

WABASH COLLEGE ORAL HISTORY PROJECT, 1982-1987

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Manuscript and Visual Collections Department

William Henry Smith Memorial Library

Indiana Historical Society

450 West Ohio Street

Indianapolis, IN 46202-3269

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COLLECTION INFORMATION

VOLUME OF
COLLECTION: 3 document cases and 108 cassette tapes

COLLECTION
DATES: 1982-1987

PROVENANCE: Johanna Herring, Archivist, Wabash College, 301 West Wabash,
Crawfordsville, IN 47933, 20 April 1994.

RESTRICTIONS: The tapes and transcripts of interviews with Keith Nelson and Finley Campbell are to be restricted from public use for 50 years

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ALTERNATE FORMATS:

RELATED HOLDINGS:

ACCESSION NUMBER: 1987.0659

NOTES:

HISTORICAL SKETCH

The Wabash College Oral History Project grew out of the school's sesquicentennial celebration planned during the 1980s. Under the leadership of Eileen McGrath, the faculty's Minority Studies Committee successfully proposed an oral history project focused on African Americans at Wabash. As a response to the paucity of records available about the history of blacks within the Crawfordsville community, the project was expanded to include the city. McGrath sought and received support from Bridgie Brelsford, local history supervisor at the Crawfordsville Public Library; Jasmine Robinson, a professional on the staff at Wabash; and James Barnes, a professor of history who agreed to teach a local history class pertaining to the local black community that would have an oral history research focus.

With grants from the Indiana Historical Society and the Walter Hulet Trust of Crawfordsville and a prototype interview completed by Robinson with local resident Edith Reed, the project was off and running. Early on, however, the project was burdened with several technical, staffing, and financial limitations. More specifically, there were poorly recorded tapes and the transcription of the tapes were uneven in quality. Many key figures left the college before Jackie Colman took control by setting up new transcribing and editorial guidelines for the project. With the project on track and plentiful student assistance provided by the Hadley Fund of Wabash College, George H. Davis led it to completion in 1987.

The Reed interview was followed by 22 other townspeople being interviewed to complete the first part of the project, "Crawfordsville and the Black Experience." The second part of the project, "Wabash and the Black Experience," includes 27 taped interviews, mostly of alumni, beginning with Robert Wedgeworth ('59), said to be the earliest black to graduate from Wabash College in modern times. (Wedgeworth later became executive director of the American Library Association.) There are interviews of African American faculty and staff including Rose Olabegi Adesiyun, Finley Campbell, Rob Johnson, and Horace Turner. There is also an interview with Norman Moore, longtime dean of the college, who witnessed an increase of a black student and staff presence at Wabash. The interviews were completed from 1982 to 1986, with most being conducted from 1982 to 1983.

Reviewed as a whole, the city and Wabash College interviews provide an overview of race relations at a predominantly white male college located in a small town in eastcentral Indiana. It provides a glimpse of the transitional atmosphere from the 1960s to the 1980s. Dominant themes throughout the interviews include segregation, race relations, community activism, and political change and transition.

Sources:

Materials in the collection

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

The Wabash College Oral History Project contains 48 transcriptions and 108 tapes. Executed during the 1980s, it grew out of the college's sesquicentennial celebration. The project is divided into two parts, "Crawfordsville and the Black Experience" and "Wabash and the Black Experience."

The transcriptions, removed from eight, loose-ring binders remain in their original order. Both parts of the collection are arranged roughly in chronological order. The Crawfordsville materials (Box 1 and Box 2, folders 1–10) begin with the oldest resident and ends with the youngest. The Wabash College portion of the collection (Box 2, folders 11–22 and Box 3) is arranged from the earliest alumnus to the most recent graduate, with faculty and staff placed in at the beginning of their time at the school. There are transcriptions for all of the tapes, except those identified as Max and Nancy Servies. Prior to both sets of interviews (the community and the college), there is background information pertaining to the project, its history and the editorial policy for the interviews and transcriptions, along with biographical summaries of each interviewee. The background information preceding the Wabash College interviews also includes an index that crosslists names of individuals that are mentioned during the interviews. It encompasses a much wider list of individuals than the interviewees who are part of the project. The list contains the names of several prominent individuals (including Imaru Baraka, Stokely Carmichael, Angela Davis, Richard Nixon, George Wallace, and Malcolm X), many who visited Wabash College as speakers.

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Frances Wooden	CT 0600–0605
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Series 2: Wabash College

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CATALOGING INFORMATION

For additional information on this collection, including a list of subject headings that may lead you to related materials:

1. Go to the Indiana Historical Society's online catalog: <http://157.91.92.2/>
2. Click on the "Basic Search" icon.
3. Select "Call Number" from the "Search In:" box.
4. Search for the collection by its basic call number (in this case, M 0647).
5. When you find the collection, go to the "Full Record" screen for a list of headings that can be searched for related materials.