

Eva Jefferson: young voice of change

Northwestern student government head
is national spokesman for the young

By Helen H. King

"Is Eva Jefferson here?"

"I think she's in the shower," someone bellows. The shower is a flurry of girl confusion. Water flows onto the floor from several of the stalls. It's nearly time for classes and students are talking at each other through mouthfuls of toothpaste. Eva is one of them.

"Let's go back to my room," Eva says when she finishes towel drying her hair. "Excuse

this room," she says with a laugh and puts her hand to her head in dismay. Her roommate, who is still trying to sleep, pulls the covers up over her head.

The room is full of books and papers and notes. There is a Confederate flag pointedly stuck in a vase with an American flag. A large satiric poster of President Richard M. Nixon hangs on the closet door. The caption

underneath reads: "The Almanack of Poor Richard." Over the poster a sticker says "Voter Pledged Against War." Most of the books are not texts, but writings on social protest and works by many black writers, including Eldridge Cleaver and Imamu Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones). There is a gas mask, obviously the leavings from an anti-pollution demonstration. Wine bottles are vases.

"Will this be a busy day, Eva?"

"No, this is a kind of nothing day," she answers simply. She puts on huge dangling earrings and slips on a pair of clogs.

"Do you have a class right now?"

"No, just a meeting with the university president . . ." she stops thoughtfully. "It is sort of important because it's the first of regular meetings we will have with him." The "we" is the Northwestern University Associated Student Government of which Eva, 21 years old and a senior, is the first black president.

"Anything after that?"

"Well, I have to go to class sometime today and I have to meet with one of my instructors." She remembers something. "You might like to see ASG in action. We're having a level meeting this afternoon, but you'd probably

Eva Jefferson, first black president of student government at Northwestern University in Evanston, Ill., has become a leading voice of the youth movement because of her brilliant, frontal attacks on the "system" and President Richard M. Nixon and Vice President Spiro T. Agnew, whom militant youths have labeled "the enemy."



EVA JEFFERSON *Continued*

like to see the general meeting tonight." She returns to the business of dressing. Her roommate pokes her head from under the covers. "This is Mollie, my roommate," Eva offers. To the question "What's it like living with Eva Jefferson?" Mollie answers: "Wild!" and emphatically covers her head. Eva laughs. It is obvious that they are close. They talk briefly about Eva's schedule and Eva tries to explain where she'll be the rest of the day.

"What do you have on your agenda for the rest of the week, Eva?"

"A Chicago Crime Commission meeting—and let's see . . ." She checks an appointment book unhurriedly. "Oh! Here's something you might be interested in. Saturday I'll talk to the National Council of Negro Women in Raleigh, N. C." She closes the book and resumes dressing.

Eva Jefferson is typical of the militant coeds of the '70s. She doesn't believe in America as it is and she says so to anyone who's listening. She has a distinction, however. Just now the whole nation is listening to Eva Jefferson because she so brilliantly articulates the youth movement and so skillfully handles "the enemy." Because of a particularly lucid rap she gave to the President's Commission on Student Unrest in Washington, she has become a prominent voice in the youth revolt.

"Why did you go to Washington for that meeting?" She slips a crocheted poncho over her head before she answers. "It was after the Cambodia thing and Kent State and everybody was demonstrating." (President Nixon had ordered the escalation of the war in Cambodia and at Kent State University four students had been killed by National Guardsmen). "They called all the student government presidents to see what could be done." Some of the things she said at that meeting were interpreted to imply that she was an advocate of violence, and an earlier invitation for her to join the commission was withdrawn. This dumbfounded many of her following because she had been publicly credited with keeping the peace on her campus during the Cambodian and Kent University incidents.

"What *exactly* happened with you and that commission?" She answers as she goes down the stairs. She speaks to several girls on the way out.

"*Exactly* I was misquoted. What I said was taken out of context and used against me. I won't back down on what I said, though," she adds calmly. "I said that because this country has had a long history of reacting to violence and even now only reacts when someone blows up a building or something, the students and other concerned people in this country have concluded that blowing up buildings is the only way to get anything done in this country. As Agnew himself put it, more and more people are tacitly accepting violence. Most don't condone it. I don't myself, and most people are not able to participate in violent activities. Still, more and more people are beginning to understand how people can be moved to do that kind of thing." Though she calls President Nixon and Vice President Agnew "shrewd politicians who intend to keep their thing going," to her and her faction they are "the voice of the enemy," and Eva told Vice President Agnew as much during a televised debate between student leaders and the

The momentous students vs. Vice President Agnew debate on *David Frost Show* made national headlines after Eva told Agnew: "You're making people afraid of their own children!" Participating (l.-r.) were Frost, Agnew, Creg Craig, Yale; Richard Silverman, U. of Wash.; Eva and Steve Bright, U. of Ky.



Vice President. "You're doing us a disservice," she told him, "because you're making people afraid of their own children. The way you talk about students is as though they are people from another planet who were dropped down on college campuses with no more intention than just to blow up buildings and destroy our society. If they are your children, if they are my parents' children, they are the children of this country, and you're making people afraid of them!" Before the show, she had told newsmen that when Agnew first came onto the TV studio set, she literally could not speak to him. "I was just so angry inside," she had said. "The things he's doing to this country are a crime. I just wanted to yell, just thinking about what he's doing. So I didn't say anything to him until the show started." She had earlier accused President Nixon of doing "more to actively fill the ranks of the Weathermen (a radical revolutionary organization of youth) than anyone else in the country."

In normal conversation, it's hard to imagine this somewhat shy, very low-key girl in battle with such high government officials. But when her ire is raised, the usually calm, pleasant face becomes stern and resolute.

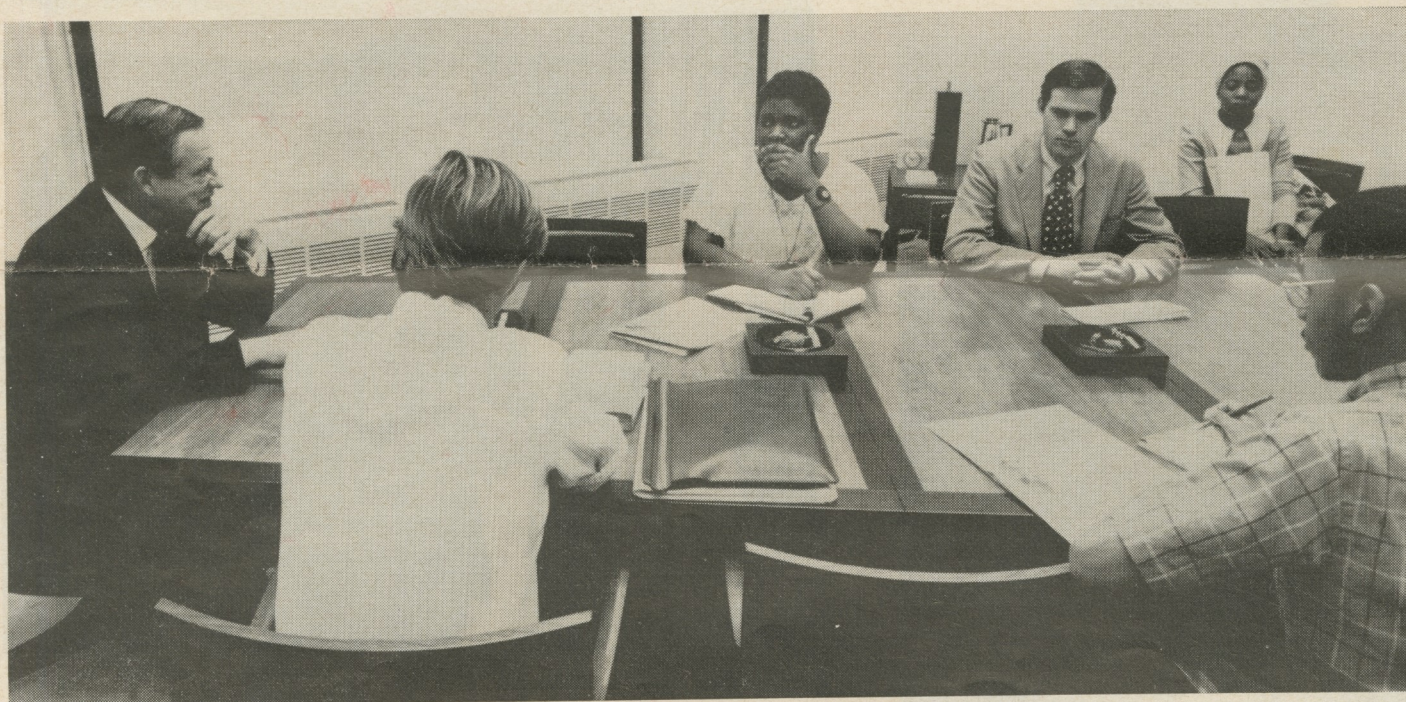
During the meeting with University President Robert Strotz, she asks that she and other members of ASG have a private meeting with him and other university staff. "This is our first meeting," she explains, "and we'd like to get to know each other and stuff like that." Later,



Eva raps during Northwestern's Associated Student Government meeting. During most meetings, even rallies, Eva practices what she preaches, believes strongly in letting everyone air opinions. She usually takes role as mediator during any dispute.



Eva holds rally with thousands of NU students following escalation of war in Cambodia and Kent incident. She was later credited with leading peaceful protest during this crisis period. Bottom, she, other ASG members meet with Northwestern President Robert Strotz (l.) and Jim Stull (on her left), dean of students.



EVA JEFFERSON *Continued*

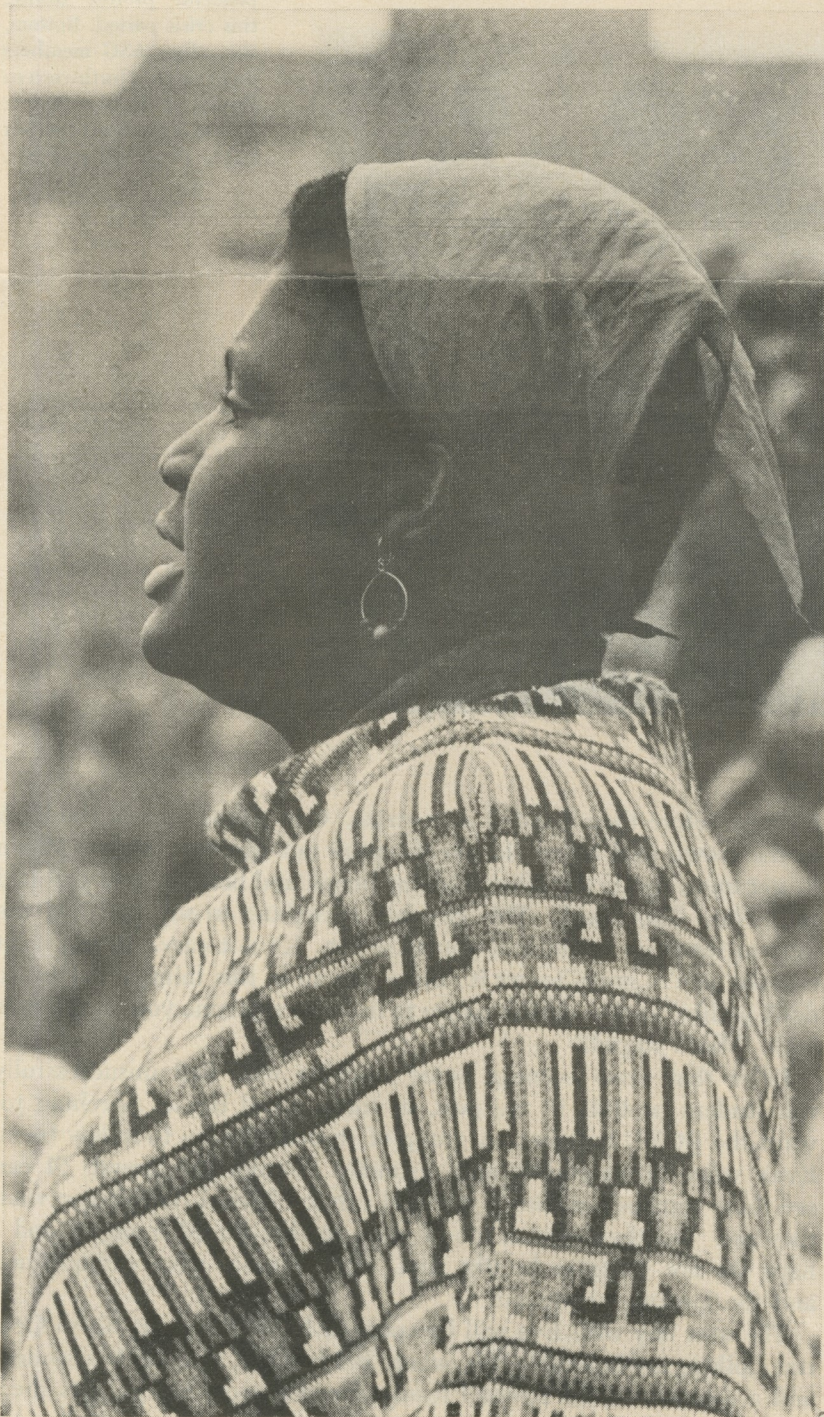
at a 7 p. m. ASG meeting, she sits to the side while the ASG speaker, Amos Brown, a black student, chairs the meeting. There is a discussion on whether ASG should receive free publicity in the student newspaper and a black woman in Afro dress wants ASG to consider the support of a black culture group that would be open to all but would only deal with black culture. A white student objects to the "black" label. There is a heated discussion. Finally, Eva stands up and reads from the ASG constitution and asks for a vote on whether the organization in question has the right to be a black culture group. The vote is an overwhelming "yes." The other issue of how and if they will support the organization is tabled for later. The meeting continues until way past 11 p. m. and Eva listens mostly and only speaks when it is necessary to clarify an issue constitutionally.

Eva neither attacks those who don't agree with her nor will she allow anyone else to do so. She is unshakable in her feelings that individual freedoms are the most precious freedoms of all. One evening last May, before she had gained national prominence, she held a rally of Northwestern students who had decided to strike after the Cambodian and Kent State incidents. She asked that students get up and discuss their

feelings before they decided on a strike. One young man at the back of the crowd said he would like to speak out *against* a strike. When he got up to speak, the other students booed and hooted. Eva grabbed the mike: "Hey, look. This guy has something to say and had the guts to stand up in front of you to say it. It's not easy. If you want a strike, you're going to get it. But we're all in this thing, all of us, so don't be like Agnew. Don't refuse to listen to someone you don't agree with. That's stupid!"

Later that same evening, some students who had unsuccessfully run student protests in the past, lit torches and began marching toward the ROTC building. A group of students began to follow them. Eva's voice broke clearly and distinctly through the crowd. "I can see those torches out there," she said calmly. "And I don't know what they are. But they remind me of other torches on other nights and I hope it's not going to be like that." The torches were extinguished and the meeting continued.

The next day with Eva will be spent at homecoming at North Central College in Naperville, Ill., where her brother, Jim, 20, is a student and a member of the football team. She will meet her parents there



At summer graduation ceremonies (above), Eva chats with university chaplain, Rev. Ralph Dunlap. Despite her views, she is very well respected by school's administrators.

At Kent State (Ohio) U. (left) where four students were killed by National Guard last spring, Eva is principal speaker at a rally by the students.

A stroll is as good a way as any (right) to have a chat with former ASG president Michael Place. Eva, a senior, has held position for eight months.



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On Kup's Show in Chicago, a TV talk show, Eva airs student grievances with (l.-r.) actor Jack Lemmon, Dr. Fred Schwarz, head of Christian Anti-Communist Crusade, host Irv Kupcnet and journalist William Braden.

EVA JEFFERSON *Continued*

and a younger brother, David, 12. On the way, she answers questions about her reasons for being a spokesman for "whites," as she is labeled by many black students who feel she could better serve the black community. Some of Northwestern's black students still remember the time in 1968 when 124 of them—Eva was among them—seized the university's finance office to protest "unfair treatment of blacks" on campus. They held the building for more than 38 hours and, in one of the most successful student protests in the nation, realized all of their 25 demands. Eva was only a freshman then and nowhere near being a national figure.

"How do you feel about being a leader of whites?"

"I don't see myself that way. I am president of the student government. Anyway, I feel the black crisis is very directly related to the national crisis," she adds, never breaking the calm, steady pace of her voice. "The same kind of a country that can neglect a 12 or 15 per cent of its population just because they don't feel like doing anything about it, is the same kind of a nation that can continue this war in Indochina, in which, by the way, black men are dying in numbers far disproportionate to their percentages in the population." She gives a few directions to the driver and apologizes for causing him to miss a turn. "People should understand that; then more black people would join the anti-war movement. Everything this country does, directly has an effect on black people."

"What about the blacks who say that black people cannot get their thing together in white society and, in fact, feel that the black cause would be weakened by involvement with whites?"

"That's true. I don't think black demands, per se, could be accelerated if they worked with white activists. Blacks would have to spend a lot of time explaining to white people why this is necessary and why that is necessary and, for the time being, at least, I think it's very necessary for black people to define their own problems until that proves counter productive. And if at the



At Black House, headquarters of For Members Only (FMO), a Northwestern University organization of black students, Eva talks with FMO members. Says FMO comprises one of the most powerful student groups on campus.

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