

The First Black Graduates of the Nation's 50 Flagship State Universities

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# The First Black Graduates of the Nation's 50 Flagship State Universities

*In an earlier issue of JBHE, we took a look at the first black graduates of the nation's most prestigious and mostly private universities. Here we relate the tales of the black pioneers at the leading public universities in all 50 states. Surprisingly, some of the state universities have no clue whatsoever as to the identity of their first black graduate.*

by Robert Bruce Slater

FOR NEARLY TWO centuries in the United States it was generally believed that of all God's intelligent, language-using, self-aware creatures, black people were at the bottom of the pyramid. And for two centuries after the establishment of the first institution of higher learning in the United States — Harvard in 1636 — no black person was awarded a college degree. Colored people were thought of as intellectually inferior and incapable of comprehending serious scholarly study. It was not until 1823, when Lucius Twilight graduated from Middlebury College, that an African American was awarded a college degree. Lucy Ann Stanton was the first black woman to achieve this distinction when she graduated from Oberlin College in 1850. The first degree-granting institutions established specifically for blacks — Lincoln University in Pennsylvania and Wilberforce University in Ohio — were established in the 1850s. All told, by the end of the Civil War it seems that only 40 blacks had been awarded college degrees throughout the United States.

Access to higher education for black Americans did not improve dramatically after the Civil War. W.E.B. Du Bois' research concluded that from 1865 to 1900 only 390 blacks had graduated from predominantly white colleges and universities. During this period, however, dozens of private black colleges were established throughout the South, sponsored for the most part by white religious organizations. From the end of the Civil War to the turn of the century, these private black colleges provided almost all the postsecondary education offered to African Americans.

In the years immediately following the Civil War, a few states established "normal" schools to produce teachers for predominantly black elementary and secondary schools. It

*"The earliest black graduate of any flagship state university appears to be Isaiah G. DeGrasse, who received a bachelor's degree in 1836 from Newark College (now the University of Delaware)."*

was not until 1890 and the passage of the Second Morrill Act that widespread public higher education was made available to black citizens in the southern states. This act, which allocated funds for the establishment of land grant colleges, stipulated that "no money shall be paid for the support of a college where a distinction of race or color is made in the admission of students." But, in an amazing intellectual tour de force, the act went on to say that "the establishment and maintenance of such colleges separately for white and colored students shall be held in compliance with the provision of this act."

The Second Morrill Act was a mixed blessing for the higher education of African Americans. Although it opened the door to the establishment of dozens of black public land grant institutions, the act assured a half century or more of strict racial segregation of American public higher education in the South.\*

## The Beginning of the End

The walls of racial segregation of the public universities in the South began to crumble after the 1948 Supreme Court decision in *McLaurin v. Oklahoma*. As a result of this ruling southern state universities could no longer refuse admittance to black graduate students if corresponding graduate degree programs were unavailable at black state-operated institutions. Undergraduate programs were the last to be desegregated. Many of the large flagship state universities in the South did not admit their first black undergraduate student until the late 1950s or even the 1960s. The lone exception was the University of South Carolina. Before

\*For more on the establishment of black land grant institutions, see Gil Kujovich, "Public Black Colleges: The Long History of Unequal Funding," JBHE, Number 2, Winter 1993/1994, p. 73.



*The 1899 graduating class at the University of Idaho.  
The university's first black graduate, Jennie Eva Hughes, is seated second from the right.*

racial segregation was strictly imposed in the 1880s, black students did attend the University of South Carolina for several years after the Civil War.

Segregated public higher education was not restricted to the states of the old Confederacy. In the North and border states, separate black public colleges and universities were established in Pennsylvania, Ohio, Kentucky, Delaware, Missouri, and West Virginia. Black students were not legally prohibited from applying to predominantly white state universities in these and other northern states, but it was rare for a black student to try to cross the color line.

Racial discrimination in higher education was probably less prevalent in the West than in any other region of the U.S. Although there were very few blacks living in the region, many state universities in the West admitted black students in the very early years after they were established. Undoubtedly, the small black populations in these states made it extremely impractical to establish separate public universities for blacks. It turned out then that these states had little choice but to admit black students to their predominantly white flagship institutions, which in many cases were the only institutions of higher education in the entire state. As an illustration of the early progress of

blacks in higher education in the West, it is surprising to learn that a black student earned a bachelor's degree at the University of Idaho well before any African-American student graduated from the flagship universities in Maine, Massachusetts, Connecticut, New Hampshire, New York, or Pennsylvania.

Over the course of the past year, *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education* has asked the archivist at the flagship state university in each of the 50 states for information on the first black student to earn a bachelor's degree at that institution. Many state universities had previously compiled extensive dossiers on their first black graduate and were

#### Moral Event of a Lifetime

"The civil rights movement was an expression of naked moral outrage at unnecessary human suffering. It was the great, inspiring moral event of our lifetime: the moment at which our country showed that it was still capable of moral progress and of a national moral identity."

— Richard Rorty  
*The New York Times*  
September 24, 1995

## First Black Graduates of Flagship State Universities

<b>State</b>	<b>Institution<sup>+</sup></b>	<b>Black Graduate</b>	<b>Year</b>
Alabama	University of Alabama	Vivian Malone	1965
Arizona	University of Arizona	Elgie Mike Batteau	1935
Arkansas	University of Arkansas	Maxine Sutton	1955*
		Billy Rose Whitfield	1955*
		Marjorie Wilkins	1955*
California	University of California	Charles E. Carpenter	1905
Colorado	University of Colorado	Lucille B. Jones	1918
Connecticut	University of Connecticut	Alan Thacker Busby	1918
Delaware	University of Delaware	Isaiah G. DeGrasse	1836
Florida	University of Florida	Stephan Mickle	1965
Georgia	University of Georgia	Hamilton Holmes	1963
		Charlayne Hunter	1963
Idaho	University of Idaho	Jennie Eva Hughes	1899
Illinois	University of Illinois	William Walter Smith	1900
Indiana	Indiana University	Marcellus Neal	1895
Iowa	University of Iowa	Samuel Joe Brown	1898
Kansas	University of Kansas	Blanche Ketene Bruce	1885
Kentucky	University of Kentucky	Doris Y. Wilkinson	1958
Louisiana	Louisiana State University	Charles E. Harrington	1952**
Maine	University of Maine	Ada Viola Peters	1927
Maryland	University of Maryland	Hiram Whittle	1951*
Massachusetts	University of Massachusetts	George R. Bridgeforth	1901
Michigan	University of Michigan	Gabriel F. Hargo	1870
Minnesota	University of Minnesota	Andrew F. Hileyer	1882
Mississippi	University of Mississippi	James Meredith	1963
Missouri	University of Missouri	Walter W. Hamilton	1957
		Hubert Arthur Kelly	1957
Montana	University of Montana	James W. Dorsey	1922
Nebraska	University of Nebraska	George Albert Flippin	1892
Nevada	University of Nevada	Theodore H. Miller	1930
New Hampshire	University of New Hampshire	Elizabeth Virgil	1926
New Jersey	Rutgers University	James Dickson Carr	1892
New Mexico	University of New Mexico	Oliver LaGrone	1938
New York	SUNY-Albany	Georgine Lewis	1911
North Carolina	University of North Carolina	David M. Dansby Jr.	1961
North Dakota	University of North Dakota	Frederick Pollard Jr.	1939
		Horace Johnson	1939
Ohio	Ohio State University	Sherman Hamlin Guss	1892
Oklahoma	University of Oklahoma	Ada Louis Sipuel	1951**
Oregon	University of Oregon	Mabel Byrd	1917*
Pennsylvania	Penn. State University	Calvin H. Waller	1905
Rhode Island	University of Rhode Island	Harvey Robert Turner	1914
South Carolina	University of South Carolina	Thomas M. Stewart	1875
Tennessee	University of Tennessee	Theotis Robinson	1961*
Texas	University of Texas	Edna O.H. Rhambo	1958
Vermont	University of Vermont	George W. Henderson	1877
Virginia	University of Virginia	Robert Bland	1959
West Virginia	West Virginia University	Jack Hodges	1954
Wisconsin	University of Wisconsin	William Noland Smith	1875

**Note:** State universities in Alaska, Hawaii, South Dakota, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming have no information on their first black students.

+Present name of the institution.

\*Date student enrolled, not graduated.      \*\* Graduate degree

*Source: Survey by JBHE research department.*

proud to share the information with us. In some instances, although the universities were aware of the identity of their first black graduate, they had very little biographical information on the individual. Other universities had no immediate record of the first black to earn a diploma at their institutions and as a result of our request conducted historical searches to determine his or her identity. Some universities claimed racial designations were not compiled until well after blacks had already graduated from their institutions, thus making it impossible to determine the identity of their first black graduate. Other universities, which have been unable to determine their first black graduate, have promised to conduct further research into the matter.

All told, six state universities had no information at all on their first black students. Five institutions knew the identity of the first black student who enrolled but were unsure who was the first to graduate. And two state universities knew the identity of the first black student to earn a graduate degree but were unsure of the first African American to be awarded a bachelor's degree.

The earliest black graduate of any flagship state university appears to be Isaiah G. DeGrasse who received a bachelor's degree in 1836 from Newark College (now the University of Delaware). It looks as though no other black graduated from any flagship state university until after the Civil War. During the 1870s, black students were to graduate from state universities in Michigan, South Carolina, Vermont, and Wisconsin. The last flagship state university to confer a bachelor's degree on a black student appears to be the University of Alabama in 1965, or perhaps the University of Florida that same year. Of the 44 states that had some information available, 13 of the first black graduates were African-American women.

Here is a rundown of the available information on the first black graduates of the flagship state universities in each of the 50 states:



Vivian Malone

**Alabama:** In February 1956 Autherine Lucy was the first black student to enroll at the University of Alabama at Tuscaloosa. Three days later when Lucy was leaving a classroom building, an angry mob yelling "nigger whore" hurled rocks, eggs, and tomatoes at her. She was forced to leave the scene face-down in the back of a state police car. The university suspended Lucy the next day "for her own safety" and shortly thereafter she was expelled from the university.

For the next seven years, no black students were permitted to enroll at the Tuscaloosa campus. In June 1963 Vivian Malone and James Hood entered the university under federal court order but only after Governor George Wallace had made his infamous stand in the schoolhouse door. Hood later graduated from Wayne State University. Malone maintained outstanding grades and graduated in 1965 with a degree in personnel management. Unable to find employment in Alabama, Malone worked in Washington for the Justice Department and later the Veterans' Administration. In 1969 she moved to Atlanta when her husband was accepted at the medical school at Emory University. Malone raised two children in Atlanta and worked for the Environmental Protection Agency. She also founded a successful real estate company.

**Alaska:** The University of Alaska, founded in 1917, has not been able to identify its first black graduate.

**Arizona:** The University of Arizona was founded in 1885. Early school records do not include racial classifications. The earliest black graduate of record was Elgie Mike Batteau, who received a bachelor's degree in history in 1935. While attending the university, Batteau was not permitted to live in the university dormitories or to eat at its lunch counters. A decade after graduation, Batteau earned a master's degree. She then taught at the segregated all-black Dunbar High School in Tucson. Batteau died in April 1994.

**Arkansas:** In 1948 the initial racial integration of the University of Arkansas at Fayetteville occurred in graduate programs that were not available at the racially segregated University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff. By 1954, 15 black stu-

dents were enrolled in various graduate programs. But African Americans were still not permitted to enroll as undergraduates at Fayetteville. Finally, in 1955, the first three black undergraduates — Maxine Sutton, Billy Rose Whitfield, and Marjorie Wilkins — were permitted to enter the nursing program at the Fayetteville campus. They were not allowed to live or eat on campus. All three women completed the nursing degree program.

**California:** The first black student to enroll at the University of California at Berkeley appears to be Alexander Jones of San Francisco. Jones enrolled in 1881. There is no evidence that he earned a degree, and the university has no information on what became of this educational pioneer.

The University of California archives contain a letter written by Charles E. Carpenter, a confirmed graduate of the Class of 1905, in which Carpenter claims he is the only black ever to have graduated from the school at that time. In his letter, written to secure a job as a messenger in the U.S. Senate, Carpenter wrote:

"I have learned that the capacity is usually filled by a colored man. I am inspired to strive for the position because I feel that Senator Perkins would prefer a man who is a resident of his state and furthermore a graduate from the university of his own state. And since I am the only colored graduate of the University of California, I feel that my preference might excel, in the senator's judgment, that of any other colored man east or west."

Vivian Rogers, class of 1909, was the first black woman to earn a degree at Berkeley.

**Colorado:** Records of racial classifications of students were not kept at the University of Colorado in the early part of this century. For many years, officials believed that in 1924 Ruth Cave Flowers was the first African American to graduate from the university. Flowers went on to earn a master's in education in 1930. However, recent evidence has come to light that the first black graduate was most likely Lucille Buchanan Jones, who earned a degree from the College of Arts and Sciences in 1918. A Denver couple revealed that they had visited Jones, who was then blind, at her home. Jones told them she was the daughter of James Buchanan, a black Union Army officer, and Sarah Buchanan, who was half white. The couple had moved to Denver from Virginia in 1866 to manage property for P.T. Barnum. Lucille Buchanan Jones told the Denver couple that at the time of her graduation she was informed that she was the first black

to earn a degree from the institution. Lucille Buchanan Jones died in 1989 at the age of 105.



*Alan Thacker Busby*

**Connecticut:** In 1914 Alan Thacker Busby of Worcester, Massachusetts, was denied admission at the University of Massachusetts. He enrolled at what was then Connecticut Agricultural College (now the University of Connecticut). As an out-of-state resident, Busby was required to pay \$290 per year in tuition and fees.

Busby was a football star and an honor student. Two days after graduating in May 1918, and heavily in debt, Busby enlisted in the all-black field artillery unit which served in France. Upon returning home, Busby taught at the Borden-town Industrial School in New Jersey. He later spent 20 years teaching at Alcorn State University in Mississippi and 25 years at Lincoln University in Jefferson City, Missouri. Busby continued to work at a local credit union in Jefferson City until the age of 95.



*Elbert C. Wisner*

**Delaware:** The University of Delaware at Newark was established in 1743 but did not become a degree-granting institution until 1833. The first class of graduating students in 1836 consisted of five men, one of whom, Isaiah G. DeGrasse was black. DeGrasse was from New York City. He was a member of the Delta Phi Literary Society on campus. He later earned a master of arts degree from the university in 1839. It is likely that DeGrasse was the first black student to earn a master's degree from what is now a flagship state university.

Despite DeGrasse's pioneering effort in the world of African-American higher education, the story of the integration of the University of Delaware must be told in two parts. Prior to the Civil War, Delaware was a slave state. Residents of Delaware were deeply divided on which side to support in the Civil War. The state remained in the Union, but after the war Delaware behaved very much like a southern state in its actions to disenfranchise its Negro citizens and to enforce segregation in all aspects of society. Delaware State College was established in 1891 for black

students, while Newark College remained exclusively for whites.

In 1921, when Newark College was rechartered as the University of Delaware, no black students had been allowed to enroll since the Civil War. In 1949 Elbert C. Wisner, a native of Elwood, Kansas, and a student at the University of Colorado, sought to transfer to the highly regarded engineering program at the University of Delaware. Wisner's mother was then a professor at the all-black Delaware State College. He was accepted and in 1952 graduated with a degree in electrical engineering. Wisner was the first black graduate of the modern era. He spent most of his career as a civilian electronics engineer for the U.S. Army. Now 72 years old, Wisner is an avid golfer and plays the alto saxophone and clarinet. He lives in southern New Jersey.

**Florida:** The University of Florida does not know the identity of its first black graduate. We do know that the first seven black students to attend the university as undergraduates enrolled in September 1962. One of those students, Stephan Mickle, who graduated in 1965 and who later became a county judge, reported that throughout his four years of college and three years of law school at the University of Florida, he never met another black student in any of his classes.

The initial integration of the University of Florida did not occur until 1958. In 1949 Virgil Hawkins, a member of the faculty at Bethune-Cookman College in Daytona, had applied for admission to the law school at the University of Florida. He was denied admission first by the university, then by the board of regents, then by the state attorney general, and finally by the Florida Supreme Court. At the time, Supreme Court Justice Glenn Terrell wrote that racial segregation was the natural state of human beings: "When God created man, he created each race to his own continent according to color, Europe to the white man, Africa to the black man, and America to the red man."

Finally, the state agreed to integrate the law school if Hawkins would withdraw his application. He did so and earned his law degree elsewhere. He was admitted to the Florida bar in 1977. Hawkins died in 1988. In 1992 the University of Florida, recognizing the contribution Hawkins made to the institution, named a law clinic in his memory.

**Georgia:** Established in 1785, the University of Georgia at Athens is the oldest state-chartered university in the United States. However, for the first 176 years of its history the university did not admit black students. In 1959 two black teenagers, Hamilton Holmes and Charlayne Hunter, applied for admission. Despite superior academic records, they were denied admission. The university claimed that there was no room in the dormitories for the two black students. Holmes enrolled in Morehouse College and Hunter attended Wayne State University. In 1960 they applied to the University of Georgia as transfer students. Again they were denied admission. After a four-month court battle, the two black students were ordered to be admitted. On January 9, 1961, both Holmes and Hunter were allowed to enroll. Two days later an antiblack riot rocked the campus and the atmosphere for the two black students became extremely hostile. Holmes reported that on occasion he would go entire days without anyone on campus saying one word to him. Both remained in school and graduated in 1963.

Hamilton Holmes went on to Emory School of Medicine and is now an orthopedic surgeon in Atlanta. Charlayne Hunter married Ronald Gault and they had two children. Hunter-Gault worked as a reporter for *The New Yorker* and *The New York Times* before assuming the post as national affairs correspondent for public broadcasting's *The News Hour With Jim Lehrer*.

**Hawaii:** The University of Hawaii has not been able to identify its first black graduate.

**Idaho:** Jennie Eva Hughes was born in Washington, D.C., in 1879. Her mother and stepfather headed west in the early 1880s and after stops in Pennsylvania and Oklahoma, arrived in Moscow, Idaho, in 1891. Hughes' stepfather was possibly a restauranteur or a barber or both. Hughes graduated from Moscow High School in 1895. That fall she enrolled at the University of Idaho. In 1898 she won the Watkins Medal for Oratory, the highest student honor bestowed by the university at that time. In 1899 she received a bachelor of science degree as a member of the university's fourth commencement class.

Soon after graduation, Hughes married a railroad employee who had speculated in mining stocks. The couple prospered and had four children. In 1912 the family moved to Spokane, Washington. In 1919 Hughes sent her son Berthol

to the University of Idaho. Twenty years after his mother's graduation, Berthol was only the second black to enroll at the school. Jennie Eva Hughes died in Spokane in 1939 at the age of 60. At the time of her death, she was still the only African American to earn a degree from the University of Idaho.



*William Walter Smith*

degree in 1900, the first African

American to receive a degree from the University of Illinois.

Smith took a job as a teacher and assistant principal at a high school in St. Louis while continuing his study as a civil engineer at the University of Illinois. He earned a bachelor of science degree in 1907 and a master's in civil engineering in 1913. Smith took a job with the Portland Cement Company selling steel products and engaging in construction engineering in South America. Later, the university alumni association received a change-of-address form from him. Smith listed his occupation as foreign trade and was moving from West 138th Street in Manhattan to Saunders Avenue in Philadelphia. At that time, he also notified the alumni association that he had changed his name to Walter Smith Oglesby. Oglesby was his mother's maiden name.



*Marcellus Neal*

**Indiana:** In 1870 Marcellus Neal was born in Lebanon, Tennessee. His family fled to Indiana when Union troops were pulled out of southern states and white supremacists regained control of state government. An outstanding student in high school, in 1891 Neal was offered a full scholarship to attend Indiana University in Bloomington. In 1895

Neal graduated with a degree in mathematics. Black students had attended Indiana University for at least 22 years prior to Neal's graduation, but he was the first to earn a degree.

Little is known about Neal's experiences at the university. At the time, however, Indiana University had a distinctly

southern flavor. People in the surrounding area had been proslavery and many university students and alumni were from the South. It was often remarked wryly that the Mason-Dixon line should have been moved north of Bloomington. Preston Eagleton, a black student who graduated a year after Neal, was forced to sit by himself in class because white students refused to be near him. A star football and baseball player, Eagleton was not allowed to play football against the University of Kentucky, whose coaches told Indiana officials that his presence on the field would not be tolerated.



Alexander G. Clark Jr.

**Iowa:** The earliest black graduate of record at the University of Iowa was Samuel Joe Brown, who received a bachelor's degree in 1898. Jones was from the now defunct town of Buxton, which was built by the Consolidated Coal Company to house black miners from Virginia. Brown went on to earn a law degree from the university in 1901. He was one of the founders of the National Bar Association. The university is not sure whether any other black students preceded Brown.

On the graduate level, the University of Iowa is more certain of its African-American history. Alexander G. Clark Jr. graduated from the law school in 1879, the first African American to earn a law degree in the United States.



Blanche K. Bruce

**Kansas:** Blanche Ketene Bruce was born in Brunswick, Missouri, in 1859, the same year Kansas abolitionist John Brown was executed for his failed raid on the federal arsenal at Harper's Ferry in an attempt to arm a slave rebellion. After completing secondary school in Missouri, Bruce enrolled at Lincoln University, a black college in Jefferson City.

With flagship state universities in Missouri and nearby Oklahoma closed to blacks, Bruce applied to the University of Kansas which was open to black students. The first black student to enroll at the University of Kansas was Lizzie Ann Smith in 1876, but she did not graduate. In 1885 Bruce became the first African American to receive a bachelor's degree. After graduation Bruce had a 54-year career as princi-

### "Come In But Keep Your Distance"

**W**hile the University of Kansas readily accepted black students during the 1870s and 1880s, the climate on campus was anything but welcome. An 1886 editorial in the *University Courier*, the student newspaper, describes the racial climate on campus:

"When we say there should be equality, we do not mean there should be community. No matter how much we contend against the idea, the fact remains that there is an impassable gulf between the races. Not because one is infinitely higher or better than the other, but because there is a difference in temperament and mental qualities which prevents their having little or anything in common."

For this reason we do not desire to associate with Negroes, neither do the Negroes want to associate with us. It seems a matter of mutual pleasure that the two societies should be separate and independent."

pal of a school in Leavenworth, Kansas. In 1939 he moved to Baltimore to live with a daughter. He died in 1952 at the age of 93.



Doris Y. Wilkinson

**Kentucky:** In the fall of 1954, 20 black undergraduates were admitted to the University of Kentucky. The integration of the graduate schools at the University of Kentucky had occurred five years earlier in 1949. Doris Y. Wilkinson, the valedictorian of her high school class and a member of the National Honor Society, was one of the group of 20 black undergraduate students admitted in 1954. She majored in social work with a minor in English. Wilkinson completed her course work in three and a half years and became the first African American to earn a bachelor's degree from the University of Kentucky.

Wilkinson went on to earn a master's and Ph.D. in medical sociology from Case Western University and a master's in public health from Johns Hopkins University. In 1967 Wilkinson became the first black woman appointed to the full-time faculty at the University of Kentucky. She is now a full professor of sociology at the university.

**Louisiana:** Louisiana State University does not know the identity of its first black graduate. However, the university has told JBHE that it has launched a research effort to determine the first black to receive a bachelor's degree.



*The 1900 University of Massachusetts Football Team. George Ruffin Bridgeforth, the first black graduate of the institution, is pictured at the back between the two coaches with black coats.*

Photo: News Office, University of Massachusetts.

In 1952 Charles Edward Harrington of Magnolia, Mississippi, was the first African American to earn a degree at any level from LSU. Harrington, a World War II army veteran and graduate of Southern University, received a master of education degree.

**Maine:** Ada Viola Peters was born in Bangor, Maine, and graduated from Bangor High School. She enrolled at the University of Maine at Orono to study French and in 1927 she became the first African American to earn a degree from the university. She married J. Jerome Smith in 1930. Ada Peters Smith went on to Columbia University where she received a master's in contemporary American literature in 1952. She later taught at Tuskegee University. Ada Viola Peters Smith died in Alabama on September 27, 1995.

**Maryland:** The University of Maryland does not know the identity of its first black graduate. However, the tale of the first black undergraduate student to enroll at the university is

well documented. In 1950 Hiram Whittle was a 19-year-old student at historically black Morgan State University. The local office of the NAACP approached him to be the test subject in efforts to integrate the University of Maryland at College Park. Whittle, who wanted to be an electrical engineer, a course of study not available at Morgan State at that time, agreed and became party to the litigation. On January 31, 1951, before the case came to trial, the university's board of regents on the advice of the state's attorney general voted to admit Whittle. He transferred from Morgan State but was not allowed to live in campus dormitories. Within a year, Whittle had dropped out of college and moved to New York City. Now 64 years old, Whittle has worked for the city of Baltimore since 1963.

**Massachusetts:** In 1901 George Ruffin Bridgeforth was the first African American to earn a degree from Massachusetts Agricultural College (later the University of Massachusetts). Bridgeforth was born in Westmoreland, Alabama,

ma, in 1872. He attended Talledega College in Alabama before transferring to Massachusetts. At UMass he played football, was a member of the Shakespeare Club, and was president of the YMCA. At graduation he was presented with the Flint Oratorial Prize and was asked to give a speech entitled "The Security of the Nation."

After graduation, Bridgeforth taught at the State Normal School in Atlanta. In 1904 Bridgeforth was named director of the department of agriculture at Tuskegee Institute. In 1923 the UMass alumni association received word that Bridgeforth was a "dairy man" in Athens, Alabama. In the alumni association's last correspondence with Bridgeforth in 1928, UMass' first black graduate listed his occupation as "real estate."

**Michigan:** In 1868 the first two black students, John S. Davidson and Gabriel F. Hargo, were admitted to the University of Michigan. There is no evidence that there was any controversy over their admittance. At the time the university was embroiled in a major controversy over the continued exclusion of women students.

Davidson was a student of literature but dropped out of college after only one year and died in 1892. Hargo, a native of Adrian, Michigan, studied law and was a sergeant at arms of the Lincoln Debating Society. He received a bachelor's degree in 1870. There is no information on what happened to Hargo after graduation.

**Minnesota:** In 1882 Andrew F. Hilyer became the first black to earn a bachelor's degree at the University of Minnesota. An 1895 article in the university publication *Ariel* provides much of what is known about Hilyer: "He is a mulatto who came to our institution without means or encouragement and paid his way by earnest work outside the university. He is now employed in the Treasury Department at Washington. Mr. Hilyer has there associated with the colored class and is doing much for their advancement." In 1901 Hilyer published the book *A Social Study of the Negro of Washington, D.C.* He later served as a trustee of Howard University.

**Mississippi:** James Meredith was born in Kosciusko, Mississippi, in 1933. A nine-year Air Force veteran, Meredith enrolled in 1960 at what was then called Jackson State College. He applied to the University of Mississippi in 1962

and was accepted. But Mississippi Governor Ross Barnett blocked Meredith's admission. Under federal court order and under guard of two dozen U.S. marshals with guns drawn, Meredith was finally allowed to register. Riots erupted on campus. More than 150 federal marshals were injured, 28 by gunshot. Two bystanders were killed by random gunfire. President Kennedy dispatched 3,000 federal troops who were obliged to use tear gas to restore order. Federal troops remained on campus until Meredith received his diploma in August 1963.

Meredith went on to study at the University of Ibadan in Nigeria. During a civil rights march in Mississippi in 1966, Meredith was shot. He survived and went on to earn a law degree from Columbia University in 1968. He later became a successful entrepreneur and dabbled in Republican Party politics, at one time serving on the staff of North Carolina Senator Jesse Helms.

**Missouri:** For its first 116 years, no black students were admitted to the University of Missouri at Columbia. Black students in the state seeking a higher education were expected to attend the segregated Lincoln University in Jefferson City, which was established in 1866. In the fall of 1954 the first four black students enrolled at the University of Missouri. Of these four, Walter Wesley Hamilton and Hubert Arthur Kelley, both of Kansas City, graduated in 1957. In January 1958 Nora A. Petty became the first black woman to earn a bachelor's degree from the University of Missouri.



James W. Dorsey

**Montana:** In 1897 James W. Dorsey was born in Missoula, Montana. His father was a member of the 25th Infantry which earlier had gone to Montana to fight Indians. After graduating from Loyola High School in 1918, Dorsey enrolled at the University of Montana. Dorsey worked as a janitor and a sign painter to put himself through school. An accomplished athlete in football and track, Dorsey in 1922 became the first African American to earn a degree from the University of Montana. He majored in psychology. Five years later he received a law degree from the university.

There was little work for a black lawyer in Montana, so Dorsey moved east. After unsuccessfully trying to establish

*FIRST BLACK GRADUATES OF STATE UNIVERSITIES*

a law practice in Des Moines and then St. Paul, Dorsey decided to head back to Montana. His car broke down in Fort Dodge, Iowa, and he was forced to do janitorial work at a local theater. While there he heard that the city of Milwaukee had only one practicing African-American lawyer for a black population that then numbered about 8,000. Dorsey passed the Wisconsin bar examination in 1928 and moved to Milwaukee, where he successfully practiced law for many years. He was the first black candidate ever nominated for city office and Milwaukee's first black court commissioner. He served as president of the Milwaukee chapter of the NAACP. In 1966 James Dorsey and his adopted daughter perished in a fire at their home. Dorsey was 69 years old.

**Nebraska:** George Albert Flippin, originally of Point Isabel, Ohio, enrolled at the University of Nebraska in 1892. He played left halfback for the football team and graduated in 1895. Flippin followed in his father's footsteps and went on to become a doctor.



*Theodore H. Miller* for the General Services Administration and the Mare Island Naval Shipyard. He also was a part-time instructor at Stanford University.

**New Hampshire:** Elizabeth Virgil was born in 1903, the granddaughter of a former slave. In 1926 she became the first black graduate of the University of New Hampshire. A



George Albert Flippin  
University of Nebraska  
Class of 1895

native of Plymouth, New Hampshire, Virgil majored in home economics.

After graduation she taught at the Virginia Normal and Industrial Institute in Petersburg and later at the Bowie Normal School in Maryland. She later worked in the soil conservation department at the University of New Hampshire.



*Elizabeth Virgil*

**New Jersey:** Born in Baltimore in 1868, James Dickson Carr attended public schools in New Haven, Connecticut, and Elizabeth, New Jersey. In 1886 Carr entered the Rutgers Grammar School. Two years later, graduating as the valedictorian, Carr enrolled at Rutgers College. He lived off campus in a boarding house and compiled an impressive academic record including induction into the Phi Beta Kappa Honor Society. In 1892 Carr became Rutgers' first black graduate.

Carr went on to earn a law degree from Columbia University and became an attorney in New York City. In

1899 he was named an assistant district attorney for the city of New York. In 1920, immediately before he was to be appointed a New York City



judge by Mayor John J. Hylan, Carr died of a heart attack in his Harlem home. *James Dickson Carr*

**New Mexico:** Oliver LaGrone, noted sculptor, poet, and teacher, was the first black graduate of the University of New Mexico. LaGrone was born in the Oklahoma territory in 1906. In 1930 he dropped out of Howard University where he was studying journalism. He moved his family to

Albuquerque to pursue his first love, sculpture. His early works caught the attention of University of New Mexico president James F. Zimmerman, who convinced LaGrone to enroll in the university's art department. While a student at UNM, LaGrone was commissioned to create a statue for a hospital in what was then Hot Springs, New Mexico. The town has since been renamed Truth or Consequences. The work entitled "Mercy" is a plaster sculpture of a mother holding a sick child, her hand upon his head. When the statue was unveiled, LaGrone was told not to bother to attend because no hotel in town would rent a room to a black man. The hospital has since moved to Albuquerque and the original statue remains on display. Patients often touch the statue for good luck as they enter or leave the hospital. Two bronze casts of "Mercy," considered LaGrone's most famous work, have been made and are on display at the University of New Mexico and at the Albuquerque Museum.

LaGrone graduated from UNM in 1938 and went on to further study at the Cranbrook Art Academy in Michigan. He taught in the public schools of Detroit and Harrisburg and at Pennsylvania State University. In addition, LaGrone is the author of two books of poetry.

**New York:** Evelena Williams of Westbury Station, New York, graduated from the New York State Normal School on January 25, 1884. She earned a teaching certificate from what was to become the State University of New York at Albany. She went on to become a teacher in Jamacia, New York. She later became a stenographer.

The first black to earn a bachelor's degree from the institution was Georgine Lewis in 1911. Lewis married a dentist and moved to Baltimore. She later returned to SUNY-Albany to earn a master of arts degree in 1931.

**North Carolina:** The first black undergraduate students were admitted to the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in the fall of 1955. None apparently made it through to graduation. The first black to earn a bachelor's degree at Chapel Hill was David M. Dansby Jr. Dansby majored in political science and earned his degree in 1961. Dansby later graduated from the UNC law school and has a successful law practice in Greensboro.

**North Dakota:** In 1939 two black men became the first African-American graduates of the University of North

### Swimming Pool Privileges: Black Africans Yes, African Americans, No

A decade before David M. Dansby Jr. earned a bachelor's degree at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, the graduate programs at the university were desegregated. Edward O. Diggs enrolled at the medical school in 1951. The same year, four black students enrolled at the law school. The next year, one of those students, Harvey Elliott Beech, became the first black person to earn any type of degree at UNC. Beech told JBHE an interesting anecdote about his first days on campus:

"All new students were required to take a physical. While waiting in line, I could not see the other black students who had enrolled with me. I had my physical and was presented with a swim card allowing me to use the university pool. Afterward I met the other black students who had been examined in a different room. They were not given swim cards."

"A few days later I was called into the dean's office. With great embarrassment the dean told me that the chancellor had requested that I return the swim card. I said 'Like hell, I'll return it. In fact, I don't know how to swim, so I think I'll learn.'

"I had been mistaken for a black student from Africa. Only African-American students were denied swim cards."

Dakota. Frederick Pollard Jr. earned a bachelor's degree in physical education. Horace Johnson earned a bachelor's degree in American history with minors in physical education and education.

In 1916 Pollard's father, playing halfback for Brown University, was the first African American ever to play in the Rose Bowl. Later, he was the first black man to play quarterback and to coach in the National Football League. The younger Pollard was also a gifted athlete, playing football at North Dakota. He went on to win a bronze medal in the hurdles at the 1936 Berlin Olympics where Jesse Owens' four gold medals shattered Hitler's show of Aryan supremacy. After graduation, Pollard earned a law degree from John Marshall Law School in Chicago. He served for many years as an official of the Chicago parks and recreation program.

Horace Johnson went on to a distinguished career in the U.S. Army, retiring after achieving the rank of lieutenant colonel. He later taught in the public schools in Compton, California. Johnson died in 1991 at the age of 75.

**Ohio:** In 1892 Sherman Hamlin Guss became the first black graduate of Ohio State University. He served for many years as principal of West Virginia State High School. Guss died in 1943 at the age of 73.

The first black woman to earn a degree at Ohio State was Jessie Frances Stephens, who received a bachelor's degree in modern languages in 1905. Stephens' father, an emancipated slave, worked for the brick company that provided supplies for the construction of many buildings on the Columbus campus. Jessie awoke each morning at 4 A.M. and at 6 A.M. began her four-mile walk to the campus. After attending classes, she worked cleaning rooms in a downtown Columbus office building. After graduation she taught at Florida Agricultural College and the West Virginia Collegiate Institute.

**Oklahoma:** Though the University of Oklahoma is unsure of the first African American to earn a bachelor's degree, the integration of the university's graduate programs is well documented. In 1946 Thurgood Marshall and the NAACP organized a carefully choreographed challenge to southern segregation. Ada Louis Sipuel, a young black woman who had graduated with honors from Langston University, applied to the University of Oklahoma College of Law. Because Norman, Oklahoma, where the university is located, did not allow blacks in town after sunset, Sipuel stipulated that if admitted she would commute to the law school each day from Oklahoma City. To no one's surprise, she was denied admission.

The NAACP legal team sprang into action. The case eventually reached the Supreme Court in 1948. The Court unanimously ruled that if the state did not set up a separate law school for blacks, it would be required to admit Sipuel to the University of Oklahoma. Within days Oklahoma established the Langston University College of Law located in the fourth-floor offices of the state capitol building. Three white attorneys were appointed to the faculty. When Sipuel again reapplied to the University of Oklahoma law school, her application was refused. She was once more referred to Langston.

But the NAACP had not played every card in its hand. Two days after Sipuel was rejected at the University of Oklahoma, six black students, including 68-year-old George W. McLaurin, applied to six other graduate schools at the institution. There was no graduate program for blacks at Langston in any of the six disciplines. Faced with the monumental and costly task of establishing a string of separate graduate schools for blacks, the state finally gave in. McLaurin was the first to breach the racial barrier when he

was admitted to the University of Oklahoma to pursue a doctorate in education. But because a separate black law school existed on paper, Sipuel was still denied enrollment at the University of Oklahoma College of Law. In June 1949, with McLaurin and other black students now enrolled at the Norman campus, the state closed the Langston law school and Sipuel was finally permitted to study law on the campus of the University of Oklahoma College of Law. She earned her law degree in 1951.

**Oregon:** The university is not sure of the identity of its first black undergraduate degree recipient. University officials believe that the first black undergraduate student to enroll at the University of Oregon was Mabel Byrd. She was a native of Canonsburg, Pennsylvania. She attended the University of Oregon from 1917 to 1919 but did not earn a degree.

Sherman Savage was the first black person to earn a degree at the university. He completed a master of arts in history degree in 1926. His master's thesis was entitled "Abolitionist Literature in the Mails, 1835-1836." A graduate of Howard University, Savage went on to earn a Ph.D. from Ohio State.



*Calvin H. Waller*

**Pennsylvania:** Calvin H. Waller was born in Macon, Georgia. He came to Pennsylvania State University in 1899 to learn how to be a successful farmer. Waller was a popular student who sang as a soloist in the college chorus.

He earned his degree in 1905 as Penn State's first black graduate. He then joined the faculty at Haynes Institute in Augusta, Georgia. In 1907 Waller accepted a position as instructor in vegetable gardening at Prairie View State College in Texas. In 1910 he was named chair of the department of agriculture. Waller died in 1941.

**Rhode Island:** The first black graduate of the University of Rhode Island was Harvey Robert Turner in 1914. Turner majored in civil engineering and was a member of the football and track teams. The 1936 alumni director listed his occupation as assistant treasurer of Prairie View State College in Texas.

**South Carolina:** Unlike the other flagship state universities of the South, the University of South Carolina did admit black students in the years immediately after the Civil War. Thomas McCants Stewart, a native of South Carolina, was a student at Howard University in 1874. He transferred to the University of South Carolina as a junior and the next year earned bachelor's degrees in art and the law.

Stewart practiced law in Columbia, South Carolina. He also served as a journalist reporting on conditions in the South for the *New York Age*. Later, he helped codify the law for the territory of Hawaii and the new nation of Liberia. At the end of his career, Stewart served as an associate justice on the Liberian Supreme Court.

**South Dakota:** The University of South Dakota has not been able to identify its first black graduate.

**Tennessee:** The University of Tennessee followed a similar pattern of many southern states. For more than a century and a half no black students were allowed to enroll. Then, under court order, graduate programs not available at historically black institutions were opened to Negroes. Undergraduate education was the last to be desegregated.

Theotis Robinson enrolled at the University of Tennessee at Knoxville on January 6, 1961. He was the first African-American undergraduate on campus. The identity of the first black student to earn a degree is not known. It is quite probable that several black students graduated in 1964 or 1965.

Lillian Jenkins was the first African American to earn a degree at any level. She graduated with a master's in special education in August 1954. Gene Mitchell Gray, a graduate student in chemistry, was the first black to break the color line and enroll at the University of Tennessee in 1952.



Edna Oddessa  
Humphries Rhambo

**Texas:** In 1958 Edna Oddessa Humphries Rhambo was the first African American to receive a bachelor's degree at the University of Texas. After transferring from Huston-Tillotson College in 1956, she majored in secondary education. After graduation, she taught in the public schools in Austin before moving to Denver in 1963. She later earned a master's degree in administration and supervision from Wichita State University.

**Utah:** The University of Utah has not been able to identify its first black graduate.



George Washington  
Henderson

**Vermont:** In 1850 George Washington Henderson was born a slave in Virginia. After Emancipation and the end of the Civil War, Henderson moved to Vermont in 1865. He enrolled at the University of Vermont in 1875 and graduated in 1877. In 1880

Henderson began study at Yale in theology and was ordained a congregational minister in 1888. He went on to teach theology at Straight University in New Orleans. In 1909 he accepted a position as professor of Latin, Greek, and ancient literature at Wilberforce University in Ohio. Henderson died in 1936 at the age of 86.

**Virginia:** In 1833 Catherine Foster, a free black woman, paid \$450 in cash for a two-acre plot in Charlottesville, Virginia. The tract is now a parking lot for the school's Carter G. Woodson Center for Afro-American Studies at the University of Virginia.

Although a black woman once owned property on what is now the UVA campus, no African-American student was permitted to enroll at the university during the institution's first 136 years. The state university system, rigidly segregated for decades, finally admitted Robert Bland, George Harris, and Theodore Thomas in 1955. Bland was the first to graduate. In 1959 he earned a bachelor of science degree from the School of Engineering. After graduation, Bland accepted a job with the Naval Weapons Center in Corona, California. He went on to earn both a master's and a doctorate. He is currently employed as director of the Combat Systems Projects Division of the Naval Ship Weapons Systems Engineering Station in Port Hueneme, California.



Jack Hodges

**Washington:** The University of Washington has not been able to identify its first black graduate.

**West Virginia:** In 1954 Jack Hodges was the first African American to earn a bachelor's degree at the

West Virginia University. Hodges, a journalism student, was an editor on the school newspaper.



*William Smith Noland*

**Wisconsin:** The family of William Smith Noland arrived in Madison, Wisconsin, from New York in the 1850s. His father was listed in the 1860 census as a mulatto cloth cleaner. Noland first enrolled at the University of Wisconsin in 1862 at the age of 14. He left school for seven years and reregistered for classes in 1869. He finally earned his bachelor's degree in 1875.

The Class of 1875 photograph album described Noland as having "a sanguine temperament, a logical mind, is a good

writer, and speaks in public with a slight hesitancy. He is the poet of the class and never has used tobacco or alcohol drinks."

After graduation, Noland enrolled in law school but dropped out after two semesters. Little is known about what happened to him after he left the university. He died near Edgartown, Massachusetts, on the island of Martha's Vineyard in June 1890. The local newspaper account at the time said that he had visited the island each summer for the past four or five years from his home in Providence, Rhode Island. The coroner's certificate lists the cause of death as suicide.

**Wyoming:** The University of Wyoming has not been able to identify its first black graduate.

### Princeton Review\* Surveys Campuses With the "Best" and the "Worst" Race Relations

In common with other college guides, The Princeton Review provides a lot of gossipy information and rankings. In its 1997 edition of *The Best 310 Colleges*, Princeton University is rated the number one school for academics. Florida State is the number one party school and West Point is rated the best-run campus. Dartmouth College is the number one "jock" school. The "happiest" students attend Washington and Lee University; the unhappiest attend the University of Missouri at Columbia. Deep

Springs College has the best food, whereas the food at the New College of the University of South Florida was rated the worst.

Aside from its reputation for being both witty and irreverent, Princeton Review is generally regarded as doing careful and consistent research on the important and complex issues in higher education. Among its recent findings: 1. Students now apply to more schools (seven on average). 2. Since 1980 the cost of a

four-year college degree has shot up at a rate twice as fast as inflation. 3. Only 12 percent of college students are required to write a thesis. 4. Americans borrowed \$23.1 billion to finance higher education in 1994. 5. The number of foreign students in the U.S. has doubled during the last 20 years.

Although we hesitate to report academic rankings except those based on hard statistical analysis, a recent Princeton Review ranking is newsworthy as it concerns the field of interest of JBHE. Students at 310 colleges were asked by Princeton Review to rate their institutions as to the state of race relations on their campuses. Princeton Review tabulated the results and published rankings of the 20 campuses where black and white students were said to intermingle freely and without hostility and the 20 campuses where race relations appear to be strained. The results are shown in the two accompanying boxes.

#### INSTITUTIONS WITH THE "WORST" RACE RELATIONS

1. Miami University
2. Vanderbilt University
3. Villanova University
4. Hampden-Sydney College
5. Washington and Lee Univ.
6. St. Lawrence University
7. Cornell University
8. Univ. of Calif. at Santa Barbara
9. Emory University
10. University of Vermont
11. Duke University
12. Syracuse University
13. University of Notre Dame
14. Baylor University
15. University of Richmond
16. Fairfield University
17. Gettysburg College
18. Providence College
19. Boston College
20. Northwestern University

Source: Princeton Review.

#### INSTITUTIONS WITH THE "BEST" RACE RELATIONS

1. U.S. Military Academy
2. U.S. Naval Academy
3. Cooper Union
4. N.C. School of the Arts
5. Eastman School of Music
6. St. John's College (Md.)
7. Bennington College
8. Calif. Inst. of Technology
9. Boston Conservatory
10. Harvey Mudd College
11. Marlboro College
12. Juilliard School
13. S.F. Conservatory of Music
14. Mount Holyoke College
15. Whittier College
16. Simon's Rock Coll. of Music
17. Berklee College of Music
18. Bryn Mawr College
19. New Coll. of the Univ of S. Fla.
20. Parsons School of Design

Source: Princeton Review.