasure to others.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

VIDEO SCRIPT

Audio	Video
Music/"It's So Hard To Say Goodbye"	:20 Graphics/LANGSTON UNIVERSITY: A HISTORY.
	:20 EDUCATION AND PROGRESS FROM 1897-1994.
	:20 PRODUCED BY MONICA DIANE LEE.
ANNCR: Originally know as the Colored Agricultural and Normal University, Langston University is Oklahoma's only historically black college and the only institution of higher education in Oklahoma and perhaps in the United States which has both a land grant and urban mission. Founded in 1897 as a result of the Morrill Act of 1890 and Oklahoma Territorial House Bill 151, Langston University has been providing higher education in Oklahoma for almost a century. Originally the University's purpose was to instruct both male and female colored persons in the art of teaching various branches which pertain to a common school education and in such higher education as may be deemed advisable, and in the fundamental laws of the United States in the rights and duties of citizens in the agricultural, mechanical and industrial arts. Now Langston University offers some thirty-six degree programs supportive of both its original land grant mission and the urban mission. As the university approaches its centennial it continues to strive.	3:00 ANNCR APPEARS ON

Audio

toward excellence from Langston
to the world.

Music/Jazz ANNCR OV

ANNCR DIALOGUE

Video

:15

Still Shot/
Shot/Constitution
Separate but
Equal Clause.

:20

Still Shot/
Black Oklahomans.

:30

Still Shot/
Oklahoma
Territory map.

:30

Still Shot/
Presbyterian
Church.

:30

Still Shot/
Black migrants.

:10

Still Shot/
Charles
Robbins.

:10

Still Shot/
E.P. McCabe.

:20

Still Shot/
Oklahoma
Territory Map.

:30

Still Shot/
Black Children.

:30

Still Shot/
Langston City
Herald Newspaper.

Audio	Video
	:30 Still Shot/ Original Site.
	:30 Still Shot/ P l e s s y v . Ferguson document.
	:30 Still Shot/ Presbyterian Church.
Holloway Opening Speech Excerpt	3:45 Holloway Opening Speech.
Holloway Opening Speech Excerpt	:20 Still Shot/ 1941 Students.
	:25 Still Shot/ 1990 Student Gov.
	:25 Still Shot/ 1954 Students.
	:40 Still Shot/ 1992 Students.
Music Jazz Anncr OV More dialogue.	3:30 Still Shot/ C.A.N.U.
Melvin Todd speech.	1:00 Melvin Todd Vieo excerpt from speech in 1993.
	1:00 Curry Ballard Video from 1994 lecture.
Curry Ballard lecture.	4:45 Curry Ballard

Audio

Music Jazz Annncr OV More dialogue

Annncr more dialogue

Music Jazz

Video

lecture.

2:00
C u r r e n t
Campus.

:30
Still Shot/
Presidents

:30
Still Shot/
I. Page

:30
Still Shot/
Hale

:30
Still Shot/
Holloway

3:00
Protest Video.

3:00
Annncr. standing
at C.A.N.U. sign.

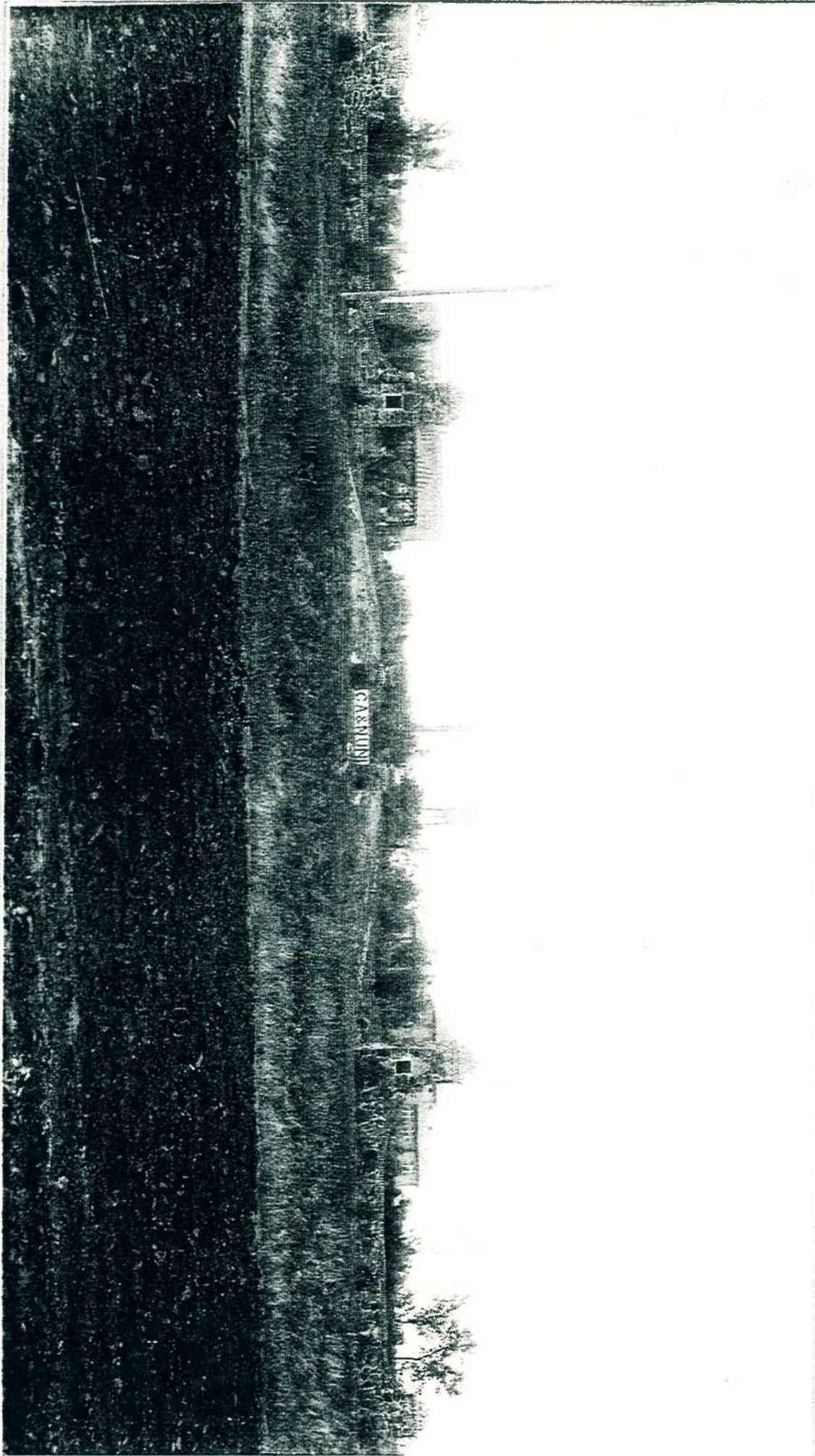
2:00
Moving Graphics/
Thanks to:
Dr. Joy Flasch
Karen Clark
Alicia Atkinson
Lester Lesure
Willie Lee
Linda Lee
Ernest Holloway
The Langston
Family!

APPENDIX B

Photographs

1. Graduating Class of 1941.
2. The Colored Agricultural and Normal University entrance.





VITA

Monica Diane Lee

Candidate for the Degree of

Bachelor of Arts

and

Completion of the

E.P. McCabe Honors Program

Thesis: LANGSTON UNIVERSITY, A HISTORY: EDUCATION
AND PROGRESS FROM 1897-1994.

Major: Broadcast Journalism

Biographical Information:

Born in Kansas City, Missouri, March 17, 1972, the
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Graduated from Lincoln College Preparatory Academy,
Kansas City, Missouri, in May 1990; will complete
requirements for Bachelor of Arts degree
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Awards/Honors:

Regents' Scholar; McCabe Honors Program Participant;
Who's Who Among American Colleges and Universities
1993, 1994; University of Kansas Urban Journalism
Workshop Participant, 1988; Alpha Kappa Alpha
Sorority, Inc.; highest ranking Broadcast Journalism
Student 1993.