



THE MAGNIFICENT SEVEN:

The Story Behind the Iconic Photo, 50 Years Later



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INTRODUCTION

They sit on a sofa, anger, and defiance clear in their faces and body language. Seven young men, who, unknowingly, through their beliefs and actions, will impact Indiana State University for 50 years. They (*Jesse Burr, Alex Dunnigan, John Wesley Gunn, Jr., Eugene "Gene" Hardaway, William T. Powell, Chuckie Robinson, and Michael Shane Wright*) started out as seven students seeking an education to help change their world and became known as "The Magnificent Seven." In an April 23, 2019 interview, Michael Shane Wright maintains that the origin of the name "Magnificent Seven" was coined by the underground 1960s Indiana State University student newspaper *The Grinding Stone*.

In 1969, the United States was changing rapidly and was confronted with a movement for equality that had been percolating for over 100 years. This "movement," which had been building across America throughout society in general and especially at colleges and universities as far apart as Columbia in New York and Berkeley in California. It was soon to have a major impact on Indiana State University. Led by students, including these seven young men, six African American and one white, their actions in May 1969 remain a part of the fabric of the University.

As recently as November 2015, a new social movement for change, FREEISU, felt the impact of the photo taken May of 1969. At that town hall meeting, members of FREEISU and the audience stared at the enlarged photograph of those young men sitting on that sofa and wondered what had made that photo such an icon at ISU. Who were these young men; where did they come from; what did they want; and how did they change the social and political history of the University are all questions that this researcher seeks to answer.

To answer those questions is the purpose of this essay. By interviewing three of those seven young men, John Gunn, William Powell, and Michael Shane Wright, the beliefs that lead to the events of May 1969 can partially be explained. (The other four members were either deceased or unable to be located at the time of this essay.)

The Seven

The seven male students who became known as the Magnificent Seven referred to themselves in 1969 as members of Students for a Better University. Members of the University's Black Student Union referred to the seven as the "John Brown Society," in reference to mid-nineteenth abolitionist John Brown who, with several former enslaved Africans led a raid on the United States armory at Harpers Ferry in Virginia prior to the American Civil War. Members of the ISU community and the local and state media helped to spread the moniker, "The Magnificent Seven"--a name that has endured to the present.

The Magnificent Seven, earned their long-lasting name by their actions in May 1969 by taking over the University's Administration Building (now Gillum Hall). They were not super heroes but rather just ordinary men with extraordinary courage. The men on that sofa all knew each other prior to that day. Three of them, John Gunn, Chuckie Hardaway, and Alex Dunnigan, were

from the same Gary, Indiana neighborhood. They had attended the same elementary, junior, and senior high schools, and, by coincidence, had found themselves on the same college campus. How they got there and what they did can best be understood from their own points of view.

John Wesley Gunn, Jr.

John Wesley Gunn, Jr., a native of Gary, was the son of John and Mary Gunn, who had migrated from Alabama. John Sr. was a machinist in East Chicago, Indiana, and Mary was a nurse's aide. At a young age, John, Jr., became a real-life participant in the nation's school busing program designed to integrate American schools by "busing" black children to white schools and vice versa. John, Jr., was "bused" to an all-white school, Thomas Edison, when he was in eighth grade. He stated that he, "was scared to go to school cause of the white folks."

He knew that desegregation through busing was inevitable for him and for others in Gary, but he was still hesitant to start this social experiment. In 1965, on the first day of ninth grade, as he got off the school bus to enter the school, he recalls that he saw, "a sea of white faces." He describes his experience as follows:

On the first day of school I saw a sea of white faces. The black girls got off of the bus first. Then the black boys followed. There was a parting of the red sea. Thought that school might not be so bad. Day one went okay, but when I got back on the bus, I was barraged by whites yelling, "nigger go home." I managed to get through ninth grade.

Although he survived ninth grade, in the ninth grade, he went through many physical changes, and he maintains that he was a physical force to be "reckoned with."

Actually, they all were forces to be reckon with, for he and his fellow black classmates realized that if they all stuck together, they could survive the conflicts, for it was strength in numbers. They formed their own gangs and self-defense became part of their education. Self-defense was one of the core subjects "learned" at the school.

By the time Gunn graduated, the percentage of whites to blacks at Thomas Edison High School had changed dramatically. What had started off as 10 percent blacks and Hispanics and 90 percent whites, was now reversed. Black students were the majority. This phenomenon of "white flight" became prevalent throughout the country in many urban cities at this time. By the time Gunn and others graduated from Edison High School, they had, as he says, "beat the hell out of some white folks," both in self-defense and in self-preservation.

In addition, by the time Gunn graduated from high school, he maintains, that he was "an angry black man." His anger throughout high school was really due in part to the way things were in the world around him. He could not understand why society was the way it was; why racism was so prevalent in the country; and why he was considered less of a man because of the color of his skin.

After high school, Gunn went to work in a Gary steel mill. He also began to “shoot craps.” He was very good at this street game. So good that one day in a single “hustle” he won \$5,000 during his tenure in this hustle (Michael “Shane” Wright maintains that Gunn won the money over a period of 2 or 3 months in the craps game that Shane terms “gambling” rather than a “hustle”). Disenchanted with his current job where he maintains that his bosses were a bit “shady” and tired of street life, in a moment of clarity, he decided that he would take the money and use it to get out of the negative environment, out of the street life that was enveloping him. Almost on a fluke, he decided he would venture to Terre Haute, Indiana and attend Indiana State University.

He knew that he could not expect any financial help for college from his parents. This would be an undue burden on them, for they were already paying his sister’s tuition at Purdue University. He knew that he would have to make his own way, so in January 1969, he took his gambling winnings of \$5,000 and used it to pay his tuition and living expenses for the spring semester at Indiana State. He really did not know how much tuition or room and board would cost, but he figured \$5,000 would get him at least a semester of schooling. As it turned out, that sum was more than enough to pay for the spring semester.

Gunn described his first taste of ISU as “awe inspiring.” He did not think that he would do well academically because he barely graduated from high school. In high school, he had slept through most of his classes and at other times, he was just angry. At ISU, he was most intimidated by his English class. However, when he got his first English essay back, and he had received an A on it, his whole perspective changed. He thought, just maybe, he could handle this “college thing.” He did more than just handle college, Gunn did very well in school that semester, and at midterm during his first semester, he received all A’s and B’s in his courses. In fact, his mother was so proud of him that she showed everyone she encountered his midterm grades.

Unfortunately, his academic achievements would not continue that semester. Spring 1969 would be a time of change for the University and a time of change and self-discovery for him. It was during that time that he realized that life on campus for African Americans was no fairy tale. In fact outside of their first initial meeting, he had not seen his roommate until the end of the semester. His roommate chose not to stay in their dorm room. The last day Gunn saw his roommate was the same day that Gunn came into the room and found a black paper doll in black face with a noose around its neck with the term “Pink Nigger” written on it. Although Gunn did not discover who had left this message for him, he assumed it was his roommate since he never saw him again until the end of the semester. Shane believes that the doll may have been in reference to him a white guy who was friends with black guys. One day toward the end of the semester when the ice was finally broken between them, he and his roommate had a heart-to-heart talk and eventually got to know each other. His roommate confessed that the reason he had avoided him was because he was taught that, “black people had tails” and that they were bad people.

The absurdity of this view of black people held by some white people coupled with rising tensions and the realities on ISU’s campus caused Gunn to join with other students, both black and white, to form the organization, “Students For A Better University” (SBU), whose goal was

to try to change some of the antiquated policies (i.e. housing, curriculum, in loco parentis, etc.) that were so prevalent at the school and to bring the University into the twentieth century when it came to race relations. In fact it was fellow students Alex Dunigan and Michael “Shane” Wright who coined the term “Students for a Better University” after attending several of the informal student meetings.

This young activist was invited to his first “SBU” meeting by his friend Alex Dunnigan. Dunnigan told him of what had been transpiring at the meetings and believed that Gunn would like what he himself had been hearing. Gunn discussed how he came to be at the “SBU” meetings in November 2015:

Alex asked me to come to a meeting with him. Black students everywhere at the meeting. I did not know them. Black students were speaking 100 miles an hour and loud. We went to a couple of meetings. I talked about the events of the meetings with Shane, Dunnigan, and Hardaway. I was interested in injustice. When came up with the list of demands, I thought that they were reasonable. We then asked each other what do we do—take over the Administration Building. However, I perked up when they said that. When I was in a gang back in Gary, action was important to us.

When he first arrived at the “SBU” meeting, which was being held at one of the male dorm lobbies, a fellow student, William T. Powell, had the floor. Gunn was immediately drawn to Powell and his energy. He liked what he was hearing. Powell was articulating ideas and feelings that he himself had been thinking, but more eloquently than he could have done, he said.

He stated that Powell was quoting the Black Nationalist leader Malcolm X verbatim and was very well versed in black culture and history. Given Powell’s familiarity with Black Nationalism, Gunn was very impressed with Powell:

I liked what the brother was saying. I was impressed with him. Although I and Bill never became friends, I really liked what he had to say.

Gunn and the men who would later be called the Magnificent Seven were deeply rooted in the Black Nationalist Movement; they were also supporters of the Black Panther Party. Gunn believed as the Party did that, “we should take care of our own.”

William T. Powell

William T. Powell, a South Bend native, had taken a different route to ISU than the others members of the Magnificent Seven. Born in 1946 as one of five children to parents who had immigrated to the Midwest from Mississippi, his mother was a domestic and his father was a factory worker. Powell was a good student in school. He also was a student who was part of the busing experiment that occurred in South Bend, Indiana and in many major urban cities. Powell, who was often described as an overachiever, knew early on that he wanted to be a journalist, for he loved to write. However, his journalism career would have to be put on hiatus for a while. In 1964, right out of high school, he decided to join the Navy. After his two year stint in the military, he decided to pursue his writing career.

He was fortunate enough to receive a journalism scholarship from the *South Bend Tribune*. Armed with the newspaper scholarship and his GI Bill, he embarked upon his career at Indiana State, a school he chose to attend due to its close proximity to his hometown and its low cost. In January of 1967, he entered ISU. During his first semester, he lived in Reeve Hall, a women's dorm, due to lack of housing in other residential facilities across campus. In the fall of 1967, he was placed in Hulman Hall (now defunct) of which he has fond memories of its maid service and great cafeteria food.

Powell did very well academically at ISU. He was well liked by both his teachers and peers. He and his white roommate were the best of friends. And, remarkably he and the University President Alan Rankin were, in his words, "friends." He was even a reporter on the previously then all white *Statesman* newspaper for a short time, publishing one to two articles every week. Life at State was great. He could have spent four unremarkable years at the College, but things began to change in 1967.

Perhaps in the same vein as Colin Kaepernick, the present day professional football player who risked it all to protest what he believed was unfair treatment of black males by white police officers across America, Powell began to notice the disparity in treatment between the white and black students at ISU. He saw first-hand how well and privileged the white students were compared to their black counterparts. He, however, was treated well and was considered a privileged black male. He could have rested on his laurels and on his good fortune. But, he could not reconcile with the way the other students were being treated. Many black students were not being treated well by some of their white professors; black students could not find adequate housing and were often victims of local housing discrimination; the number of black instructors or staff was low; there were no black studies or history courses; black students could not get jobs in the city of Terre Haute; and the word "Negro" was still being used throughout campus.

Powell's awareness of the plight of black students both on campus and nationally was spearheaded by the two black upperclassmen who served as his mentors, Fred Bullard and Bill Lavelle. He credits them with opening up his eyes to the plight of black students. He says that they "indoctrinated" him. Fred Bullard, one of the founders of the Negro Student Forum (name changed soon afterward to Black Student Forum), the forerunner to the current Black Student Union, invited him to several of his meetings. Powell liked what he saw and heard. He was soon invited to run for the presidency of the organization upon Bullard's ensuing graduation. He says he was elected as president because his South Bend friends voted him in and because he had the required grade point average (GPA) when others did not. The GPA to be the president of an organization at ISU at that time was very high.

As president of the BSF, Powell wrote many letters to President Alan Rankin on behalf of the black students asking for a better quality of life on campus. One of his requests was for more black entertainers and speakers. He was instrumental in getting several popular entertainers of the time, such as The Fifth Dimension and Bill Cosby on campus. He also fought for the BSF to have an office and a budget. However, soon the problems that were facing black students on campus were overwhelming and too frequent. Powell, as well as other black and white students, believed that the University was not listening to their call for equality. The black students

believed that Dean of Students Alan Rodgers was racist and was acting as a buffer, even an impediment between them and the President. They knew that they needed to get Rankin's attention.

Powell was told of the SBU meetings by several students. Several organizations were joining together to discuss the plight of the students, all the students. In 1968, Powell attended the meetings as the president of the Black Student Forum. Like his fellow Magnificent Seven members, he liked what he was hearing. He did not know until years later that the other members liked what he was saying and that he would inspire them to action.

Michael Shane Wright

Michael Shane Wright, a Terre Haute native and the only Caucasian of the group, credits his parents with teaching him how to treat people. His mother, he believes, grew up in a bubble. She had many black friends growing up and believed that everyone was equal and that like Martin Luther King, Jr., "you judge people by the content of their character."

Although born in Terre Haute in 1948, Wright grew up in Danville, Indiana. The young Shane could not understand the discrimination that he saw in the world around him because of his mother's teachings and philosophy. He and his four siblings were taught to be color-blind by his father, a local pharmacist, who stressed the importance of judging people based on how they treated you.

Wright attended Thornton Elementary School and Montrose Elementary School in Terre Haute, Indiana and for junior high and half of high school, he attended Danville schools, both all white schools. In his junior year of high school, he returned to Terre Haute and attended Wiley High School, which had been desegregated. Upon graduating from Wiley High School, he attended one semester at Indiana State University before he became restless and decided that he was at a crossroads in his life. It was during that first semester at ISU that he started meeting different people with different perspectives. He met Alex Dunnigan in his first semester at State. Dunnigan stated to the young and restless Wright, that if he were ever in Gary, he could come and visit him. After his first semester at ISU, he became dissatisfied, even disassociated, with the whole concept of school. He says that he was just "partying, drinking, and chasing women." He had a lack of direction, no firm commitment.

Realizing that he was disassociated and only going through the motions, he reasoned that he was actually more interested in and craved a real world education. He was more concerned about the rallies in Chicago and what others were doing out in the real world, the national movements were more important to him. So Wright dropped out of College and went to live with his Uncle Charlie and cousins in Gary. His uncle was a high school teacher in Gary. He got a job at the railroad and then in the steel mill, and when he made some money, he bought a car. In Gary, he met John Gunn, Jr., Eugene Hardaway, and reconnected with his Indiana State friend Alex Dunnigan. After working at the steel mills for about nine months, he decided, with a "little convincing" from "the fellows," to return to ISU as his parents were happy to pick up his tuition bill. "The guys came over one day and saw me lying on the sofa and said to me, 'get up white boy, you are going back to college.'" He went back to college.

In the meantime, he would take a short detour to Columbia University in New York to hang out there with people in the “Struggle.” Wright, Gunn, and Dunnigan all went to Columbia during the Christmas break. It was at Columbia he maintains that, “his eyes were opened.” At the time, Columbia was immersed in several movements ranging from war to Black power.

He brought the protest mentality and his raised consciousness back to Terre Haute.

He describes himself at that time as being “wild” and says that once back at ISU, he got “wilder.” While at ISU, he was more interested in “partying” than doing school work. Part of this “partying” was “getting high.” He experimented with drugs. He dated many girls and just enjoyed himself. His parents thought he was just in a “wild phase” and would soon grow out of it.

When he arrived at ISU, it was not long before he realized that there was institutional racism. There was no black representation on campus, no Black Studies Program. In his eyes, black people were not valued.

Although the black students on campus were acutely aware of the institutional and student centered racism, Wright recognized that among black students, there were two camps: the Martin Luther King, Jr. Camp of “Nonviolence” and the Huey Newton and Malcolm X Camp of “We Will Fight It Out.” He was in the latter camp.

In addition, Wright was also aware of the outdated student life policies on campus. “The University used to lock up girls in the dorms; would close the rec center at night. We wanted to play ping pong and watch TV at the center; we were college kids and school was too old fashioned” he maintained. He, as well as the other students, resented the numerous tickets that they used to get on their cars by both campus and local police. In comparison to the other schools that he was familiar with, ISU was behind the times.

Wright joined the Students for a Better University Movement (SBU) with his friend Alex Dunnigan. He maintains that he was tired of the way things were on campus.

He and his fellow students in the SBU were fighting the way things were at the college, the status quo, both racial and societal. Students were also against Vietnam. Why go to Asia and fight Asians when there are so many problems here in the United States, including racism, he queried.

He says that the movement that he became a part of was a movement against the establishment that was, “not up with the times.” He was from the Eldridge Cleaver School of Thought, where proactive was the key word here. Cleaver was an American civil rights and political activist who became a major leader in the Black Panther Party in the 1960s and 1970s.

Wright is proud that at this time he was able to bridge the gap between white and black students. He believes that he brought some of the white and black students at ISU together for a common cause. Racism and other social issues had become common themes on campus. However, the main theme among these groups, black and white, was anti-establishment.

Alex Dunnigan, Jesse Burr, Eugene “Gene” Hardaway, and Chuckie Robinson

The other four members of the Magnificent Seven also believed in this anti-establishment. Alex Dunnigan, Jesse Burr, the late Eugene Hardaway, and the late Chuckie Robinson were also natives of Gary. All except Burr and Robinson had attended the same elementary, junior high, and high school as Gunn. They reconnected with Gunn at ISU in 1969. Unfortunately, this researcher was not able to locate them or members of their families for this essay.

Gunn has vivid memories of the guys that he hung around within the Tarry Town section of Gary and who later united to take over the most important building on ISU’s campus. Of Alex Dunnigan, he has fond memories of his childhood friend. “Dunn”, as Gunn affectionately called him, was the son of a local teacher; he remembers Dunnigan as a brainiac during his high school years.

When all of the other guys were outside playing basketball or other sports, Dunnigan would be inside his garage making radios or building something. He loved technology and anything mechanical.

Wright also remembers Dunnigan well. He credits Dunnigan’s upbringing in the predominately black Gary with the reason Dunn was so well informed about the culture of blackness.

While Wright did not know Jesse Burr very well, Gunn knew him well and knew that he could depend on him. There was an unwritten code of honor among those who grew up in Gary. They all had each other’s backs.

As for the late Eugene Hardaway, he had grown up in the same Gary neighborhood as Gunn. He too had been a “victim” of the busing in Gary. He also abided by this unwritten code of “having each other’s backs.”

The late Chuckie Robinson was also a native of Gary. He met the other Magnificent Seven members at ISU. Although they did not grow up together, they shared something in common: “the Gary Thing” as Wright would term it. Unfortunately, none of his family members could be located to learn more about his life.

THE TAKEOVER

The following information (pp. 11-23) is taken from Mikell-Reynolds, Crystal. *Leadership Response to the Black Student Protest Movement at Indiana State University*. Dissertation, 1998.

In 1968, President Alan Rankin was sent a list of demands on behalf of the Black Student Forum. Less than six months after the Black Student Forum's list of demands, William Powell, as President of the Black Student Forum, sent Rankin a letter dated February 1969, outlining several areas, “in which further action is needed in order to secure the elevation of the role and status of the Black students at Indiana State University.”

1. We want the use of the word "Negro" discontinued in all University publications
2. We want the police disarmed
3. We want a room check of all dormitories for weapons

4. We want better financial support for Soul Week, scheduled April 7-13
5. We want better jobs for our students from the Financial Aids Office
6. We want publications of all existing scholarships and other aids available and the corresponding deadlines for application
7. We want an investigation of the judging of the Homecoming Queen Contest, Junior Varsity Cheerleading Tryouts, and the All-Campus Talent Show
8. We want harassment by the Student Activities Office via Dr. Rodgers discontinued.
9. We want bi-weekly meetings between you and the executive board of the Black Student Forum
10. We want to know why you and Mr. Mark Williams have not responded to my invitations to speak before the Black Student Forum
11. We want to know what action has been taken on the list of requests given you by Dr. Truitt
12. We want an office for the Black Student Forum
13. We want the housing file kept up to date

This letter came on the heels of Powell's resignation from the SGA Senate. He withdrew from the Senate following the failure of his resolution asking SGA to allocate \$150 to the Black Student Forum. The money was to help sponsor the speaker Father James Groppi, advisor to the NAACP Youth Council in Milwaukee, to speak at ISU. In a November 11, 1968, Indiana State University *Statesman* article, Powell apparently, "accused the senators of being insincere in their nondiscriminatory attitudes as they defeated the resolution because they felt the "budget couldn't allow for subsidation of every organization on campus."

The issues that were presented to Rankin in the letter were arrived at by the members of the Black Student Forum and reflected the issues that faced black students on the campus at that time. In a 1998 interview with the author, Powell discussed the reasons for the demands:

Black students wanted to be called Black. It represented and still represents a political designation. It is a matter of black people naming themselves. There was concern that some of the campus police might accidentally shoot someone and we wanted them disarmed. There had been no evidence of student violence and therefore, no need for armed police. In addition, there were concerns by some students who lived in dormitories that some of their fellow white students were armed. Indeed there were some who carried automatic and semi-automatic weapons in their cars and had weapons in their dorms. Many of the white students who were attending State had never seen black people in person before and were afraid of us. As you know, when some Americans are confronted with things they fear, the answer is to grab a gun and shoot the hell out of it. There were incidents of verbal assaults on black students, particularly black women, by white male students. The Terre Haute police did nothing, that I'm aware of, in these matters and the University dragged its feet. So this was a time when political and racial tensions were high on campus.

Powell maintained that the Rankin Administration moved very slowly on the issues presented in the demands. A couple of months later, Powell and others would take more drastic action.

In the month after Powell's list of "areas of improvement," black and white students were having serious dialogues about black discontent. One significant event occurred on February 22, 1969. A heated discussion that began in The Grill, a campus eatery, moved to an education class. Approximately 100 ISU students participated in an impromptu dialogue on black-white relations. In what began as a heated exchange of words at about 1:00 p.m. in the crowded grill among black and white students was finally brought under control at 3:00 p.m. when Dr. Allan W. Rodgers, associate dean of student activities, asked that the students move to his Education 317 class, which met at 3:00 p.m. on Tuesdays and Thursdays.

During the two hour session students expressed their fears and hopes. The Grill situation began during a discussion of the black response to the National Anthem at the previous Wednesday night's basketball game against Valpraiso. Apparently most black students either remained seated or hung their heads while holding up an outstretched clenched fist. Other topics addressed during the class were centered around issues of a Black Studies Program, more black staff and faculty, and other relevant social events on campus. The class ended with some issues resolved but with many still left unresolved (*Statesman*, February 22, 1969).

It would seem that the issue of the black students' reaction to the National Anthem at basketball games had become a major issue at ISU. On February 26, 1969, Rankin addressed ISU students before the ISU and DePauw basketball game, the final home game of the season. He began his speech by commending and congratulating the students of ISU for, "the restraint, good judgment and common sense they have shown in the relationships with their fellow students, and with our faculty and administrators in spite of the examples of violence and destruction which have taken place," between black and white students on many American colleges and University campuses these past several months and called for tolerance.

What caused Rankin to give such a speech at this event? The main impetus for the speech seemed to be the Black Power Salute displayed by approximately 200 students during the National Anthem prior to the De Pauw basketball game. In a 1995 interview, Bob Browher, a white male Logansport freshman at ISU, recalled the event and stated that at several basketball games prior, the black students would turn their backs to the American flag when the *Star Spangled Banner* was sung.

Dr. William Osmon, then dean of academic services at the time, contended that the students did not turn their backs to the American flag, but rather they chose not to face the flag when the National Anthem was sung. Several of the black alumni who were present at the February 1969 game maintained that they did not turn their backs to the American flag, but rather they continued to face forward when the Anthem was played. Today, Colin Kaepernick and some of his fellow athletes are choosing "to take a knee."

From March to May 1969 the University supported a seminar series to address the issues of the black community. The series, "Diversity Within Unity: The Black American in American Life," was planned in consultation with Rankin and then Black Student Forum President Powell. Eleanor Holmes Norton, future congresswoman and then assistant legal director of the American

Civil Liberties Union, was a featured speaker at the April 30, 1969 presentation, “The Black American and Civil Liberties.”

It appears that such institutional efforts as the conference and the seminars testified to President Rankin’s and the University’s concerted efforts to close the, “gap of misunderstanding” that he believed was the cause of the students’ discontent. What happened in the days after the “Diversity Within Unity” series, however, marked just the beginning of the storm.

Perhaps a prelude to the May 1, 1969 takeover and occupation of the administrative building, was the occupation by 10 to 12 students of the newsroom of the *Statesman* on April 21, 1969 to, “express peaceful dissent” with the policies of the campus newspaper. During the half-hour demonstration, no property was destroyed, but the students were able to present and discuss a list of 11 grievances with the editor, Ron Culp. The students’ main grievance was their belief in the lack of accurate coverage of black news events. Culp agreed to appoint Gary student and future Magnificent Seven member Alex Dunnigan to the staff to serve as a consultant for reporters concerning black student affairs (*Statesman*, April 22, 1969).

The occupation of the *Statesman* newsroom would pale in comparison to the next occupation.

On May 1, 1969, the University was taken by surprise when a group of predominately black students calling themselves Students for a Better University (SBU) barricaded themselves in the reception room of the vice president of business affairs. The plan for the takeover was formulated at the SBU meetings.

The 50 to 60 predominately male students all agreed that drastic action was needed. At the SBU meeting, Wright and others agreed that “we need to do what the country is doing. We need to take over buildings.” The plan was for the students to take over the Administration Building and present their list of demands to the president while occupying the building. They knew that if they occupied the building that the president would have to listen to them and that they and their demands would garner then needed media attention. However, they had no idea how much media attention the plan would garner.

Significantly, the takeover almost did not happen, for at the last SBU meeting prior to the takeover with only 25 or 30 students in attendance, Gunn and Wright maintain it became “all talk and no action.” At the April 30, 1969 meeting, several students began to discuss items that Wright believed were not relevant to the larger cause. He believed that the students were drifting away from the larger goal of drastic action:

The night of the takeover, we had some missteps. Kids were putting forth irrelevant issues and getting into personal issues and getting frustrated with inaction and diversion. Nine or ten who were up there said let’s get this on track and focus and make a decision. Let’s make a move.

Perhaps the SBU students were getting cold feet, Gunn and Wright reasoned.

After the SBU meeting had ended, Gunn and Wright, and the other five SBU members talked among themselves and in an impassioned moment, decided it was time to effect change at ISU. The takeover was going to happen that night. The students then quickly planned it out. Within an hour of the planning session, the 25 to 30 students made plans to meet at a neutral location later that night. They decided to implement the details of the quickly sketched plan at dusk. At dusk, only seven of the SBU actually showed up. But, the show must go on. With only the clothes on their backs, the seven proceeded to the Administration Building.

The students entered the building at 9:00 p.m. on April 30. They decided to do an “infirmiry stunt;” the plan would call for some acting skills. The infirmiry was located in the Administration Building. The plan was for one of the students to pretend to be very ill and be carried in by two other students. Once in the building, the students would all run into the main office and lock themselves in. The plan actually went like clockwork. One of the students called ahead of time stating that his friend was very ill and that they were bringing him to the infirmiry immediately.

The plan also called for Gunn to blow up the generators to the building. Luckily for him, the Molotov Cocktails that he quickly made did not blow up the generators, for the generators were surrounded by a fence. The Molotov Cocktails, landing a few feet from their intended mark, just burned out. Had the generators blown up, the situation would have been worse for him and his fellow protestors.

I was supposed to blow up the generators. I made Molotov Cocktails. My mindset was if I believe in something, then I would fight for it. I had no weapons. There was a set time to pull the alarms, burn the generators, etc. Fortunately for me, the generators were surrounded by a fence. I threw them, but they did not reach the generator. None of them reached. They were just fires burning.

Once the students arrived at the Administration Building, they knocked on the door, for it was after hours and they could only be admitted by someone on the inside of the building. Shane, with death curling moans, was being supported by two other students on either side of him as they knocked on the door. As the nurse on duty opened up the doors, the students, both the initial three and the four who had been hiding in the bushes, immediately pushed passed her and ran upstairs. The nurse, believing that the students were playing some kind of prank, called campus security. When security came to check if the students were still in the building, the students hid under the desks, motionless, as the guard aimed his flashlight at several places in the room. Security, assuming the students had exited the building, left without ever discovering the intruders.

That night, the protestors blocked the door with office furniture and waited until morning. During the night, they talked and waited. No one slept. Contrary to previous published reports and this author’s writings, the students did not bring any supplies: no food, no water. As Gunn maintains, “this plan was not well thought out.” That night they talked about what would happen to them, what punishment they might receive. They also believed that when morning came, the student body would generally be very supportive of them. They did not anticipate the negative backlash from a portion of the student body.

On May 1, 1969, in the morning, when Barbara Kilmore, receptionist in the Business Affairs Office, arrived for work at 7:30 a.m. she discovered the students. In her official statement written four days after the event, she recalled what happened when she arrived for work:

The first thing that alarmed me was that one of the doors to the hall from the steps was locked, it never has been in the past. I noticed at once that there were people in the office. I had my key out to try the door, but before I tried to get in I noticed the desk in front of the door. I then yelled in to the people inside--are you about through cleaning? They laughed--very loud, but said nothing. I looked closer then, and much to my dismay there was someone lying on the one desk, and there were boys standing on the window sills. As far as I could tell there were six or seven, white and black males.

After Kilmore notified the ISU police, she called Vice President of Business Affairs Kenneth Moulton.

The student protestors, realizing that they had been discovered, opened the window ledge in Gillum Hall and went out to the window and started reading their demands. The main readers were Dunnigan and Powell. They read the demands over and over again. Soon the crowd started to grow when word spread of the takeover. Although this was the time before cell phones and social media such as Facebook and Twitter, word spread quickly.

While they were reading their handwritten demands, they realized that they needed supplies. They located a phone and began to call the SBU captains in the dorms (There were SBU captains in each dorm whose job was to be by the phone in case the students needed something during the takeover). The phone calls were made possible due to the fact that the telephone switchboard was now open. The ISU switchboard opened at 8am, of course this was pre-cell phone days. Food and supplies began to show up. Their friends lifted the supplies with a rope to the top floor. It was then that other SBU students joined them on the ledge. The original seven students and the ones who joined them on the ledge (including Ernest Lee Thomas, who earned a Bachelors degree in Sociology and Psychology from ISU, and later became an actor and is best known for his role as "Raj" in the 1970s sitcom, *What's Happening!!*) not only read from their demands, but they also talked to the students on "the Green" (the grassy area at the center of the campus by the Administration Building now called the Quad). They answered students' questions and had conversations with them.

While all of these actions were occurring, other ISU Business Department employees started arriving for work, but they could not get in. As they stood on the ledge, Gunn saw an "ocean of people." The seven plus students actually started to be heckled. Gunn recalls several white students yelling, "Nigger go home." Wright maintains that they had both supporters and opponents on "the Green" that day. He asserts that the opponents were mostly white fraternity boys who were privileged and did not want to rock the boat.

There was both support and opposition in the crowd. There was a lot of shock in the crowd, nothing like this had ever happened before. Some reacted negatively because of black students taking over the Administration Building. They thought that everything was okay. White frats who were privileged did not think that there

was a problem. The takeover caught the kids by surprise cause they did not know they had power.

Soon both the campus and state police arrived on the scene. The seven students became nervous when the state police showed up, for they had an inherent distrust of the police. However, apparently officers from both police squads did nothing except to stare at the students on the ledges. Gunn remembers the state troopers staring at them through their sunglasses, and an almost eerie silence filled the air.

Police and business affairs administrators demanded that the students unbarricade the door and give themselves up. Powell, chosen as spokesperson for the group, demanded to speak to President Rankin before the students would unbarricade the door. The students were adamant that they did not want to meet with anyone except President Rankin himself. Previously, Dean of Students Allen Rodgers would intervene and not let the students talk directly to the President. The students always had to go through Dr. Rodgers; however, this time they wanted to speak to the president directly and would not relinquish the building until they spoke with him and presented their demands. This time presenting their demands to Rodgers was not an option, for many of the students in both the SBU and the Black Student Union were united in their contention that Rodgers was “a racist obstructionist who hated students” even putting such language in their demands on that day.

Forty years later, the SBU students, now in their sixties and seventies, still hold this belief about the dean of students. Fortunately, or perhaps unfortunately for the students, their desire to see the President was granted.

Most estimates are that Rankin arrived on the scene within one hour of Powell’s demand. By this time, a large crowd of about 100 students had also arrived outside the building; this number would grow to as many as 500 as the minutes ticked away. The crowd would eventually grow to nearly 1000 students who witnessed the protestors read and reread their list of demands, question University policies, and answer questions from observers. Milton Allen, a student from Indianapolis and star football player, was one such observer. In a September 2012 interview, he stated, “I saw several students hanging off the roof. I was amazed at the sight. I knew that something was going on. I knew some of those guys.”

President Alan Rankin, standing on a ladder, with bull horn in hand, then read from a prepared speech.

Rankin knew that similar events had been occurring all over the nation in recent months at such universities as Harvard and Cornell. Although he had developed policies for such occasions, he had hoped that such events would not occur at ISU. In a prepared speech and quoting a newly developed policy, he announced to the students:

I am Alan C. Rankin, president of Indiana State University, empowered to address you officially as a representative of the University. You, the students occupying the offices of the Vice President for Business Affairs, are guilty of violation of the Facilities Priorities Policy of the University in that the facilities you occupy are assigned for use to persons other than yourselves. The policy states: Use of space for purposes other than those for which it has been designated will not be allowed.

Neither will individuals nor groups be permitted to interrupt the use of space after it has been duly assigned without permission of the president or a University official by him. In addition, you are in violation of the Policy Guaranteeing the Right of Expression of Students which prohibits: Actions which disrupt, by physical or auditory means, the ongoing operations of the University. . . . You have 15 minutes to vacate the offices you now occupy or you will be suspended.

In addition to reading the speech, he also talked to the students on the ledge and the students on the Quad. Rankin promised the students that he would work with them on their demands. The students got him to agree to implement certain demands and discuss other demands and concerns.

An agreement was finally reached between the students and the University. If students came down from the ledge and surrendered the building, then the University would hold a meeting with them at a later date and they could express their concerns; and none of the students would be arrested. The original seven students, agreeing to the University's proposal, came down.

The students would leave the office at 11:30 a.m., a few minutes after President Rankin gave the 15 minute speech, with an escort from ISU security. Before they left, however, Powell, issued to Rankin, a written list of demands.

SBU issued 17 demands which dealt with both student affairs issues and academic affairs issues. The list, which is written verbatim, was later reduced to eight demands then to six in the ensuing days.

1. Reduction of tuition back to \$12.00
2. Immediate ratification of the proposed constitution
 - A. Double jeopardy
 - B. Housing (separation of tuition from housing)
 - C. No hours for anyone
 - D. Open visitation
3. Qualification of motor vehicle by age or grade classification
4. City police jurisdiction void on campus
 - A. Parking tickets
5. University jurisdiction void off campus
6. Establishment of a student committee to regulate all fines imposed on students
1. 7. Expulsion of Dean Rodgers (racist and anti-Semitic)
7. More freedom for professors in academic affairs
 - A. Chissom [sic] affair
 - B. More emphasis on research
8. Recreation facilities to be opened to students when not in use, but when authorized personnel are present. This will include residence halls
9. Redefinition of campus boundaries for all students
10. The streets of ISU campus will be off-limits to anyone not affiliated with University during the hours of 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., or to anyone who is not on University business
11. Switchboards open 24 hours seven days a week
12. Unlimited serving in the dorm cafeterias

- A. A definite all around improvement on food service
- B. Catering service
- 13. The establishment of a review committee (made up of students) to review all probationary and expulsion action taken in the last (3) years
- 14. New contract with canteen company
- 15. Black Studies Dept.
 - A. Afro –American History (mandatory)
 - B. Black Literature
 - C. Black Sociology
- 16. Black Student Forum recognized although no advisor--full rights of campus organization without advisor

In retrospect, Wright believes that they should have never given up the building until their demands were met. He believes that when they gave up the building, “we lost our leverage.”

While the SBU were occupying the Administration Building, members of the Black Student Forum (BSF) were occupying The Grill, a main eatery on campus located in Tirey Memorial Student Union. Members of the BSF declared May 1, 1969, Black Liberation Day. They demanded free food from The Grill staff. For several hours that day, black students did not pay for their meals. Although The Grill staff was not threatened with physical violence, according to various reports of the incident, the Black Student Forum members did intimidate them.

In the midst of all of this chaos, how did the iconic picture come about? The Magnificent Seven garnered support from several sources. One such source was the underground college newspaper, *The Grinding Stone*. This progressive newspaper did a front page story of the Seven. The picture with all the men seated on the sofa was taken a couple of days later, immediately after the meeting with the University officials.

The picture was taken by a student photographer to accompany the ensuing feature story about the students and the takeover. “After the meeting, we sat on the couch and a student took the picture,” Gunn said.

Interestingly, although the University has claimed ownership of the picture, both Wright and Gunn claim that one picture was taken by the student photographer with her camera, a second picture was taken by the same student with the camera of one of the Seven and that that makes the iconic picture the property of one of the Seven or to the student, not the University.

At the meeting between the University and the students, Gunn said very little: “I said nothing to them, didn’t like the talking. I like to do something, been talking for 400 years, let’s just do something.” Wright was chosen as the spokesperson because he was white and other students were too shy. Wright made an impassioned speech emphasizing the outdated policies and procedures of the University. Other students made various comments as well. The student demands were also discussed again at the meeting. The meeting ended with no resolution or promises made.

Wright vehemently believes that at the meeting the age-old “bait and switch” occurred. The conversation went from the harms of the University toward the students to the correct punishment for the students.

Things shifted from what we wanted to how to discipline and what to do with the students for breaking the rules . . . felt it was bait and switch and no substance to the talks.

Wright's perspective actually became reality. On May 4, 1969, President Rankin recommended to the Board of Trustees that disciplinary action be taken against the students who participated in the takeover, and the Board concurred although the students maintain that promises were made to them that no punishment would befall them. It is the author's opinion that Rankin, under pressure from various stakeholders, including Board of Trustees members, state legislators, citizens of Terre Haute, parents, and faculty, gave in, caved in if you will, to the pressure and recommended some sort of punishment for the Seven plus the others who joined them on the roof.

Some Indiana State faculty members who generally had been supportive of students and who would normally have been supportive of the students in this matter would not support them on this occasion. Why the lack of support by some members of the faculty? Was it because of the fundamental disagreements with the students? The belief that the students were just "hippies" trying to cause trouble? In actuality the reason for the lack of support from some of the faculty is less complicated than that. The simple fact was that the students took over the Administration Building on the wrong day of the month; May 1st was faculty pay day. Due to the disruption and takeover, the faculty did not get their paychecks until the next day (this was pre direct deposit days).

Interviews with faculty who were present on the campus that day state that the faculty had bills to pay and that they believed that May 1st was the wrong day for a takeover. Wright and Dunn maintain that they had no knowledge of what day it was and that the date chosen was purely coincidental. As the members of the Magnificent Seven maintain, "the plan was not well thought out."

At the May 4th board meeting, Rankin also discussed the group's demands, contending that, "most of the demands presented had never before been brought to the attention of University officials by the elected representatives or organized agencies of our students." Although most of the demands had not been officially presented to Rankin by elected officials of organizations, the demands relating to black students had been presented to Rankin through leaders of the Black Student Forum as discussed in the previous pages. For example, in the May 8, 1968 demands, students had called for Black Studies courses.

THE AFTERMATH

President Rankin did indeed support disciplinary action against the students who occupied the building. Eleven students, the seven students who initially occupied the building and the additional four who had joined the occupation later, had disciplinary action taken against them: ten were placed on Strict Conduct Probation, and one received a Conduct Warning.

However, the disciplinary actions against the students would matter little for they would not stay around at ISU long enough to feel the brunt of the actions. All except one student of the original

seven, Bill Powell, would leave the University immediately after the takeover. Powell graduated the following year still on social probation. Today, he does not believe that the punishment was too stiff.

Because of the action or rather because of the lack of further action on the part of the other student members of the SBU, Gunn decided to leave the University. He was disappointed with the people who did all the talking at the meetings, but when it came time for action, they failed to take action, both literally and figuratively. At the very last SBU meeting, the 25 to 30 students in attendance all had agreed to the takeover plan and all promised that they would show up. Fellow students later revealed to him their motives for not showing up that night: the SBU members were afraid of disappointing their parents because their parents were paying for their college, and they did not want to get expelled.

For all the rhetoric at the meetings, only seven had shown up. "Punk Ass Boys" Gunn declared, so he, Wright, Hardaway, and Dunnigan headed to New York to Columbia University. They believed the cause was greater than themselves. They knew the country was changing, and they wanted to be part of this change. So for a full semester, the four men lived in an empty dorm room at Columbia and ate and hung out with Gunn's cousin and friends who were all students there. They lived there for three to four months, becoming part of the blossoming movement.

Wright believed that in the immediate aftermath of the takeover at ISU, the emphasis shifted from focusing on their issues and demands to an emphasis on them. It became less important to effect change and meet the demands and more focused on how to punish those who had taken over the building.

However, what the Seven had done was to lay the seeds for change. In the five years after the initial takeover, due to their efforts as well as subsequent events on campus by the now Black Student Union (under the leadership of presidents Sam Dixon and Z. Mae Jimison), several of the demands that were on the SBU's list came to fruition. Dorm hours were modified; Dean Allen Rodgers was asked to resign; a Black Studies Program became a reality; more minority faculty and staff were hired; and more changes occurred.

WHERE ARE THEY NOW

Today, William T. Powell, after having a successful career as a stockbroker, returned to college and recently earned a master's degree in environmental engineering at Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis. He lives and works in Indianapolis and can boast six college degrees to his name. He is a frequent visitor to ISU's campus where he expounds about the lessons of the 1969 takeover. At a recent 50th anniversary commemoration of the Black Student Union at Indiana State University, he discussed the takeover, its goals and its lessons, to a mixed race audience of both old and young.

When asked why he participated in the takeover, Powell says he believed that if they wanted the University to acknowledge their demands, they would have to take "meaningful action." In a 1998 interview with the author, he stated the following about that fateful day:

It was suggested that we should take over the Administration Building. We wanted the action to be non-violent and effective. We didn't want to commit any acts which were openly criminal. We decided to enter the Administration Building, card the main door, and then barricade the doors from the inside. It worked beautifully. We shut the University down with that one simple act. We were called the Magnificent Seven. People all over the state knew who we were.

The students contended that they had to take such drastic action because they were not being listened to and that they had been refused the use of audio equipment (a bull horn) so that they could peacefully demonstrate.

When asked the questions: Knowing what you know now would you do it again? And, what would you do differently? Powell fervently maintains that he would do it again for change had to happen: "ISU was living in the Dark Ages."

John Wesley Gunn, was an adjunct professor in the Department of Ethnic Studies at Indiana University-Purdue University in Gary, Indiana from 2008 to his untimely death in December of 2018. After leaving ISU in 1969 after the takeover, he joined some of the other Magnificent Seven members at Columbia University to be a part of the movement there. Then he ventured to Jamaica for a short stint. He would eventually find himself employed as an air traffic controller in Connecticut where he stayed for several years. In 2006, he finally returned to college majoring in public affairs, African American Studies and anthropology. He made up for lost time, earning one undergraduate and three master degrees in a span of only a few years.

In a 2014 interview with the author when asked why he participated in the takeover of the Administration Building, Gunn stated, "because I did not like things the way they were on campus. There needed to be a change. Right is right and wrong is wrong." He thought that the University was wrong. In addition he said he participated in the takeover cause, "you don't let your friends down." He told the guys (Hardaway and Dunnigan) that he would be there and he was there.

When asked, "knowing what you know now would you do it again?; and what would you do differently?" Gunn said he would definitely do it again because of the way black people were being treated. On the other hand, he stated that he probably would not do it again because of the response of the student body. Gunn maintains that the meetings were all talk:

Only seven people showed up. Just gave lip service. Lost all faith in black student body. They gave excuses why didn't show up. Students would stand up and espoused hatred for the system and what actions should be taken, but in reality when it all came down to it, only seven of the hundreds of other SBU members actually rose to the challenge.

When asked, why he thinks that he and the other six were the only ones who showed up that day, he maintained that, "it was a Gary thing." He said that the psychology of the movement on campus in 1969 had a lot to do with what was going on in Gary. With the white flight and the city being 99 percent black, people had a taste of what it was like to run their own communities. It was not a town like Terre Haute where there were only a pocket full of black people.

Gunn, Hardaway, Dunnigan, and Burr were accustomed to seeing their own people run things and used to seeing them take a stand. There was a big difference between black students in New York and Gary versus these black students in Terre Haute. Wright contends that “there was a higher level of competency of blackness from Gary as compared to Terre Haute.”

Michael Shane Wright left ISU and Indiana after the takeover, went to New York, married, and joined the Air Force before he could be drafted, and then in 1975 he returned to ISU to finish what he had started. He graduated on the Dean’s list with a degree in accounting in 1978, and worked in the field for several years in Austin, Texas before working as an investigator and paralegal in a law firm in Atlanta. He now is retired and resides in Terre Haute, Indiana where he remains active in the political scene and remains in “the Struggle.”

His rationale for participating in the takeover mirrors his fellow brothers: “Things had to change. There were many problems at ISU. We were against the establishment.”

When asked, Knowing what you know now would you do it again?; and what would you do differently?, Wright fervently maintains that he would do it again. He believes that desperate times require desperate measures. And, as he stated, “those were desperate times. Knowing what I know now, I would have done more. And, I would not have given up the Administration Building so soon.” Shane states that he is a firm believer in the motto of civil rights icon Eldridge Cleaver: “If not part of the solution, you are part of the problem.”

As for the late Eugene Hardaway, when Gunn and Wright left New York for New Haven, Hardaway stayed on for almost a year with Hardaway’s cousin until the latter graduated. However, it had been Gunn’s cousin with whom the guys had found refuge when they left ISU in May of 1969. This is the only information that is currently known about Hardaway.

As stated, Eugene Hardaway and Chuckie Robinson are now deceased. No information was available from either man before their passing nor from their families as to the events that occurred at ISU or in the ensuing years.

In the mid-2000s, Alex Dunnigan was a truck driver in Mississippi and would pay visits to his old pal Shane who was living in Atlanta at the time. Unfortunately, contact has been lost with him since this period.

Unfortunately, the location of Jesse Burr is unknown.

CONCLUSION

They sat on that sofa, anger and defiance clear in their faces and body language. Seven young men who, through their beliefs and actions, would impact Indiana State University for 50 years. They started out as seven spirited students, six African American and one white, seeking a meaningful educational experience and soon became known as “The Magnificent Seven.” In the midst of a nationwide movement for social change, their actions in May 1969 would affect and surprise the ISU community well into the 21st century.

John Gunn contends that the actions that occurred on May 1, 1969 at ISU and the iconic picture that ensued did not take root at ISU. The movement for justice had started at Edison High School

in Gary when he and the other Gary members of the so called Magnificent Seven were bussed to an all-white school and “called out of their name” (insulted) on almost a daily basis. The movement occurred when by the time he graduated from the once predominately white high school, the school would soon become 90 percent black. The white flight, the running away from the problem and from the black students, fueled the movement that showed itself at ISU. The movement occurred in the rhetoric of iconic figures like Malcolm X, Huey Newton, Stokely Carmichael, and Eldridge Cleaver. The movement was greater than themselves.

Much has changed since 1969 on many college campuses. Some colleges, like Indiana State, have made changes for the better, some have maintained the status quo, while on other campuses, conditions have become worse. Now in their late 60s and early 70s, when asked if they would do the take over again, the answer from three of the men on the sofa in the iconic picture is a resounding yes. When asked about the iconic picture, the three men are happy that that moment in time was documented and believes that in this current age of social media that the picture would have made its way around the country, if not the world, and their efforts on that fateful day would not be lost to history, and they relegated to seven defiant men sitting on a sofa.

Addendum:

On May 1, 2019, the two known survivors of *The Magnificent Seven* and the author will have a reunion of sorts to commemorate the 50th Anniversary of the takeover, to discuss student activism then and now, and to discuss the lessons learned. The reunion will be held off campus and attended by current ISU student leaders and a couple of emeriti faculty.

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