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The Atlanta Journal and Constitution

January 10, 2001, Wednesday, Home Edition

Desegregation of UGA cited

BYLINE: Rebecca McCarthy, Staff

SOURCE: CONSTITUTION

SECTION: Metro News; Pg. 4B

LENGTH: 483 words

Athens --- The University of Georgia set aside Tuesday --- the 40th anniversary of the school's desegregation --- to reflect on the tumultuous times of the 1960s and to honor many who played a part in opening the state's flagship institution to all Georgians.

The day's festivities began with an address in the Performing Arts Center by UGA President Michael Adams. While UGA embraces its history, he said, it still has a long way to go in fulfilling the dream of creating a diverse and open community.

Tuesday's events ended in the Chapel, with Gov. Roy Barnes thanking Charlayne Hunter-Gault and the late Hamilton Holmes, the first two African-Americans to enroll at UGA in 1961. Their courage was commemorated on a marker outside the academic building, officially renamed the Holmes-Hunter Academic Building.

Marilyn Holmes said her husband, who died in 1995, would have "laughed at the irony of the building they tried to keep him out of now bearing his name."

In his morning speech, Adams praised Hamilton Holmes and Hunter-Gault for walking through the Arch, the historic entrance onto North Campus, and opening the doors of the university to all Georgians. If not for them, Adams said, "UGA wouldn't be one of the top 20 public universities in the country."

Maurice Daniels, a professor in the School of Social Work, spoke about the contributions of attorneys Donald Hollowell, Constance Baker Motley and Horace Ward, all of whom attended Tuesday's celebration. The three were part of the legal team, along with Vernon Jordan, that battled in the courts so that Holmes and Hunter-Gault could enter UGA.

Despite the legal victory, Daniels said there are major inequities, such as a state with a population more than 30 percent black having less than 6 percent black enrollment at its largest institution. He challenged the audience to "move forward and make real the promises of democracy."

A video presentation, "Across the Great Divide," documented events occurring on the UGA campus in the early 1960s in grainy, black-and-white images and film footage; in 1985, when a teary Holmes recounted his love for the school; and in 1988, when Hunter-Gault delivered the commencement address, the first African-American to do so.

People in the audience wiped their eyes at some of the pictures --- students rioting outside Hunter-Gault's dormitory, law enforcement escorts taking Holmes to class and the two of them, smiling and triumphant, in their caps and gowns

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on graduation day in 1963.

After a brief talk by UGA historian Robert Pratt, Hunter-Gault delivered the annual Holmes-Hunter lecture, talking about the journey on which she and Holmes embarked 40 years ago, the help they received, the hopes they shared, the struggles they endured.

She ended her talk with the audience on its feet, singing a civil rights anthem, "Ain't Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me Roun'."

LOAD-DATE: January 10, 2001

LANGUAGE: ENGLISH

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