

A History of the African American  
Student Experience at Indiana State  
University, 1870-1975

Crystal Mikell Reynolds, Ph. D.

---

## **Introduction**

The story of African American students at Indiana State University throughout the decades to acquire an education is one of perseverance. It is a story of the Black students' tenacity and faith in themselves, each other, and the University. Indiana State University should share in this remarkable story for its courage and dedication in ensuring that all students received an education regardless of race.

## **The Early Years (1870-1919)**

Established by the Indiana Legislature on December 20, 1865, the Normal School in Terre Haute opened its doors to receive its first enrollment of 21 students on January 6, 1870. Its purpose was to prepare teachers for the common schools of Indiana. The first president of Indiana State Normal School (ISNS) was William Albert Jones (1869-1879).

ISU's relationship with students of African descent dates back to its initial year of 1870. African Americans had been a part of Terre Haute since 1816 when the first Blacks arrived in the city as indentured servants. Since the Indiana school system was largely segregated at the time, in 1869 the Indiana General Assembly passed a law requiring separate schools for Blacks in districts where significant numbers justified them. It was appropriate, therefore, for Indiana State Normal School to prepare African Americans to teach in the classrooms of African American schools. Zachariah M. Anderson of Lost Creek was apparently the first Black student to attend the new Normal School, enrolling in the first summer session classes of 1870. Anderson was chosen to be the first teacher in the newly established "colored school" located in the African Methodist Episcopal Church on First Street in Terre Haute. This School would be the first state supported school for Blacks in Indiana.

In September 1877, George W. Buckner from Indianapolis enrolled at the Normal School. He did not earn a degree, but was enrolled for several semesters. The presence of African Americans at the Normal School was a noteworthy achievement, since the other premier Indiana school now called Indiana University, did not admit its first Black student until 1884. In June of 1885, another Black student, Albert E. Meyzeek of Terre Haute, registered at the School as well. Meyzeek went on to become the first principal of the 14th District School for Black children in Terre Haute, which he had been a leading force in helping to create. This first Black principal named to a Terre Haute school went on to serve Kentucky in the field of education for 40 years.

Because the student records were lost in a devastating 1888 fire that destroyed the main building at the Normal School, it cannot be documented how many Black students attended the school between Anderson's and Meyzeek's admissions.

The ISNS *Normal Advance*, a combination yearbook and newspaper published weekly and begun in 1895, gives the first glimpse into the lives of African American students during the early years of the school (1870-1919). As early as 1895, a photo in the yearbook captures African American students studying in the school library, seated among their White counterparts. Formal photographs of African American students began as early as 1902 with the photograph of

Vincennes resident and principal of the Colored High School of Vincennes, Wade Langford. However, while Black students' attendance at the School may have been continuous beginning in 1870, with the loss of the school records this information may never be verified.

Another student, Evangeline Harris Merriweather, was pictured in the 1910 yearbook and graduated from ISNS in 1911. Merriweather became a teacher, author, and soprano soloist who performed across the country. She also taught at Terre Haute's Booker T. Washington and Abraham Lincoln schools. Her book, *Stories for Little Tots (1940)*, was for elementary students and taught African American culture. She was referred to by African American scientist George Washington Carver as an early pioneer of the Civil Rights Movement.

Still another student John W. Lyda (1886-1969), who graduated from ISNS in 1918, became a celebrated teacher at Booker T. Washington Junior High School (the Tenth District School) in Terre Haute during the early to mid-1900s and a respected ISNS alumnus. His book, *The Negro in the History of Indiana (1953)*, received high acclaim and was a definitive study of the Blacks in Indiana up to that time. In the late 1960's, his son Dr. Wesley Lyda became a moving force behind the development of the African American Studies Program at Indiana State University and became its first director.

Although ISNS had a policy of open admittance from its inception, and although many Black students graduated and went on to have successful teaching careers in Black schools, all was not favorable for Black students at the School.

A practice of the time, and perhaps most interesting and most revealing about the ISNS yearbooks in the early decades of the Twentieth Century, was the placement of photographs of Black students. Black students often were placed in a group after the pictures of White students. The practice of the editors of the yearbook of separating Black students in the yearbook, which began in 1910, continued for several years of the Twentieth Century.

It would seem that the segregated customs that were prevalent throughout the nation were practiced, if not at the School itself, then, in the actions of the editors of the yearbook. Did the practice of the placement of yearbook pictures mirror practices of the School during its early years? It is clear that the Black students attended the same classes as the White students, and yearbook and related photographs show that Black students used the same academic facilities as their White counterparts. Black students also sat in any seat they chose in the classroom. For the most part, African American students were also treated fairly by their White professors in the classroom itself.

Black students even participated on the same sports teams as their fellow students. Leonidas Casey Blake (1894-1991), a Terre Haute resident attended city schools before graduating from ISNS in 1917. Blake is believed to be one of the first African American athletes in any sport at ISNS. He was reported to have been an outstanding athlete and was often featured in the School's newspaper and even the yearbook.

The fact that ISNS featured Blake in its 1915 yearbook and celebrated his achievements was noteworthy given the climate in the state of Indiana and the United States at that time. 1915 was

not a particularly good year for African Americans in this country, for it was in that year that the beloved African American leader Booker T. Washington passed away. And, perhaps equally as detrimental to the Black culture, 1915 saw the rebirth of the Ku Klux Klan and the debut of the movie *Birth of a Nation*, a movie celebrating the Ku Klux Klan and demonizing and dehumanizing the African American male. Blake, therefore, must have been a tremendous athlete. Track and field appeared to be a sport opened to all, regardless of race. It would seem that the School took pride in the achievements of its athletes regardless of their race.

In the area of student organizations and clubs, there is also evidence that such organizations were open to Black students in these early years. Black students were members of the Equal Suffrage League of the State Normal School. Terre Haute resident Bertha Coakley was one such member in 1913. However, social fraternities and sororities were not open to Black students at this time. These organizations would not be open to African Americans in practice for several decades.

## **The 1920s**

The 1920s was the decade of the flappers and new-found freedoms for many Americans; for African Americans at ISNS it was the decade of the Black athlete. The School's president during most of these years was Linnaeus Neal Hines (1921-1933). The 1922 *Normal Advance* was a mirror to the racial culture at the School during the 1920s. The 1922 yearbook had as its front cover to the activities section, a cartoon like picture of a dark skinned thick lipped Black man singing joyously while being accompanied on piano by a dark skinned woolly haired Black woman also with thick lips. It would seem that in 1922, the editors of the yearbook believed that Black people loved to sing and were very satisfied with their lot in life. This stereotypical caricature of Blacks was commonplace in American life at this time.

However, in the classrooms of ISNS itself, it appeared that Black students were not subject to second-class citizenship. There they were not relegated to sitting in the back of the classroom. And, despite the stereotypical imagery that surrounded them at the School, students continued to achieve in the classroom and to graduate. Science major David Duncan was selected as a cadet teacher, an honor only given to the most outstanding students. Exact data on how many Black students attended the School or graduated during this era are not identified in School records. However, what was known was that in any given semester during the 1920s, there were anywhere between 20 and 40 Black students in attendance out of total enrollments of 573 in 1920; 1,393 students in 1925; and 1,392 students in 1929.

What is perhaps remarkable for the era was the fact that in 1926, Warren Anderson, an African American athlete, received ISNS's highest athletic award, a medal given annually by President L.N. Hines to a student who earned a sports letter during the year and who during his previous three terms had the highest average in scholarship among varsity men. Anderson, a graduate of Wiley High School in Terre Haute and a junior at the time of the award, excelled in the hurdles and the broad jump. He went on to become a principal of Gary Roosevelt High School in Gary, Indiana and was the first Black member of the Indiana Board of Education. It is not known if any other African Americans received the Hines Award before Anderson. Today, the award is given to the graduating senior, athlete or non-athlete, with the highest grade point average.

What is significant here is that at a time when African Americans were being systematically deprived of basic rights, especially educational rights, Indiana Normal not only opened its doors to this group, but also seemed not to discriminate in the awarding of collegiate athletic awards and in participation on most sports teams. More proof of this was given in the 1928 *Sycamore* yearbook which highlighted the individual members of the 1927 football team. What stands out here is that a Black student, Tindolph Cook of Bloomington, Indiana made the team and was pictured along with the non-Black members.

Football was not the only sport opened to Black men in the 1920s; track continued to feature them as well. The 1923 track team was composed of 23 men, one of whom was Black; the 1924 track team was composed of 31 runners, three of whom were Black; the 1925 track team was composed of 31 runners, four of whom were Black.

The 1925 track team included William “Babe” Holland. Holland, one of four members of the famed “wonder team,” was a sprinter and a hurdler. In 1925, Holland set a school record for the 100 yard dash (10.1). Holland went on to have successful teaching and administrative careers in Texas.

By 1927, the track team was composed of 35 runners, six of whom were Black. One of these Black student athletes was Sylvester “Sy” Laffoon. This Wiley High School and ISNS track star was the son of a local business owner and father of famed Terre Haute educator Barbara Sizemore. In 1928, a Black female track member was listed on the 13-member women’s track team. Unfortunately, her name is not known. Despite these strong showings by Black athletes on the football and track teams, there were no Black members on the School’s baseball and basketball teams during this decade. However, despite the absence of Black players on the two other major teams, it is quite clear that in terms of athletics, ISNS was well ahead of many of its collegiate counterparts in the acceptance and recognition of Black athletes.

In the area of campus organizations, Black students were members of a few organizations, the Eclectic (a literary organization), the Spanish Club, the YMCA, the Band, the Orchestra and the Student Council. The Student Council was not always open to Black students, however. Not until 1929 was the segregated Student Council disbanded. In 1929, a new student constitution formally gave Black students a seat on the Student Council. Such a seat had been denied to them in March of 1927.

Segregation was present in other aspects of campus life as well, including eateries, housing, and meeting spaces. Black students did not have access to campus lockers until 1929 when the number of Black students increased, as previously they were not allowed to have lockers in the same buildings as their White counterparts.

Another change occurred in January 1929, when Black students were given access to the recitation room of the deceased Professor Gifford. The recitation room, located in the basement of one of the classroom buildings, was to be used as a storage facility, eatery, and gathering place for Black students.

Although segregated social facilities were maintained at this time, it would seem that by providing facilities for Black students in 1929 the School attempted to ensure that life for Black students, although separate was to some degree equal. However, the School did not control the membership of chartered national social fraternities and sororities which remained closed to Black students. The practices of ISNS in the 1920s seemed to uphold the segregated practices of separate but equal of the time, which had become the law of the land in 1896 as a result of the *Plessey vs. Ferguson* Supreme Court decision.

Since Black students were not accepted in White sororities and fraternities, they established their own social organizations. One of the earliest was the Black organization AMICITIA, the Latin word for friendship, in existence from 1920-1924.

### **The 1930s**

The 1930s was the decade of depression and hardship for most Americans, but was also a period of change for Indiana State students. Reflecting both higher educational requirements for certification of teachers in the Indiana public schools and an increasing number of Indiana State graduates who went into professions other than teaching, the Normal School became Indiana State Teachers College (ISTC) in 1929. Its presidents during this period were Linnaeus Neal Hines (1921-1933) and Dr. Ralph Noble Tirey (1934-1953).

The Great Depression greatly affected African American residents in Terre Haute and ISTC students during the first half of the decade. The number of African American Students at the College during the 1930s was now between 30 and 40 students. The total student enrollment was 1,503 in 1930; 1,723 in 1932; 1,269 in 1935; and 1,599 in 1939. While the majority of African American students who continued to enroll at ISTC were from Terre Haute, other Indiana towns and cities continued to be represented: Brazil, Indianapolis, Gary, East Chicago, Anderson, Evansville, Greencastle, and even Rushville were represented as well as Louisville and Earlington, Kentucky. At this time tuition remained free to Indiana residents.

For African Americans at Indiana State Teachers College during the 1930s getting a teaching certification or education degree was their main goal, for these documents allowed the Black students to work in the “Colored Schools” across Indiana, which was their ultimate goal. Being accepted socially by their White counterparts or being fully integrated into the fabric of the College were unrealistic goals for most African American students at this time. Such goals for African American students would come much later at Indiana State University.

In the 1930s, Black males and Black females continued to excel in the classroom. In the classroom itself as in previous decades, both anecdotal and written evidence support the belief that Black students were not subject to seat segregation or any other segregated classroom practices.

Not only were Black students excelling in the classroom in the 1930s, but Black males as well as Black females were receiving recognition in and excelling at athletics as had been the trend in the previous decade. In 1931, Donald Porter, a Terre Haute native, received the Bigwood Award for his outstanding track performance. The Bigwood Award was presented each year to the athlete based on outstanding athletics, scholarship, loyalty, and other factors. He was featured in

the *Indiana Statesman* and in the 1931 *Sycamore* yearbook. Porter's receiving the coveted 1931 Bigwood Award and receiving the print media attention that ensued are remarkable feats for African Americans for the period.

Jesse Oliver May, another 1930s Black athlete, was featured in the 1933 yearbook. May was also a member of the track and intramural baseball and basketball teams. He earned a football varsity letter and sweater in 1931. After graduating from ISTC in 1933, May pursued a doctoral degree, eventually returning to Terre Haute to teach at Booker T. Washington Elementary School in 1947.

In 1933, Junius "Rainey" Bibbs was a standout in baseball. Bibbs was one of the most celebrated Black athletes both during his years at ISTC and in subsequent years. Bibbs not only played baseball but played fullback on the football team as well. After graduating from ISTC, he went on to play eight seasons with the Negro Baseball Leagues (1936-1944) and helped his team to win three league championships. Because of his remarkable baseball feats, he was inducted into the ISU Hall of Fame in 1998.

1939 seemed to be the year of Coleridge Churchill. He was a standout on both the track and football teams. After graduating from ISTC, Churchill became a celebrated member of the faculty at Lincoln High School in Evansville, Indiana. He would serve in several administrative roles in Evansville until his retirement.

However, in the 1930's participation on the official basketball team was still closed to Black students. But, Black students were allowed to compete on separate "colored teams" under the umbrella of Indiana State Teachers College.

Black men were not the only members of the African American student population who were both achieving and being recognized for their success in athletics at the Teachers College during this time. In 1930 the Black students could even boast of having one of their own in the prestigious "I" women, the highest award that a woman in a campus organization could earn. In 1930, Georgia Offutt from Indianapolis received this honor along with eight of her White counterparts. She was prominently featured in the yearbook. After graduating from ISTC, Offutt joined the faculty at Crispus Attucks High School in Indianapolis.

The 1933 yearbook also pictured an unidentified Black woman star runner. In 1936, there were Black women on both the soccer and hockey teams. Nancie Ellison was one such athlete. It is unfortunate that more is not known of these Black women athletes. It is also unfortunate that not all of the Black female athletes' names were given in the yearbooks and *Statesman* newspaper at a time when their Black male and White female counterparts were being named and lauded.

It would seem that in the arena of sports, Black students, especially Black males, achieved some degree of equality at ISTC. By the 1930s, athletics was not the only arena open to Black students, for Black students were also active in campus student organizations or "clubs," as they were referred to on campus. They were members of general student organizational clubs such as the Student Council, W.A.A. Council, the Poet's Club, the YWCA, and the Athenaeum, an organization composed of physical education majors. Mabel Evans (1918-2004) was one such

member of Athenaeum. The daughter of Terre Haute civil rights activist and Terre Haute mayoral candidate Grace Wilson Evans, Evans was a physical education major and received her Bachelor of Arts degree in 1938. She taught briefly at various Terre Haute schools before pursuing a Master's degree at the University of Wisconsin. She worked in the field of nutrition for most of her career and was honored by ISU as a distinguished alumna in 1984.

Other organizations Black students participated in were entertainment related clubs such as Sycamore Review, the chorus, and the band. Academic clubs also opened their doors to Black students. These included the prestigious Kappa Delta Pi, international honors fraternity, included in its membership Naomi Mitcham, an upperclassman from Indianapolis, the only African American student in the club that year and for many years after; the Social Studies Club; and the Elementary Department Club, which appeared to be a very popular club among Black students during this decade.

While many school organizations did open their doors to Black students, there was one arena that remained closed to this group: traditionally White national social fraternities and sororities. It seemed clear that such social organizations were off-limits to Black students at ISTC, a practice common at predominantly White universities all across the United States at this time.

While Black students were achieving some success both in the classrooms, on sports team, and in general campus organizations, they were still not able to share a dorm room with their fellow White counterparts. In fact, both Black women and men were not able to reside on ISTC's campus for two more decades. Reeves Hall was the second residential facility for women at ISTC. It was founded in 1925 for female students, White female students, although the Teachers College had never stated officially that it was for Whites only. However, by 1930, Indiana State Teachers' College did not conceal the fact that Black students were not allowed to reside on campus with their White counterparts; this fact was now an official written policy.

In 1934, Indiana State purchased a house off campus to board Black women students who were not permitted to reside in Reeves Hall. Named after the great 19<sup>th</sup> century African American woman poet, Phyllis Wheatley Hall was located in the 1100 block of Poplar Street, in Terre Haute, more than a mile from the campus.

Arguably, although Wheatley Hall maintained the segregated customs of the times, it can be interpreted as an attempt by ISTC to ensure that African American women would not be denied access to adequate housing while attending the school.

The House was in full operation from 1934 to 1945 and no other house for either African American women or men was ever established. By 1945 the house was no longer in operation; however, no equivalent house was established for Black women and Reeves Hall remained "Whites only"). Black females found lodging in the homes of local Black families or with White landlords who rented to Black students, and such landlords in Terre Haute were rare. It should be noted that the Teachers College established no equivalent hall for the Black men at this or at any other time at the University. Throughout the history of ISTC, a dormitory for male students was not established until 1937 when Parsons Hall was constructed to house White male students. Like the female residence halls, Parsons Hall was designed and built to house White students.

Not only were Black students not allowed to reside on campus during the 1930s, they were also not allowed to eat at any of the Teachers Colleges' dining facilities at this time as well. Although "separate but equal" was being practiced at ISTC in the area of residential facilities for Black women, this doctrine fell short when it came to dining facilities, for there were no dining facilities for Blacks on campus. Blacks had to be creative when it came to eating facilities. A local African American eatery operated by Mr. and Mrs. Weathers and located by Allen Chapel (local Black church) and Phyllis Wheatley Hall made it possible for Black students to get a square meal at a reasonable price.

Living and eating facilities were not the only aspects of campus life that were off-limits to Black students during the 1930s; mainstream dances and proms were also off-limits to this group as well.

Not being accepted in the White sororities and fraternities and not being accepted in the social life on campus, Black students established their own social organizations.

The Ivy Leaf Club, a women's sorority, was founded by Black female students in 1932 at ISTC. It was a local branch of the national sorority Alpha Kappa Alpha, founded in 1908 at Howard University, but not officially colonized at Indiana State until 1969. The Ivy Club was a very popular club among the African American female students and the national AKA organization can credit local member and musician Evangeline Merriweather for its official pledge song which eventually became the official song for the Alpha Kappa Alpha sorority.

One of the most popular and successful organizations at this time was the Statonian Club. A group of Blacks organized the Statonian Club in the fall of 1937. The first president was East Chicago student Quentin Smith. The organization, which until 1940 admitted only Black males (after that date it also admitted Black women), had the purpose of improving the social, economic, and cultural conditions experienced on the campus. The interests of Black students and the need for cooperative effort (to bring about change) resulted in the club's expansion in the late 1940s. In 1948, Catherine Wilson of Indianapolis was chosen as Statonian Queen and future Terre Haute historian Geneva Ross was an active member of the organization.

Not only did the Black students establish organizations to help deal with life on a predominately White campus, the Teachers College also established an organization as well. The college established the Inter-Racial Club in 1939 to help bridge the racial gap and to help students get to know each other better. However, the group was short-lived.

## **The 1940s**

The 1940s was the decade of war and rebuilding for America, for African Americans at ISTC it was the decade of increased opportunity. President Ralph Tiley was president during all of the 1940s; his term actually ran from 1934-1953. Still, in the 1940s, the "separate but equal" policy was in effect in many areas of the campus as well as across the nation. However, there would be a few positive changes in the area of race relations at the Teachers College.

In the area of academics, Black students continued to graduate in decent numbers and achieved success in their careers. There was an increase in African American students in the pre-and post-war years. The enrollment numbers of Black students at this time varied from 40 to 50 immediately before and during World War II and to 60 and 70 after the war. The total enrollments of all students during this decade were as follows: 1940, 1,636; 1943,750; 1945, 788; 1946, 2,266 and 1947, 2,555.

In athletics, African Americans continued to participate with some measure of success. In the world of football, in 1940, Marvin Mosely and Harry Taylor were standouts on the football team. In 1941, Quentin Smith was an outstanding tight-end on the football team. In 1942, two Black football players, Mosely and Oscar Reeder were among those who made up a nationally acclaimed defensive line. In 1948, Bernie Render, an African American student from Terre Haute, was a star defensive back on the football team.

In track and field, in 1942-1943 saw an increased number of Black track members. Wally Darius, John Mitchem, David Smith, Oscar Reeder, Robert Hoke, and Harry Taylor were all part of the 15-member track team.

However, it was not until 1947 that ISTC's basketball desegregated. In 1947 an event which demonstrated the Teachers College's awareness of its responsibility to its Black students occurred. After achieving an 18-7 basketball season, John Wooden, in his first season as a coach at the Teachers College, prompted the School to refuse a National Association for Intercollegiate Basketball tourney bid because the host organization, the National Association of Intercollegiate Basketball, would not allow Clarence Walker, the team's only Black player, to play in the tournament. At the time, the National Association for Intercollegiate Basketball (NAIB) tourney was enforcing an all-White rule. The overall response to the Teachers College's stance from the Terre Haute community was favorable. In part, because of the Teachers College's stand, the following year NAIB dropped its insistence that Walker, also a member of the 1947-1948 team, not compete. These events demonstrated that the Teachers College was beginning to become sensitive to the negative forces of the segregated practices of the time.

Black students were also having success in student life and in campus organizations in general. A club that Blacks were first time participants in was the prestigious publication *Who's Who in American Colleges and Universities*, including Clinton A. Mitchem of Indianapolis. Mitchem was featured in the 1947 yearbook, with a whole page devoted to him. He was one of 11 students given the *Who's Who* honor. Mitchem also served as vice president of the Student Union Board and, even more significantly, was elected two years later as vice president of the senior class, a rare feat for Black Americans at predominately White colleges at this time. Mitchem was not the only Black member of the Student Union Board during the latter part of the 1940s, as an increased participation of Blacks on the Student Union Board was clearly shown.

Not only did Mitchem serve on the Student Union Board, but in the early 1940s so did stand out athlete Quentin Smith of East Chicago who also served on the Student Council along with Terre Haute natives Josephine Evans and Dharathula "Dolly" Hood, daughter of early Terre Haute civil rights activist Daisy Hood. An interesting note about the Student Union Advisory Board is

that from its inception, and written into its bylaws, was the fact that a Black student representative was to be on the Board.

However, while Blacks were being accepted in athletics and in student life in general, they were still “restricted” from participation in social sororities and fraternities. In fact, the all-White fraternities were not only still excluding Black males from membership, but were also still performing and winning school sponsored programs by performing stereotypical and racial skits. Black Face skits seemed to be the most popular skits and were part of the fabric of the Teachers College for several decades, especially among some White fraternities and even White sororities at this time. A Black Face skit was sure to win Campus Revue or other such contests.

Interestingly, while Blacks were being restricted from participation in predominately White fraternities and sororities, the Teachers College was also requiring all social organizations to have a “no discrimination article” in their constitutions. It would seem that with this 1949 provision, ISTC was well ahead of its time, for the other premier Indiana college, Indiana University, only required its student Greek organizations to eliminate discriminatory clauses in the spring of 1968 after Black student protests. However, despite the efforts on the part of the ISTC administration, theory did not mirror practice at the school in this area. There would be no movement in the integration of any White fraternity or sorority for quite some time.

Black students were also restricted from residential housing facilities throughout the 1940s as well. However, in the late 1940s some movement occurred on the part of the Teachers College in terms of Black students residing in residential facilities. It would seem that 1948 was a good year for the Teachers College in terms of its treatment of African American students, for it was in that year the Teachers College not only supported John Wooden and Clarence Walker, but also removed from its official school Bulletin the word “White” when referring to who would be allowed to reside in its residential facilities. Prior to 1948, the term “White” was used in both theory and in practice when referring to who could live in on campus residence halls. It would appear as if theory was not practice. While the discriminatory language was taken out of the Bulletin, in theory there was still discrimination in housing. Blacks, both male and female, still could not reside in on campus residential halls.

In the early 1940’s, Black students continued to bring their meals and eat them in their own gathering places or to buy their meals at the local Black restaurants. There were a few Black restaurants in the city that provided for the needs of Black students. Some White restaurants did sell to Black students, but they had to carry their lunches out or eat outside in the alley.

However, it was at this time there was some progress in terms of the desegregation of an on-campus eating facility. It would be a courageous act by Terre Haute native and son of Daisy Hood that would begin to dismantle the “no colored” rule at the school’s lunch room. Prior to Orestes’ stance, Black students could order a meal at the lunch room, but they could not eat it in the facility. Hood would challenge this “no colored rule” when he waged a one man sit in at the school lunch room for several days. Hood’s persistence was successful and in the early 1940s, the College relented and allowed him and his fellow Black classmates to eat at the College’s lunch room.

Despite the positive movement in the area of eating establishments, it would seem that the Teachers College still had a long way to go in the area of residential housing. But what about historically White fraternities and sororities? Unfortunately, there would still be no movement in this arena. Not being accepted in White sororities and fraternities, Black students began to ask for charters for their own social organizations. Recognizing the reality of social organizations, in 1948 the Teachers College chartered its first Black fraternity on campus, Omega Psi Phi. This fraternity, which was founded at Howard University in 1911, boasted seven ISTC members in 1948, including Clinton Mitchem.

In 1948, the sorority, Delta Phi Beta, was incorporated as the first Black sorority in the school's history. Such sororities were founded because the other sororities denied access to Blacks and because these sororities were seen as support systems for women of African descent.

While the Teachers College was still finding its way in terms of Black students in social organizations, residential housing facilities, and eating facilities, Black students were achieving academically and graduating from the Teachers College. Notably, in 1949, Lewis C. Dowdy graduated from ISTC with a master's degree. Dowdy became president of North Carolina AT&T in 1964. In 1961, North Carolina AT&T became famous because four of its Black students successfully staged a sit-in at the lunch counter of the local Woolworth's department store, prompting the store chain to desegregate that store. This event served as a catalyst causing many Black and White college students to stage similar sit-ins across the country. ISU would honor Dowdy by bestowing on him an outstanding alumni award in the 1980s.

Entertainer Rudy Render also achieved success at this time. While a student at the Teachers College in the late 1940s, Render was very popular with all races and lauded for his musical talents. He often played piano and performed informally for mixed audiences at the School. In 1948, he was the only Black student in the Teachers College mixed choir. In 1949, he recorded the hit song *Sneakin' Around*. He would go on to land musical roles in such films as *Torch Song* (1953) and *It Started With a Kiss* (1959).

Black men were not the only ISU alumni to achieve success in the 1940s. ISU could be proud of the accomplishments of several Black women alumni during this time. In the 1940s and the 1950s, Jane Dabney Shackelford (1895-1979), a 1914 graduate of Logansport High School and a 1919 graduate of ISTC, published several renowned children's books which explored African American history. Her children's books broke new ground. This educator received honors both locally and nationally for bestselling books, such as *The Family School* (1938), *Happy Days* (1938), and *The Child's Story of the Negro* (1944). She would return to ISTC in 1951 to co-author a student teaching guide; she taught in Vigo County for 43 years.

In the 1940s, 1925 Terre Haute Wiley High School graduate and 1927 Indiana State Teacher's College graduate Willa Beatrice Brown Chappell became the first Black woman to run for Congress (Illinois) (1906-1992). However, the area in which this ISTC graduate would leave her most significant mark was in the area of aviation. She was the first Black woman to hold a commercial pilot's license. In 1942 she became the first Black woman to become a member of the Civil Air Patrol and campaigned successfully for the Army Air Corps to train Black pilots, which led to the legendary program at Tuskegee Institute.

However, it would seem that in the 1940s Indiana State was in the business of equal access to education. There was, however, still work to be done in the areas of residential housing and social fraternities and sororities.

## **The 1950s**

The 1950s saw a further increase in the Black student enrollment. Although the number of Black students was not reliably kept at this time, African American student enrollment was approximately between 50 and 60 students during the first half of the decade and between 100 to 125 during the last half of the decade, with the total student enrollment at approximately 1,100 students.

This decade was the decade of the Korean War, the Cold War, the Baby Boomers, rock and roll, and the Little Rock Nine. For African Americans at ISTC, it can be classified as the status quo decade, for the more things changed at ISTC, the more they remained the same. Dr. Ralph Noble Tirey (1934-1953) and Raleigh Warren Holmstedt (1953-1965) were presidents during this decade.

While Black students continued to excel in the classroom during the 1950s, sports were the story of the decade. The 1950s witnessed the continuation of Black participation and success in athletics. In football, in 1951, Jim Morefield, halfback from Westville, Illinois, was a standout on the football field. In 1952, along with Morefield, Terre Haute native Glenn Tyler was also a star on the team. This halfback set several records and won several awards throughout his football career at ISTC. In 1953, he received his third football award, the "I" jacket. In 1955, halfback William Worrell, fullback Charles Casharo, and Gene Dunlap were members of the team. In 1957, Terre Haute native Bill Gilkey was the only African American on the football team.

In addition to the football team, Gilkey was also a member of the baseball team, the only African American member. In fact, he was a star player on the very successful 1958 team. 1958 proved to be a most successful season for the Teachers College's baseball team with the Sycamores winning the Indiana College Conference championship and taking part in the NAIA baseball tournament in Texas. Gilkey played a large role in the team's success. Notably, future Vice President of Student Affairs at ISU, Paul Edgerton was also on the championship team playing alongside Gilkey.

In basketball, in 1950, Charles Miller, sophomore star forward from Louisville, Kentucky and future I-Man, was the only Black man on the team. By 1952, Sam Richardson, a sophomore from South Bend, was leading the Sycamores in free throws. After a stint in the military he returned to the Teachers College to achieve even greater heights. In 1956, Richardson, now a junior, was selected as Indiana State Teachers College's Most Valuable Player in basketball for the 1955-1956 season. Richardson was one of the leading scorers and rebounders in the conference, and was chosen by Indiana Collegiate Conference (ICC) coaches for their 1955-1956 All-Conference Team. In 1953, forward Jim Crockom proved to be a valuable asset to the basketball team. Joe Lee, sophomore forward from South Bend, led the team in scoring in the 1955 and 1956 seasons.

In 1958, freshman and Terre Haute native Wally Webb received a numeral sweater for his great efforts on the basketball court. And, in 1959, former Terre Haute Wiley High School star Warren

Ross was a prince on the court. This sophomore ranked sixth in the ICC scoring race that year. In 1998, Indiana State University selected Ross as a member of the 1960s All Decade Team.

Black students continued to belong to various campus organizations outside of the classroom. In 1950, Bill Reynolds was on the Page One Ball committee. The following year, 1951, Joe Samuels was elected president of the freshmen class. And, in 1952, Charles Miller was selected one of 19 members of *Who's Who in American Colleges* while Sam Richardson was the president of the sophomore class. Bryan Moody and Anita White were members of the 1952-53 Student Council, White even had the honor of serving as the Council's secretary. Two other Black students, William Bellinger and Julius McKay, served on the 1955-1956 Student Council.

Although the separate-but-equal principle in social sororities and fraternities was still not a reality, there were two exceptions at the Teachers College in the 1950s. Pi Lambda Phi was one such exception. Founded at Yale University in 1895, the original founders wanted an organization that was free of prejudice and sectarianism. The local chapter of Delta Epsilon, founded in 1957, was a mixed-race fraternity, a rarity on American college campuses in those days. On May 30, 1958, the local chapter affiliated with Pi Lambda Phi. The fraternity could boast Black, White, and Asian brothers. John Leeke (Washington, D.C. native) was one of its members and a chapter president. By 1961, Pi Lambda Phi's philosophy had led to it being what these men had looked for, and it had become a very successful fraternity at the Teachers College.

One of the most significant accomplishments for African Americans occurred in 1955 when Norma Jean Cook, a Milwaukee native and future ISU administrator, was permitted to reside on the campus in Reeves Hall. It is this researcher's contention that Cook's living on campus was the first time an African American female was permitted to reside on campus of Indiana State University. It is also this researcher's contention that basketball star Sam Richardson was the first African American male to reside on campus in Parsons Hall in the early 1950s.

While the Teachers College was making a few inroads when it came to its Black students, it also began to make some progress in the hiring of Black faculty and staff. In 1954, the same year as the *Brown* decision, the Teachers College hired its first Black professional staff member, Dolly Hoover, as assistant head of catalogs in the library. Prior to Hoover, the only African American employees were domestic or menial staff workers and the hiring of this group was very rare.

However, despite the greater acceptance of Blacks in the field of athletics, the birth of two mixed-raced fraternities, the desegregation of the dormitories, and the addition of Hoover, Black students were still experiencing discrimination. White fraternities and sororities were still performing skits for the annual Campus Revue in Black Face.

## **1960s (1960-1967)**

The 1960s was the decade of social change for America. For African Americans at what would become Indiana State College (1960-1965) and the Indiana State University (ISU) in 1965, it was the decade of change and eventual revolution. The presidents during the 1960s were Dr. Raleigh Holmstedt and Dr. Alan Rankin (1965- 1975). The first half of the 1960s saw many significant achievements in the area of race relations at the institution. Black student enrollment increased during the first half of the decade. There were approximately 60 to 70 Black students

during the first half of the 1960s, which was less than one percent of the total student population at the College.

In the academic area, Black students continued to excel in the classroom. The College's first Black faculty members, Dr. James Conyers and Dr. Andre Hammonds, were hired in 1962 and 1964, respectively. Both were hired as assistant professors of sociology under the administration of President Holmstedt. Conyers had earned a doctorate from Washington State University in 1962 and taught at Indiana State from 1962 to 1964. He left ISU to teach at Atlanta University in 1964 and returned to ISU in September of 1968. Hammonds came to Indiana State University in 1964 from a short teaching stint at Winston-Salem College. Hammonds grew up in Chattanooga, Tennessee. He received his Bachelor of Arts degree in psychology from Morehouse College, a historically Black college, and then in 1963 earned a doctorate from the University of Tennessee in sociology, becoming the first Black doctor of philosophy from that university and in the state of Tennessee as well.

ISC's hiring two Black faculty members in the early 1960s was remarkable when taking into account the times and the fact that many of their Midwestern and southern counterparts did not admit its first Black students until the mid and later 1960s. In fact, Auburn University did not admit its first Black undergraduate students until fall 1964.

In the meantime in the athletic world at ISC and ISU, Black athletes continued to participate and excel in all sports. In football, in 1960, Wally Webb, Terre Haute native and graduate of Terre Haute's Wiley High School, was chosen to the all Indiana Collegiate Conference team leading the conference in receiving. The year 1961 also witnessed three star halfbacks on the football team: Lloyd Robbs of Terre Haute, Paul Lewis of Richmond, Indiana, and Moyese Williams of Elkhart, Indiana.

From 1962-1966, full back Emmett Tyler of Terre Haute ruled the field. This math major was an outstanding athlete at ISTC. In 1967, Jim Brumfield, an Elizabeth, Pennsylvania native, dominated the football field setting several school records and was later drafted in the tenth round by the New Orleans Saints in 1970.

In basketball, in 1962, Rudy LaMarr, John Dow, and Lenny Long were members of the fighting Sycamore team. Long, a senior forward from Terre Haute, was an honorable mention selection on the all ICC squad during the 1964-1965 season, also referred to as the "Dream Team." A year later, Mike Phillips, Terre Haute native and Terre Haute's Gertsmeier High School star athlete, was a standout forward in basketball. Phillips would serve in various administrative roles at Indiana State University for 35 years.

In 1961, Floyd Ewing was a star on the wrestling team. Ewing, a Terre Haute native, was on the first wrestling team at the College. Ewing was able to beat out more experienced athletes for a place on the team.

In 1964, South Bend student Fred Draper excelled in track, placing fourth in the DePauw state cross country record setting meet. Draper continued to excel in track and cross country throughout his tenure at ISU. Draper would go on to be the first Black assistant coach in track

and cross country at ISU and in later years become the first Black professor of physical education at ISU.

Not only were Black males excelling in sports, Black women were also gaining recognition. The 1967 women's track team which included four Black women athletes went undefeated. Unfortunately, to date not much has been written or is known about the 1967 women's track team and the great Black female athletes of that time.

In campus organizations, Black students were well represented. Black students were members of most major clubs and organizations, including the Speech and Debate Club (now defunct). Fred Hord, Terre Haute native, was a member of the award winning ISC debate team, in 1963, winning first place at the Ball State Gavel Tournament.

Black students were represented in other aspects of campus life as well. Kay Granger, a Washington, Indiana sophomore, was the featured performer in the Choral Union's *Messiah*. In 1962, Jerry Naylor, an Indianapolis freshman, was elected as freshman class treasurer. Finally, in 1963, Grace Bennett became the first African American Sparkette when she was chosen to be a member of the prestigious performance team.

Residential housing was open to all students at this time. Interestingly, however, was that while dorms were open to all races, there were issues involving roommate assignments. White students' parents often had to give permission to the school before it allowed a White student to room with a Black student. Black parents were never asked if they had an issue with their son or daughter rooming with a White student. In his autobiography years later, former President Alan Rankin commented on this practice and regretted the practice of asking White parents' permission.

Eating and dining facilities, such as "the Grill" were open to all students, but Black and White students continued to self-segregate in such facilities.

Despite movement in the areas of housing and faculty hires, discriminatory issues persisted on campus. White fraternities and sororities were still not open to Black students. In addition, Campus Revue participants still engaged in Black Face skits. In 1965, a popular White fraternity planned to perform a minstrel act in Black Face agreeing to wear Black Face masks in place of Black make-up at the request of the recently established on campus branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). The fact that the social organizations were still engaging in minstrel skits for Campus Revue was indicative of the prevailing racial attitudes of the time.

As mentioned, the newly established ISU chapter of the NAACP requested that the fraternity not engage in the use of Black Face paint for their Campus Review skit. The NAACP was one of a handful of organizations that African American students established at ISU in order to deal with the issues of race and discrimination they faced on the predominately White campus during the 1960s. In 1965, the ISU chapter of the NAACP had 100 members and faculty sponsors were Dr. Andre Hammonds and Dr. Clara Appell. Naomi Millender, a Gary native, was a very successful president of the local student chapter during the late 1960's and Don Turner, who

attended ISU in the late 1960s, was the president of the Terre Haute chapter during the late 1960s and early 1970s.

Another organization that Black students founded was the Negro Student Forum. The Negro Student Forum, which is presently known as the African American Student Union, was established at ISU in 1966. The organization was founded by New York natives Fred Griffin and Robert Norris because they believed there were no organizations on campus that were for Black students or addressed the needs of Black students.

In the late 1950s and early 1960s, equal opportunity nationally meant access to previously segregated universities and their facilities and services. However, by the late 1960s, mere access to Indiana State University and its organizations would not be enough. The Black students began to call for and even demand that Universities be more responsive to their needs. The students called for institutional commitment to African American students---their lives, history, experiences, and schooling. For many students at the School, equal opportunity meant not only increasing access to higher education, but also the construction of an environment where they could feel emotionally, physically, and spiritually secure and where their cultural values, norms, and history would be respected and legitimized.

It was the Civil Rights Movement of the late 1950s and 1960s and the Black Student Protest Movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s that began to dismantle the remaining vestiges of segregation in society and at colleges and universities. At Indiana State University these movements ushered in the advent of the School's commitment to equal opportunity in education for all.

## **1967-1975**

The late 1960s and early 1970s were times of great social change for the United States. This era of the Vietnam War and President Lyndon B. Johnson's War on Poverty also witnessed the assassination of President John F. Kennedy, his brother and United States Senator Robert Kennedy, and civil rights leaders Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X. The years 1967 to 1975 were also years of major change for Indiana State University. ISU's African American students would no longer be satisfied with the status quo. These years would be the time when the University's commitment to its students of color would be both tested and confirmed.

With the leadership of a progressive, even transformative president, Dr. Alan Rankin (1965 to 1975); administrators Dr. John Truitt (Student Affairs) and Paul Edgerton (Student Affairs); faculty members Dr. James Conyers (Sociology), Dr. Andre Hammonds (Sociology), Dr. Charles Norman (Sociology); Dr. Robert Levy (Psychology), Dr. Gary Daily (History), and Dr. Edward Spann (History); and student leaders Matt Kingsberry, Frederick Griffin, William Powell, Sam Dixon, Horace Davis, Michael Costello, Ronald Gremore, Z. Mae Jimison, and Joseph Arnold, the University would no longer just offer access to education, but began to meet the historical and sociological needs of its Black students. These years were marked by a series of student demands, a takeover of the University's administrative building, a race riot, and a meeting of the Black students' demands.

Prior to April 23, 1970, the date of the campus-wide student riot and subsequent list of demands from African American students, the years ranging from 1967 to 1970, had seen three other lists of Black student demands. The demands ranged from better residential hall policies to a call for an African American Studies Program.

In May 1969, a group of students led by South Bend junior William Powell, this group later referred to as the Magnificent Seven, took over the administrative building shutting down the University in the process. The students' actions and subsequent list of demands were similar to such actions and demands occurring all across the nation at this time of civil unrest in the country. The students called for lower tuition, fewer housing visitation restrictions, more Black faculty, and a Black Studies Program. While President Rankin did enact a few of the demands, a Black Studies Program would not be a reality for some time.

After the 1969 takeover, tensions among the Black students and the University remained high. The Black students continued to maintain that the University was not meeting their needs and that it and many of the students of the dominant culture were not responsive to the Black students' culture, history and needs. They believed that social change was inevitable and that the University was on the wrong side of history.

By spring of 1970, the racial tension on campus reached its zenith. Despite a partial meeting of Black student demands, new Black Studies course offerings, numerous conferences, speakers, video series, meetings with administration, the storm that had been brewing on the ISU's horizon had arrived.

On the eve of its centennial celebration, April 22-23, 1970, would mark two days of student unrest on ISU's campus that was perhaps a watershed moment for the University's relationship with its Black students. The events began on April 22nd with a series of skirmishes between Black and White female students in Blumberg Hall. The Black women were greatly disturbed by the defacing of an African American bulletin board display they had constructed in tribute to the Illinois Black Panther Party and the Chicago Seven and by derogatory words written on a few of the Black women's dorm doors. In a matter of a few hours, the situation between the two groups of women escalated from mere arguments to skirmishes and sit-ins to a near riot.

Later on the night of April 23, the events of the afternoon heightened to a full scale race riot between Black and White students involving all manner of weapons. That night, rumors, deep seated racial feelings and tensions, and fear caused a race riot among hundreds of ISU Black and White students, with Black students being greatly outnumbered. The riot would only be squelched due to a historic thunderstorm that occurred in the midst of the riot and due to the use of teargas by the Terre Haute City Riot Police. In the aftermath of the race riot, the Black students, through its formal voice the Black Student Union, issued its manifesto and a list of nine Black Student Demands to the University.

At this time, universities and colleges across the United States were dealing with Black student discontent. Colleges acted upon their Black student demands in a variety of ways. Most universities sought to meet the demands of the Black students. Very few presidents chose to totally ignore Black student discontent. Several university presidents published open letters or

pamphlets to the Black students addressing their demands. Some colleges made drastic changes, while others made minimal, even token concessions. Indiana State University would meet the nine demands of the students to varying degrees.

Demand #3 of the Black Student Demands called for the establishment of an Afro-American Cultural Center by 1974. Part of the rationale behind the call for the creation of an Afro-American Cultural Center was to provide the Black students with a place for them to feel at ease, be free of the dominant culture, and to provide them with a much needed recreational facility. In fall 1972, Michael A. Ard, director of the male dormitory Cromwell Hall, was appointed director of the Afro-American Cultural Center, and on October 22, 1972, about a year-and-a-half after the Black student demands were issued, the Afro-American Cultural Center opened amid great celebration in the rented Pennsylvania Central Railroad Building a short distance from campus.

In 1975 at the time of President Rankin's resignation, the Center was thriving. Under the leadership of Ard (1972-1979), it boasted the appearance of numerous African American celebrated figures, including former Atlanta mayor Andrew Young; poets Nikki Giovanni, Sonia Sanchez, and Gwendolyn Brooks; civil rights leaders Julian Bond, Joseph Lowery, Dick Gregory; and historian Lerone Bennett. Ard served admirably in his role as director for several years, leaving the helm in 1979 in the adept hands of ISU alumnus Charles E. Brown for 25 years.

Meeting Demand #3 would be a University wide effort. The Center only came about due to the tremendous leadership and the collaboration of Indianapolis students Z. Mae Jimison, prime minister ( president) of the Black Student Union and Fred Arnold, premier (vice president) of the Black Student Union; administrators President Alan Rankin and Vice President of Student Affairs Robert Truitt; and President Ron Gremore and other leaders of the Student Government Association. The Committee of Concerned Faculty (CCF) formed in May of 1970 to help with the student issues on campus and whose steering committee consisted of such members as Dr. Everett Tarbox, Humanities; Fred Bernstein, English; Jane Bakerman, English; and Harriett McNeil, Humanities, also played a key role, not only in the realization of the Center, but in the realization of all the nine student demands.

Demand # 5 called for the establishment of an Afro-American Studies Program. On October 6, 1970, five months after the student riot, an ad hoc faculty and student committee on Afro-American Studies recommended to the Faculty Senate that an Afro-American Studies Program be developed at ISU and that a search be initiated for a director of the new program.

On September 18, 1971, Dr. Wesley Lyda, professor of education, was appointed acting director of the Center and on August 11, 1972, the Commission on Higher Education approved the program. Lyda remained as director of the Center until his retirement from the University in 1978. The approval by the Commission of the program was a significant step, for earlier in the year President Rankin with the full support of the University had met with the Commission and asked that ISU's Afro-American Studies Program be exempted from the Commission's moratorium on new curricula at state universities, which had been in place since the previous year. In 1975, upon Alan Rankin stepping down as President, the Afro-American Studies Program was fully established though hiring and retaining faculty became an ongoing challenge. The Center for Afro-American Studies began granting degrees within the College of

Arts and Sciences in 1979. In fall of 2010, the department was incorporated into the Department of History as a separate interdisciplinary program.

The year 2012 marked the fortieth anniversary of the establishment of the African American Cultural Center and the African American Studies Program at Indiana State University.

## **Conclusion**

While the African American Cultural Center and the African American Studies Program at Indiana State University and all the other successes that Black students accomplished in academics, campus life, athletics, and access to facilities during the University's near 150 plus year history show a remarkable climb to equality, the struggle for justice and equality continues. Today, Indiana State University has the largest enrollment of African American students at any Indiana college or university.

For this essay, I relied on several sources, including *Leadership Response to the Black Student Protest Movement*, Crystal Mikell Reynolds, dissertation, 1998; *A History of the African American*

*Student Experience at Indiana State University, 1870-1972*, Crystal Mikell Reynolds (2013, self-published; personal interviews with former students and faculty; primary source documents contained in the Indiana State University Archives, the Vigo County Library Special Collections, and the Vigo County Historical Society Archives; and primary source documents from private collections.

For more information on this subject, please refer to *A History of the African American Student Experience at Indiana State University, 1870-1972* (2013, self published) Crystal Mikell Reynolds, Ph. D.

Available at the Indiana State University Library (Special Collections) or by purchase from The Incorporated Gathering (765-621-3560)