Reliving history

Law students re-enact trial that led to university's integration

At the reception following the trial re-enactment and legal panel were Judge Horace Ward (left), one of the attorneys who represented Hamilton Holmes and Charlayne Hunter during the original trial and who was denied admission to the law school himself during the 1950s, and Robert Benham (J.D.'70), the second African-American to graduate from the law school and currently a Supreme Court of Georgia justice.

For about two hours during late February, the present met the past.

As part of the university's 50th anniversary celebration of desegregation, the Davenport-Benham Black Law Students Association organized a two part event that examined the legal side of integration and, due to its tremendous success, earned UGA's H. Gordon and Francis S. Davis S.O.A.R. Award for Outstanding Campus Event.

The first part was a re-enactment of the trial that forced UGA to admit Hamilton Holmes and Charlayne Hunter.

The second was a panel discussion on the short and long-term ramifications of those decisions featuring prominent legal minds from Georgia.

Outfitted in 1960s-style dress, students from the law school played the parts of Hunter, Holmes, their attorneys and the lawyers for UGA.

Each witness took the stand and fielded attorney questions before closing arguments were made and the judge delivered a decision.

From prolonged waits at the registrar's office to aggressive, hour-long interviews, the trial highlighted the obstacles that Holmes and Hunter had to overcome to secure spots at UGA.

In a typical exchange, second-year student Christopher E. Bruce, who played Holmes, responded to an accusation that he was persuaded by the NAACP to legally challenge the university by saying, "No, sir. I wasn't drafted by the NAACP. In football terms, I was a walk-on."

Speaking as U.S. District Court Judge William A. Bootle, Callaway Chair Emeritus Ronald L. Carlson said, "The court is aware that demonstrations surrounding the entry of these students have become violent. ... Some see this as a reason for this court not to proceed. The view of this court is that constitutional rights are not to be sacrificed in the face of disorder, nor can lawful orders of this court be frustrated by mob violence. Nothing in these demonstrations shall slow the work of this court. It is the finding of this court that Hamilton Holmes and Charlayne Hunter would already have been admitted to the university had they been judged on their merits and not their race. It is the order of this court that they be immediately admitted."

The panel discussion that followed the re-enactment featured Judge Horace T. Ward, one of the attorneys who represented Holmes and Hunter and who was denied admission to the law school himself during the 1950s; Justice Robert Benham (J.D.'70), the second African-American to graduate from the School of Law; Kenneth I. Dious (J.D.'73), Athens' first African-American lawyer; and Maureen Downey, a reporter for *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution.*

The panel discussed what integration meant for the university, the state and the nation as well as what related issues are surfacing now.

"I think the question today is: Are segregated classrooms more acceptable today as a matter of choice rather than court order or law? I think what we're seeing in Georgia today is a re-segregation of schools by residential housing patterns, and it's very problematic," Downey said. "People are choosing where to live and it's hard to argue with that."

Added Benham: "I think education is part of a bigger picture. I want to give this country credit for the progress we've made. I think what will bode well for our future is our realization of how we made this progress. It's come about because of our diversity. Everybody doesn't look alike. We don't have the same religion. Those differences strengthen us as a country. The differences cause us to be sensitive to the needs of others."

—*UGA* Columns *Senior Reporter Matt Weeks*

Watch the re-enactment and legal panel and view photos from the reception online at **www.law.uga.edu/multimedia-gallery-recent-events.**

The re-enactment of the Hunter/Holmes trial, which led to the desegregation of UGA, included (from l. to r.) third-year student David Ballard, playing the role of one of the state's attorneys; Callaway Chair Emeritus Ron Carlson, portraying U.S. District Court Judge William Bootle; and second-year student Christopher Bruce as Hamilton Holmes, among others. Photo by UGA Public Affairs' Dorothy Kozlowski.