

CHAPTER SIX: CHEEK-CLARK BUILDING

On September 17, 1998, dozens of housekeepers, administrators, professors, and trustees, gathered to rededicate and rename the building that had for seventy-five years been known as the University Laundry. Representatives from the University's administration and the UNC Housekeepers Association (HKA) spoke at the event, each in turn remarking on the historical significance of the building's renaming as the Kennon Cheek/Rebecca Clark Building—now the central office for the University's Housekeeping Division, named in honor of two Black labor organizers and University employees from the early twentieth century. Barbara Prear, the president of HKA, spoke to the assembled group, marking the event as an opportunity “to recognize the contributions of African-American housekeepers to the University community.”³⁵²

In the seven years before the Cheek-Clark Building rededication, the HKA, a group comprised of the low-wage housekeepers and groundskeepers of the University, most of whom were members of Orange County's Black communities, organized one of the most successful labor movements of the late twentieth century in the South. At the legal conclusion of their movement, a settlement with the University in November 1996, the housekeepers, led by petitioners Barbara Prear and Marsha Tinnen, earned over one million dollars in pay raises and back pay. They also earned “recognition of the HKA as the representative of the housekeepers,

³⁵² A Naming Ceremony Draft, 17 September 1998 in the Office of the Chancellor of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill: Michael Hooker Records #40026, University Archives, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

...substantial backing for career training, child and elder care, a public health study, and the establishment of a historical commission.”³⁵³ After decades of filing complaints and grievances which cited horrific working conditions, abysmal pay, and a lack of opportunity for advancement, the housekeepers took up a bold weapon in their struggle: the University’s history.

The legal argument they filed with the state was supported by the historical legacy of Black freedom striving and the history of the University’s treatment of Black workers, extending into enslavement. “We knew the 1960s struggle [Foodworkers’ Strikes] and talked a lot about that,” Chris Baumann, a white student organizer with the HKA from 1991 to 1997 explained. “Then we found out there had been another in the thirties very similar to what we had done...And then we kept going back further, understanding that the university owned slaves, that Old East and Old West were built by slaves, and so that’s why we started arguing for reparations. People always say, ‘Oh, you can’t prove reparations.’ Well, we felt that we could prove—we *did* prove reparations.”³⁵⁴

The housekeepers movement, directed by the legacies of Black freedom striving, shaped the 1996 settlement by using the University’s history as a tool with which to pursue justice for Black low-wage workers at the University, creating a model for how histories of injustice could be used to rectify present conditions. Although the potency of the memory of the movement behind it has been diluted, the Cheek-Clark Building exists as a physical representation of the ways in which Black housekeepers and their student supporters used the legacies of previous movements to reclaim the University as a place that they too could assert their ownership of, as

³⁵³ “Housekeepers Win Settlement,” Chapel Hill NAACP newsletter, Spring 1997 in the Campus Y Papers of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Records #40126, University Archives, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

³⁵⁴ Interview with Chris Baumann by Charlotte Fryar, 21 December 2017, L-0450.

white Chapel Hill citizens had done for centuries. The housekeepers' reclamation of the University as a dynamic place of resistance is best understood as the confluence of the two prior organizing approaches—a way to claim spaces of resistance by contesting the ways in which those spaces have been inscribed as anti-Black, using the history of Black freedom striving to do so. In asserting their claims to the history and place of the University, the housekeepers movement established a new approach for spatially-based racial justice movements to challenge the white supremacy of the cultural landscape using the history of Black freedom striving in Chapel Hill.

Forming the Housekeepers Association

For decades before the formation of the HKA, Black workers at the University campaigned for racial and economic justice from the institution. Although there are numerous individuals who organized on behalf of Black workers in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the HKA followed most directly in the steps of the Janitors' Association of the 1930s and 1940s. As the effects of the Great Depression came to Chapel Hill following the 1929 stock market crash, the University threatened a ten percent pay cut to the wages of the janitorial staff. In response, four Black janitors—Frank Hairston, Elliot Washington, Melvin Rich, and Kennon Cheek—began meeting regularly to discuss issues arising from their jobs, and eventually, their options for organizing against the potential pay cuts. The Janitors' Association formed on April 14, 1930, with Kennon Cheek as its president, a position he held for three years. Early victories for the organization included “a week's paid vacation, showers in the janitors' bathrooms, and increased communication between the janitors and upper level administrators.”³⁵⁵

³⁵⁵ *The Voice of the Janitor's Association*, Newsletter 1940 in the Office of the Chancellor of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill: Michael Hooker Records #40026, University Archives, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

In 1942, the Janitors' Association reorganized to become the Local 403-P of the State, County, and Municipal Workers of America, an organization affiliated with the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO). With Rebecca Clark serving as its shop steward, the organization (now representing all low-wage University workers) in 1947 won wage increases for laundry workers, safer work spaces, and more reasonable work schedules. As McCarthyism swept through Chapel Hill in the 1950s, the national CIO merged with the more conservative American Federation of Labor, significantly diminishing the capacity for the University's workers to continue to organize for significant change.³⁵⁶ The next major wave of labor activism at the University was the Foodworkers' Strikes of 1969, recounted in *Lenoir Hall and Manning Hall*. Both the Janitors' Association and the Foodworkers' Strikes provided the UNC Housekeepers Association with two strong models of how the University's Black low-wage workers organized for dignity and equity in pay, treatment, and working conditions, historical precedents that the HKA utilized in the reclamation of a radical history of Black freedom striving at the University, which they used to build their own movement.

In the spring semester of 1980, housekeeping supervisors threatened to fire dozens of housekeepers who had not been able get to the campus during a blizzard. Following this threat, Gene Alston, a housekeeper widely known to have organized with the Communist Workers Party, was fired. The politically motivated firing of Alston and the routine harassment of Black women workers by white supervisors galvanized the housekeepers to protest. On March 27, a group of housekeepers presented the Physical Plant Director, Claude Swecker, with a list of demands that included the removal of two supervisors widely known to sexually harass female employees, the ability to use vacation time at any time during the year, the elimination of

³⁵⁶ Interview with Rebecca Clark by Bob Gilgor, 21 June 2000, K-0536.

“warning letters” for employees who were late to work because of inclement weather, the rehiring of Gene Alston, and the establishment of regular meetings for all housekeepers.³⁵⁷

Swecker and others in the Housekeeping Department did not meet their demands, and the movement could not be sustained. But out of this action, in 1983, an early version of the Housekeepers Association (HKA) formed. In 1987, another staff member, Keith Edwards, the first Black woman hired to the University’s police force, filed a grievance against the University, charging her supervisors with gender and racial discrimination. Edwards was represented in her suit by Al McSurely, a local civil rights lawyer. Although Edwards did not settle her case until 1995 (the lengthened timeline was a consequence of a series of unsuccessful appeals from the University), the continued success of Edwards’s case encouraged other workers to question their own treatment by the University and take important steps towards collectively organizing.³⁵⁸

In February 1991, a group of twenty housekeepers with the legal counsel of McSurely, (later adding Mark Dorisin and Ashley Osment) filed a Step One Grievance against the Housekeeping Department’s administrators, citing racial discrimination in the form of poverty wages, unfair treatment, and the lack of opportunities for career advancement. Black housekeepers were largely hired at the lowest pay grade (Level 50, 51, 52), with the lowest salary of any employee of the University, while their few white colleagues were hired a higher pay grades. McSurely, speaking to *The Daily Tar Heel*, explained that “these Black jobs had about 10 to 20 percent lower starting pay than white jobs, and that was a very key part of our

³⁵⁷ History of Black Workers and UNC Timeline in the John Kenyon Chapman Papers #5441, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

³⁵⁸ Jennifer Talhelm, “Edwards Confident after appeal hearing,” *The Daily Tar Heel*, 27 August 1992, 1; For more on both McSurely and Edwards, see interviews with McSurely, AI (C-0347, C-0348, C-0349, C-0350, C-0351, and R-0840) and Keith Edwards (K-0230, K-0541, K-0543, K-0543, R-0373, and R-0860) in the Southern Oral History Program Interview Database.

lawsuit — that the University had basically developed a whole analysis that Black people didn't need as much money to live on as white people and certainly didn't need any promotions or training or any way to move up.”³⁵⁹ These strategies employed by the University to keep Black workers in subordinate positions by ignoring their human needs are part of the way in which anti-Blackness is reproduced in that “Black people remain property whether or not an individual [or institution] owns them.”³⁶⁰

At this level in the grievance process, the Superintendent of Housekeeping responded to the group, stating that there was no racial discrimination. The grievance next moved to Step Two, which involved the University's upper-level administration in South Building, who also refused to address the grievance claim and allow legal representation for the housekeepers in meetings. At this point, it became clear to the housekeepers that if they wanted change, they would have to organize into a formal group and bring in partners to support their efforts. Over the summer of 1991, the group of twenty, led by Marsha Tinnen, Barbara Prear, Annie Pettiford, and Larry Farrar, reformed the UNC Housekeepers Association, which would serve as the movement's recognized organization for the filing of a class-action lawsuit. HKA set three goals for the movement: “higher wages, fairer treatment, and beneficial training programs,” which would together serve as the guiding goals of their campaign.³⁶¹

³⁵⁹ Harris Wheelless, “UNC Housekeepers' Settlement was made 20 years ago,” *The Daily Tar Heel*, 27 November 2016.

³⁶⁰ T. Elon Dancy, Kirsten T. Edwards, and James Earl Davis, “Historically White Universities and Plantation Politics: Anti-Blackness and Higher Education in the Black Lives Matter Era,” *Urban Education* 53, No. 2 (2018): 180.

³⁶¹ Justice for Housekeepers Pamphlet, *We Are All Housekeepers*, Fall 1993, in the Campus Y Papers of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Records #40126, University Archives, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Student Support and Institutional Retaliation

Starting in the fall semester of 1991, HKA sought out students to support them in their organizing work, holding meetings in student social spaces to educate them about the challenges housekeepers faced in organizing their lawsuit. “At one of the meetings,” Chris Baumann, a junior in the fall of 1991, remembered, “Al and Marsha Tinnen and Annie Pettiford came, and they showed the video of the 1969 cafeteria workers’ strike...and then Marsha and Annie talked about what they were up against.”³⁶² HKA leadership used the legacy of the multiracial campaign of the Foodworkers' Strikes to activate contemporary students for their cause, grounding their practice of counter-storytelling in their own experiences. By engaging in this form of counter-storytelling, the housekeepers were able to “teach others that by combining elements from both the story [Foodworkers’ Strikes] and the current reality [the lived experiences of the housekeepers], one can construct another world that is richer than either the story or the reality alone.”³⁶³

The first logistic hurdle to overcome was getting housekeepers across the campus to sign on to the class-action. Housekeepers were assigned to certain buildings and had little contact with their colleagues who worked in other campus buildings. Because there was no convenient central housekeeping office to gather in without being harassed or watched by their supervisors, it was difficult for HKA leaders to meet with their colleagues to explain why they should join the class-action lawsuit. To help cover the extent of the campus, HKA asked student supporters to help. Baumann, galvanized by the documentary video of the Foodworkers’ Strikes and the

³⁶² Interview with Chris Baumann by Charlotte Fryar, 21 December 2017, L-0450.

³⁶³ Daniel Solórzano and Tara Yosso, “Critical race methodology: Counter-storytelling as an analytical framework for education research,” *Qualitative Inquiry* 8, No. 1 (2002): 36.

stories of the housekeepers' struggles for dignity and better treatment, began waking up early to meet with housekeepers across the campus. "They were trying to build this class-action grievance, and so they were having a hard time getting around to get everybody to sign it, so I said, 'Well, is there anything hard you have to do?' And they said, 'Well, you just take this sheet around and explain what's going on and sign it.' So I said, 'Why don't I just get up early before class and go around and see if I can find some folks.' So I went around, and my first day, I came back with over thirty forms."³⁶⁴

Baumann soon became a key student supporter of the housekeepers movement, along with former students and graduate students Matthew Stewart, Fred Wray, Jeff Jones, Mathieu Despard, and George Loveland.³⁶⁵ Many student supporters for the housekeepers movement were white, motivated to support the housekeepers' cause because the movement was not centered only on racial justice, a cause often difficult to get white investment in, but workers rights.³⁶⁶ Although many active students supporters of HKA were white, the vast majority of white students, faculty, and staff were disengaged from the issue entirely. For his part, Baumann explained that he saw his role as a white male student in the movement as one of support: "my work was kind of behind the scenes and helping and trying to make sure that they [the housekeepers] had the space to lead."³⁶⁷ Students organized cookouts in the Pit to fundraise for

³⁶⁴ Interview with Chris Baumann by Charlotte Fryar, 21 December 2017, L-0450.

³⁶⁵ Interview with Chris Baumann by Charlotte Fryar, 21 December 2017, L-0450; Justice for Housekeepers Pamphlet, *We Are All Housekeepers*, Fall 1993 in the Campus Y Papers of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Records #40126, University Archives, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

³⁶⁶ George Lipsitz, *The Possessive Investment In Whiteness: How White People Profit From Identity Politics*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998), 15.

³⁶⁷ Interview with Chris Baumann by Charlotte Fryar, 21 December 2017, L-0450.

HKA, but soon were challenged by the administrators, who claimed it was illegal for students to give money directly to employees of the University.³⁶⁸

The reactionary strategies employed by administrators to punish student supporters of Black workers indicated that the University recognized and feared the power that white students and Black workers could wield when united by a common cause. After Baumann was brought up on false charges to the Student Honor Court and administrators called in the Health Department to stop a cookout in the Pit, students and housekeepers moved their fundraisers off campus. “There was a club out in Hillsborough, and we’d sell tickets, and it was fun. Students would be there, housekeepers, and we’d just have a nice fun party to raise money for the movement,” Baumann described.³⁶⁹ These events provided a rare opportunity for housekeepers and students to come together in a social space, building relationships between mostly white students and Black workers which would strengthen the foundation for the movement.

Happening simultaneously in the early years of the housekeepers movement was the student-led movement for a free-standing Black Cultural Center (BCC). Although they were distinct organizing efforts, student participants organized for both, sometimes holding simultaneous rallies and speak-outs on behalf of both Black housekeepers and students. “Both the housekeepers movement and the Black Cultural Center movement was about....acknowledging the dignity and contributions of people who had been marginalized at UNC for two hundred years. That really was the root of it. And so because it was that common purpose, the Black Cultural Center could not ignore the housekeepers movement because it

³⁶⁸ Ruby Sinreich and Chris Baumann, “Union deals SEAC, housekeepers dose of racism,” *The Daily Tar Heel*, 27 January 1992, 8.

³⁶⁹ Interview with Chris Baumann by Charlotte Fryar, 21 December 2017, L-0450.

signified what it was we were trying to accomplish,” explained Michelle Thomas, the Black Student Movement (BSM) president from 1992 to 1993.³⁷⁰

The campus conversation about the housekeepers movement propelled some students into the BCC movement. John Bradley, a co-founder of the Black Awareness Council and BSM president from 1993 to 1994, was introduced to the issues surrounding the BCC movement through conversations about the housekeepers movement: “So I’d heard about the Black Cultural Center, and more on the side of the housekeepers movement just with wages and some things that they were trying to get done.” Although the two movements ran parallel and on occasion shared the same platform, most student energy devoted to racial justice organizing was given to the BCC movement. “I think part of the problem was that it was a valiant and understandable struggle, but the students didn’t really—it didn’t really resonate with them as much, and the housekeepers movement almost seemed like an ancillary movement that they couldn’t identify with,” Bradley explained.³⁷¹

The Legal Case Against the University

Despite the tempered support they received from the larger student body, the HKA continued to organize, building the case for their class-action and holding marches and rallies to advocate for their lawsuit. In January 1992, members of the HKA delivered ninety-one signatures of housekeepers who wanted to move their grievance up to a Step Three Level Grievance. The University denied their request to hear the grievance and denied their right to have an attorney represent them. Although several meetings were held between the Steering Committee of the HKA and Chancellor Paul Hardin, there had been no movement made towards

³⁷⁰ Interview with Michelle Thomas by Charlotte Fryar, 26 December 2017, L-0466.

³⁷¹ Interview with John Bradley by Charlotte Fryar, 2 December 2017, L-0452.

the HKA's three goals—higher wages, better treatment, and job training programs. In January 1993, the housekeepers moved their grievance up to a Step Four Level Grievance, having now gone through the entirety of the University's internal dispute resolution and grievance process.³⁷²

The Steering Committee of the HKA next filed a Contested Case Petition with the North Carolina Office of Administrative Hearings on behalf of over four hundred housekeepers and groundskeepers, charging racial discrimination. It was the first class action case for state employees in the history of North Carolina.³⁷³ Through the fall semester of 1993, the University's legal team made several motions to dismiss the case, which were denied by Administrative Law Judge Brenda Becton. In October, David Parker, representing the University as the state's Assistant Attorney General, made an extraordinary move, filing a writ of certiorari with Judge Henry Hight in the Superior Court in Wake County and requesting a review of Becton's order to rule on the case by December. Judge Hight granted the writ, accepted the case, and promptly dismissed it. After an unusual bout with North Carolina's Court of Appeals, with the University represented by then Attorney General and future North Carolina Governor Mike Easley, the case was sent back to Judge Becton in April 1995. Later that month, the University's legal team led by State Deputy Attorney General Thomas Ziko, appealed again, petitioning the North Carolina Supreme Court to overturn the decision to give the case back to Judge Becton. This last appeal was denied, and the case was finally sent to Judge Becton to review in July

³⁷² Justice for Housekeepers Pamphlet, *We Are All Housekeepers*, Fall 1993 in the Campus Y Papers of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Records #40126, University Archives, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

³⁷³ "Historic Victory By UNC Housekeepers Approved By Judge" Press Release from UNC Housekeepers, % McSurely, Dorosin, and Osment, 3 December 1996 in the John Kenyon Chapman Papers #5441, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

1995, over four years since the first grievance had been filed by the initial group of twenty housekeepers.³⁷⁴

During this tenuous period of legal back and forth, the housekeepers attempted to keep the momentum of the movement going, continuing fundraising and holding marches and rallies in Chapel Hill and Raleigh in support of their cause. Within state government, these demonstrations were not well received. Don Follmer, the press secretary of the State Speaker of the House of Representatives, referred to housekeepers and their students supporters as “niggers and wormy kids” to the Associated Press during a rally led by housekeepers in Raleigh.³⁷⁵ But in Chapel Hill, the housekeepers increasingly had the support of many liberal white students. Baumann, who had graduated in 1993 but earned an organizing fellowship to stay on with the HKA, worked with current students to form two student organizations that would support coalition-building and fundraising efforts for the housekeepers. Students, housekeepers, and community members first organized “the We Are All Housekeepers, and then later it was a group of kind of the next generation of students that we did the Coalition for Economic Justice, and I think that probably came out of the students kind of forming their own name, and so it was building ally groups.”³⁷⁶

Both We Are All Housekeepers, which was active from 1993 to 1995, and the Coalition for Economic Justice, in operation from 1995 to 2000, were groups that melded students, faculty,

³⁷⁴ Justice for Housekeepers Pamphlet, We Are All Housekeepers, Fall 1993 in the Campus Y Papers of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Records #40126, University Archives, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill; Tinnen et al. v. University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Wake County No. 93 CVS 09678, North Carolina Court of Appeals, 4 April 1995 in the Alan McSurely Papers, #4928, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

³⁷⁵ Letter from the UNC Housekeepers Association to Harold Brubaker, 24 April 1996 in the Alan McSurely Papers, #4928, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

³⁷⁶ Interview with Chris Baumann by Charlotte Fryar, 21 December 2017, L-0450.

and staff. Both served as support organizations, developing newsletters, organizing protests, and holding rallies to support the housekeepers movement. The Coalition for Economic Justice (later, it became Students for Economic Justice) focused largely on efforts to organize against potential privatization of the Housekeeping Department by the University, a strategy which mirrored the outsourcing of dining operations to SAGA Food Services after the first Foodworkers' Strike in the spring of 1969.³⁷⁷ These two student-led organizations and their support work were part of the overall strategy of the HKA. "We were always talking about kind of the one-two punch, so we had the organizing strategy and the legal strategy, and I always felt that without either one of those, we probably wouldn't have been as successful," Baumann said.³⁷⁸

"A Modest Proposal" and the Final Settlement

Judge Becton asked the HKA to prepare the settlement proposal with the University in the fall of 1995. In meetings with lawyers and advisors, the HKA developed by January 1996 what they named "a modest proposal" for potential settlement with the University. In the proposal, the petitioners described the University's relationship to Black workers—citing scholarly research on the institution's history through each historical era, most from a graduate student, local historian, and social justice advocate Yonni Chapman—to show that the plantation system enslaved people had labored under during the first century of the University had been reprised for the modern era in the supervisory system of the Housekeeping Department.³⁷⁹

"UNC-CH has always placed African American employees in its most menial and physically

³⁷⁷ "Chancellor Hooker: It's Time To Talk," Press Release from the Housekeepers Association and the Coalition for Economic Justice, 4 September 1996 in the Campus Y Papers of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Records #40126, University Archives, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

³⁷⁸ Interview with Chris Baumann by Charlotte Fryar, 21 December 2017, L-0450.

³⁷⁹ Jeff Jones, a doctoral student in the Department of History also contributed to this research.

demanding jobs and paid them substantially less than white employees who did comparable work,” the proposed settlement stated.³⁸⁰ By citing previous workers struggles, the petitioners of HKA revealed a history of neglect and abuse on the part of the University, publicly attacking the institution’s anti-Blackness, which regarded Black workers as fungible bodies for labor.³⁸¹

Their lawsuit was grounded in the phrase within the thirteenth amendment which abolished the “badges and indices of slavery,” which HKA argued were still in effect at the University, evidenced by housekeepers’ low pay, plantation-like supervisory systems, and the inaccessibility of career advancement. HKA utilized county data on Black land ownership across Orange County to explain how the University had kept wages for Black workers low in order to keep land in the control of white citizens and the University. They provided data to show how Black workers and students had “provided a disproportionate amount of financing to build and endow UNC-CH” and explained the ways in which the University had made “little or no effort to create new career training programs for housekeepers.”³⁸² The construction of the “modest proposal” is one of the most striking acts of the reclamation of the University through counter-storytelling, in which Black workers presented a counter-history of the University and its relationship to Black people.³⁸³ In every section of the “modest proposal,” the petitioners used the history of the University to demonstrate that the anti-Blackness of the institution was not just

³⁸⁰ Tinnen v. UNC Proposed Settlement Draft, January 1996 in the John Kenyon Chapman Papers #5441, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

³⁸¹ Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of subjection: Terror, slavery and self-making in nineteenth-century America*, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1997), 26.

³⁸² Tinnen v. UNC Proposed Settlement Draft, January 1996 in the John Kenyon Chapman Papers #5441, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

³⁸³ Daniel Solórzano and Tara Yosso, “Critical race methodology: Counter-storytelling as an analytical framework for education research,” *Qualitative Inquiry* 8, No. 1 (2002): 23-44.

a facet of its past but instead was at the center of its contemporary approach to labor and racial difference.

HKA's proposal for remediation included back pay for every housekeeper, the creation of a housekeeper endowment fund, career development programs, and free health and dental care for housekeepers and their families. The housekeeper endowment fund they proposed would be funded in part from "the money with interest accumulated by the University from the escheats which it realized from 1795-1971," money which came during the pre-Emancipation era in part from the selling of enslaved persons. The HKA called on the University to establish a career training program for one hundred housekeepers a year, which would allow them to advance to more highly paid work and guaranteed them jobs after they advanced through their training.³⁸⁴

The housekeepers also called directly for financial and educational reparations, requesting a small \$1000 "one-time payment to the designated heir of all Black employees at UNC between 1793 and 1960," as well as free tuition for children and grandchildren from ages 2 to 21.³⁸⁵ This version of the proposed settlement with the University was a visionary call for symbolic and material reparations from the University for former and current Black workers and forwarded what might have been the first significant movement towards a dramatic cultural paradigm shift for the institution towards reparative justice. Chancellor Michael Hooker, unwilling to recognize the justness of the housekeepers' proposal, called their policy suggestions "excessive in the extreme," and the HKA began to prepare for a hearing trial, rather than a

³⁸⁴ Tinnen v. UNC Proposed Settlement Draft, January 1996 in the John Kenyon Chapman Papers #5441, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

³⁸⁵ Tinnen v. UNC Proposed Settlement Draft, January 1996 in the John Kenyon Chapman Papers #5441, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

closed-door settlement.³⁸⁶ By rejecting the housekeepers' initial proposal, the University once again refused to use its power to move the institution towards racial justice.

However, on November 26, 1996, the University finally settled with the HKA, who achieved all three of their stated goals from 1991. Every housekeeper and groundskeeper at the University received a pay raise of up to \$1700 and a one-time, \$600 Christmas bonus. The HKA was given a monthly meeting with the Chancellor to “meet, confer, and consider” any changes suggested by the HKA. Career training programs were to be initiated for housekeepers, and a commission was to be developed to analyze the effect of the work conditions of housekeepers. Significantly for the historical legal case the housekeepers mounted, a commission was to be developed to honor Black workers at the University, with attention given to the institution's history with enslavement. Gathered in Hill Hall, three hundred housekeepers across the University voted to accept the settlement, but many of them already knew that it would be another struggle to get the University to meet the conditions of the settlement.³⁸⁷ “We are catching our breath, and getting ready for the next stage—a permanent workers' organization and center which fights for the rights of all African Americans and other working people against the arrogance of the University,” Barbara Prear, president of the HKA, told the Chapel Hill NAACP early the next spring.³⁸⁸

³⁸⁶ “Historic Victory By UNC Housekeepers Approved By Judge” Press Release from UNC Housekeepers, % McSurely, Dorosin, and Osment, 3 December 1996 in the John Kenyon Chapman Papers #5441, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

³⁸⁷ “UNC Housekeepers Vote to Accept Settlement,” *The Daily Tar Heel*, 25 November 1996, 1.

³⁸⁸ “Housekeepers Win Settlement,” Chapel Hill NAACP newsletter, Spring 1997 in the Campus Y of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Records #40126, University Archives, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

The Fight Continues

As predicted, the HKA returned to protest within half a year, presenting Chancellor Michael Hooker on University Day, October 12, 1997 with a “failing report card,” a grade calculated by how well the University had kept the promises of the settlement. Almost a full year after the settlement had been reached, the University had failed to hold satisfactory monthly meetings and no movement had been made either for the commissions to honor the contributions of Black workers or to analyze the effects of working conditions for the health of housekeepers. The University’s refusal to follow through with actions promised in the settlement agreement mirrored the treatment of foodworkers by the University and SAGA almost thirty years before. Following another series of protests from the HKA and the student-led Coalition for Economic Justice, the University began working to meet the stipulations that they had agreed to a year ago, including raising pay.³⁸⁹

To meet the condition requiring recognition of Black workers, the University created a Commemorative Commission, headed by Vice Chancellor for Minority Affairs Harold Wallace. On January 28, 1998, the Board of Trustees accepted the Commission’s recommendation to rename the University Laundry to the Kennon Cheek/Rebecca Clark Building “in honor of two persons who provided effective leadership for University Housekeepers during the 1930s and 1940s.”³⁹⁰ Although the commission developed an outline for a more thorough examination of the history of Black workers’ achievements on the campus, they were not given adequate resources to write a full report or to enact their plans. If the Commemorative Commission,

³⁸⁹ “Housekeepers present report card,” *The Daily Tar Heel*, 13 October 1997, 6.

³⁹⁰ Harold Wallace to Elson Floyd, 12 November 1997 in the Office of the Chancellor of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill: Michael Hooker Records #40026, University Archives, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

established in 1997, had been given the adequate resources necessary to “establish a Commission to come up with the best way to honor the contributions the University’s African American employees,” it might have become the first historical commission established by any university in the country to explore “the University’s history during its slave and segregated periods.”³⁹¹ As such, Brown University, with the establishment of the Steering Committee on Slavery and Justice in 2003, became the first American university to study its relationship to slavery and has been heralded as the first institution in the United States to examine the difficulties of that historical relationship.³⁹² The potential of the historical commission to honor Black workers was mitigated by the focus on renaming just the Cheek-Clark Building, rather than using the commission as an opportunity to fully explore and examine the University’s “painful current and historic facts,” as outlined in the “modest proposal” for settlement.³⁹³

Following the struggle to get the University to meet the conditions of the settlement, the HKA joined the Local UE-150, a chapter of the North Carolina Public Service Workers Union. UE-150 expanded to include workers in several public institutions across the state, and made their central goal an end to North Carolina’s “right to work” laws, legislation that made collective bargaining by public workers illegal.³⁹⁴ Without the right to bargain collectively and

³⁹¹ “Historic Victory By UNC Housekeepers Approved By Judge” Press Release from UNC Housekeepers, % McSurely, Dorosin, and Osment, 3 December 1996 in the John Kenyon Chapman Papers #5441, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

³⁹² Slavery and Justice: Report of the Brown University Steering Committee on Slavery and Justice, 2007, Accessed 6 August 2018, <https://www.brown.edu/Research/Slavery_Justice/documents/SlaveryAndJustice.pdf>.

³⁹³ Tinnen v. UNC Proposed Settlement Draft, January 1996 in the John Kenyon Chapman Papers #5441, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

³⁹⁴ John K. Chapman, *Black Freedom and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1793-1960*. (Ph.D. Dissertation, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2006), 189-90.

organize as a workers' union, it was difficult to sustain pressure on the University to enact change. In placing the significance of the settlement within the longer history of labor activism in North Carolina, Baumann described the limitations of the "right to work" laws: "Even though it was a significant victory at the time, that the University sat down and had to negotiate in a state that it's illegal to collectively bargain—it's anti-union—the fact that we were able to get them to sign an agreement was significant, and there were victories there, but I would consider it more winning the battle rather than the war."³⁹⁵

With North Carolina's "right to work" laws still in effect, the University can still ignore without consequence efforts from workers to collectively bargain. Even after the 1996 settlement, there were no policies in place to ensure that the University would fulfill the agreed upon conditions of the settlement, and as a result, the settlement was a short-term victory for low-wage workers, rather than one that brought enduring change to the institution. In 2017, graduate student employees of the University resurrected UE-150, and at the time of this writing, are actively organizing for all workers to earn a living wage and create a formal grievance policy for both campus workers and graduate workers.³⁹⁶ Today, many current housekeepers at the University are women of Southeast Asian descent, refugees from Myanmar and nearby regions who primarily speak Karen languages or Burmese.³⁹⁷ Although the difficulties of language difference for Burmese-descent housekeepers are a critical barrier for continued labor organizing on the campus which might draw on the broken promises of the 1996 settlement, there has been

³⁹⁵ Interview with Chris Baumann by Charlotte Fryar, 21 December 2017, L-0450.

³⁹⁶ Campaigns, UE-Local 150 Workers Union At UNC, Accessed 26 October 2018, <<https://workersunionatunc.org/campaigns/>>.

³⁹⁷ Alexander Pepples, "Column: UNC Workers Deserve Support," *The Daily Tar Heel*, 21 January 2018.

at least one recent victory for the University's low-wage workers. In August 2018, the North Carolina State Employees Association's won a minimum salary for UNC workers of \$31,200, marking a twenty-eight percent increase for some workers.³⁹⁸ However, even this salary increase is still far below a living wage of \$49,504 needed by a single parent to support just one child in North Carolina.³⁹⁹

Though the victories of the housekeepers movement were largely short-term, there was at least one lasting change brought to the campus landscape as a result of their campaign. At the rededication of the University Laundry (the former name of the building inscribed in stone remains a prominent feature of the space) as the Cheek-Clark Building in September 1998, Barbara Prear highlighted the potentials for the future of the movement and the historic nature of the building's renaming, stating clearly, "we have high hopes for this building."⁴⁰⁰ The renaming of the Cheek-Clark Building was a crucial act of the reclamation of the University, a striking assertion of possession of the University as a place and all relational and historical notions the sense of that place holds for Black Chapel Hill citizens. But twenty years later, few Chapel Hill citizens recognize that the space, named to recognize the achievements of Black workers at the University stretching from enslavement to the present day, exists as a symbol of the long legacy of Black freedom striving in Chapel Hill. The lack of public commemoration of the housekeepers movement and the distant location of the Cheek-Clark Building on West Cameron

³⁹⁸ "UNC Board Announces Pay Raises For Employees," North Carolina State Employees Association, 3 August 2018, Accessed 26 October 2018, <<https://www.seanc.org/news/unc-board-announces-pay-raises-for-employees>>.

³⁹⁹ Living Wage Calculator for North Carolina 2018, Massachusetts Institute for Technology, Accessed 23 October 2018, <<http://livingwage.mit.edu/states/37>>.

⁴⁰⁰ A Naming Ceremony Draft, 17 September 1998 in the Office of the Chancellor of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill: Michael Hooker Records #40026, University Archives, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Avenue, almost a mile from the main campus, continue to exacerbate the symbolic nature of the housekeepers' victory.

This lack of institutional commemoration of the housekeepers movement reveals the success of the institution in containing the dissemination of histories of resistance and repressing attempts to build on the progress of social movements. When the movement has been mentioned by later generations of campus organizers (Student Action With Workers in the early 2010s discussed the 1990s HKA campaign), it has been remembered as a movement for workers rights, though the housekeepers' contributions to exposing the anti-Blackness of the institution and demanding symbolic and material reparations merit an important place in the history of racial justice movements in Chapel Hill.⁴⁰¹ This loss of the collective memory of the movement and the lack of comprehensive memorialization of the housekeepers' campaigns for racial and economic justice is a product of the University's cultural paradigm of "diversity without justice," which allowed the institution to diminish the potential for future workers to collectively organize, retreat from the promises made by University leadership in the 1996 settlement, and authorize the erasure of any social movement that dares to demand justice from the University.⁴⁰² Although the Cheek-Clark Building may exist as a representation of the mitigated successes of the HKA, the history of the housekeepers' movement can demonstrate for future organizers the power of using the legacy of Black freedom striving in Chapel Hill as a tool with which to pursue racial justice.

⁴⁰¹ "UNC Labor History," UNC-CH Student Action with Workers, 2005, <<https://uncsaw.wordpress.com/unc-labor-history/>>.

⁴⁰² John K. Chapman, *Black Freedom and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1793-1960*, (Ph.D. Dissertation, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2006), 191.