

**University of Illinois Student Life and Culture Archives**

**Interviewee: Aja Beckham**

**Interviewer: Delaney Bullinger**

**Length: 00:06:13**

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**Delaney Bullinger: What was one of the most important lessons you've learned at U of I?**

Aja Beckham: One of the most important lessons that I've learned at the University of Illinois is to speak up when you want to see change and to advocate for yourself. I've learned that through, I think freshman year was the first opportunity where, we cofounded Being Black at Illinois and had the opportunity to speak with administration and voice some of our goals and to collaborate with them. And we saw the university really step up and first of all they were listening to what students had to say.

**DB: What was your motivation behind creating that organization?**

AB: Yeah, the motivation behind creating the organization was just providing a space where students could, more students could be in the same space, be in our African-American Cultural Center and just have a space where they can celebrate their culture and have a sense of community because this place was so important to me during freshman year and was reason why I was able to develop friendships and have mentors and feel like I was apart of campus so I wanted other students to have that same experience.

**DB: Do you have any particular mentors that you want to mention?**

AB: I wouldn't say any mentors in particular because there are so many that I might end up forgetting someone. But it was in particular the 100 Strong student organization that was just incredibly supportive. I remember during the first couple of weeks of school we went on a retreat and we went camping and had the opportunity to just hang with the upperclassmen and not feel intimidated, but to feel welcomed to feel that we could come to them for anything and that we had a real friendship and that they were there for us.

**DB: What is your strongest memory from your first day or week on campus?**

AB: My first memory of [unintelligible] week?

**DB: A memory that's especially memorable [Aja laughs] from when you first came.**

AB: When I think back of the very first time I came to the University of Illinois, it was eighth-grade. My prof- or my teacher. Sorry I get so confused. Professors, teachers. What's the difference. My eighth-grade teacher brought us on a college tour to the university and we toured

the campus. He was an alum. And he was so enthusiastic about just showing us his campus. We went to classes and met his friends, his fraternity brothers, and that was the first memory. And I thought, "I'll never go to this school." Yeah, just at the time it just didn't feel like it was something that, a place where, that seemed interesting and I could see myself at. But then my mom ended up forcing me to apply to this university and I did a, I think it's called a late application. So, I did it like the month before I graduated high school and got in. And my mom was absolutely right that this was the right school because I had applied to smaller schools and they wouldn't have been even close to the experience that I've had at the University of Illinois and the opportunities I've had meeting new people every day because it's so many students here. Building those relationships with international students. So I'm really glad that my mom chose this university for me and that my eighth-grade teacher Mr. Warren just brought us here.

**DB: What is your favorite place on campus?**

AB: My favorite place on campus. I don't have favorites of anything actually so it's hard to say. But a place where I enjoy spending time is this little space in the LAS building. It's like some tables outdoors and it's like in-between the building ramps so you can go inside of the building and then walk through another door and be in this like rectangular outdoor area and then walk straight [laughter] again and you'll be inside of the building. But basically, just this outdoor space. It's really calm and peaceful and it feels like no one's there and that you're in nature and especially during the springtime the flowers are blooming and the sun is shining on your face and it just feels like you can just stop, smell the roses and everything is silent, you know.

**DB: And that's the Liberal Arts and Sciences building?**

AB: That is the Liberal Arts and Science building. Lincoln Hall.

**DB: Lincoln Hall.**

AB: Yes.

**DB: Is there anything else you would like to talk about?**

AB: I think what I miss most is because of having summer internships realizing that there's so many resources on campus that aren't as accessible when you're an adult and when you move away from a college campus. Just the ability to attend events about every subject you can think of. After classes are done at 5:00 pm you still have something to look forward to for the day. Something new to learn, new people to meet, and just a space where all these different events are happening and you can just, whatever. If you want to be interested in something one semester but not the other, you have the space to do that. I think I'm just really going to miss having, you know, being able to walk out of my door and a couple blocks over I'm at whatever event that seemed interesting that day and then the next day I can walk in another direction to another building and I attend an event that's completely different but nevertheless just as interesting.

Yeah, I'm really grateful for that. Hopefully get to find those opportunities [unintelligible] come to talk.

**DB: Well, thank you so much.**

AB: Thank you.