



Class Agents Letter

Class of 1959

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Dear 59ers:

This past weekend a momentous event occurred at the College. The Malcolm X Institute of Black Studies (MXIBS) held its 50th reunion two years delayed. More than 120 black alums attended plus 17 Trustees and a number of guests and current students. On Friday night they held a surprise unveiling of an oil portrait of me that will hang in the MXIBS building. As they noted, I was never a member of MXIBS as it was founded eleven years after our graduation, but they honored my support for the organization over the years.

In my remarks after thanking them I express regret that our other African American classmate, Julius Price, did not live to witness this reunion. I also tried to describe what the College and Crawfordsville were like in 1955-59. To their surprise I said that neither Julius nor I experienced any overt racial incidents during our years at the College or in town. Crawfordsville was about the same size then as it is today, population 16,000. In fact, the general attitude toward us was a kind of "benign tolerance." It was not until the Civil Rights Movement encouraged the College to enroll more black students that tensions arose at the College and in town that led to the founding of MXIBS in 1971. "A Legacy of Hope," a documentary of the founding, can be viewed here: <https://youtu.be/GjSg53xtU6c>.

I made three observations about the impact of MXIBS on the College and the town. First, I think the presence of more minority students changed the conversations at the College and raised issues they had not been discussed openly. The presence of substantial numbers of minority students have helped make Wabash a more open and intellectually challenging environment.

Second, as I recalled, our generation had an "arms length" relationship with the town. I applauded the MXIBS and other Wabash students for programs and involvement in charitable and service activities that have brought the College closer to the town. Notable among them is the tutoring program for elementary school children in Crawfordsville that MXIBS pioneered. These activities have made Crawfordsville a better town than what I remembered.



Third, I applauded the men that the attendees have become since leaving the College. Like generations of Wabash men before them they have become teachers, ministers, doctors, lawyers and business executives making outstanding contributions to their communities and their professions. Their accomplishments bring honor to the College and illustrate amply the value of a Wabash education.

The reunion was also great fun! Many of the men returned to the campus for the first time since receiving their degrees. Many little reunions took place among former roommates, classmates and team members. Bob Knowling '77 whose name graces the fieldhouse, gave inspiring remarks at the Saturday banquet setting an example by saying he could have and should have done more to support the College and promised to do better in the future.

There are a few African American student organizations that are older than MXIBS. But as Findley Campbell, the first African American professor at Wabash noted, Wabash is unique in having a close connection of MXIBS to the College administration through its director and to the curriculum through its Black Studies minor. Rev. Dr. Campbell gave the Chapel talk on Thursday, April 21. You can watch it here <https://youtu.be/-t--RWmHJ3o>.

Last weekend was a proud occasion in the history of the College that will resonate for many years to come.

Robert Wedgeworth
Class Agent