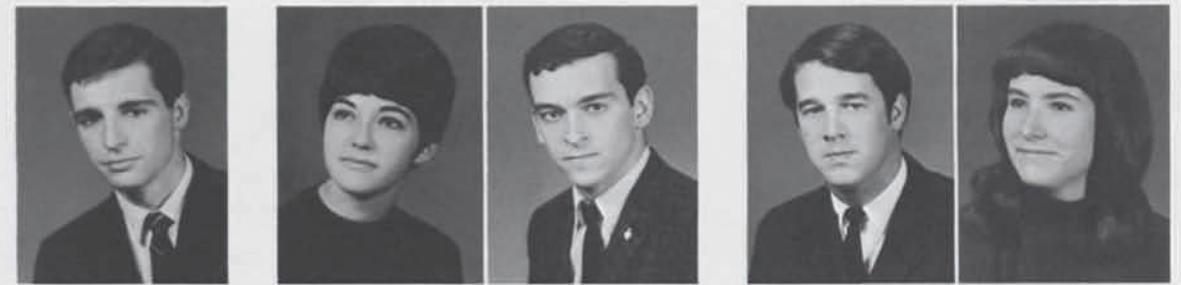


# “YOU CAN'T BE WHAT YOU DON'T SEE”

Black alumni from the 1960s to the 2010s recall the challenges and opportunities of their time on campus, and share their hopes for Penn State's future.

As told to ROBYN PASSANTE '95 COM and RYAN JONES '95 COM | Photographs by CARDONI



**A RARE SIGHT**  
On campus or in the pages of *La Vie*, Black students like William Collins made up a small fraction of the student body in 1969.



## “We Needed to Come Together”

*William “Rick” Collins ’69 Lib was on campus during a tumultuous time, and the Philadelphia native immersed himself in the fight. After Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated in April 1968, the governor of Pennsylvania wanted flags flown at half-staff, but university administrators wouldn’t comply. So, Collins says, he and other Black student leaders went to the Old Main lawn and “broke the locks and lowered them. There’s a picture in the yearbook of me taking down the state flag.” The first in his family to finish college, Collins was a member of Omega Psi Phi fraternity, and in 1967, he helped to form the Frederick E. Douglass Association to advocate for Black students, faculty, and staff. After earning a master’s degree from Bryn Mawr College, Collins spent 45 years counseling veterans and victims of PTSD, domestic violence, and other issues, and 28 years in the Army—three on active duty, 25 in the reserves. He says he loves Penn State despite its past and present flaws. “I don’t quite bleed blue and white,” he says, “but close.”*

**AFTER DR. KING WAS MURDERED**, the collective Black Penn State student community was galvanized by the failure of the university’s leadership to lower the flags. We needed to come together because we were totally excluded from this campus. There was nothing in the curriculum that even indicated we existed. I remember a professor told me that he thought Black people were pretty satisfied with slavery as it happened, that they weren’t really *unhappy* with it.

So through the Frederick Douglass Association (DA), the Black students drew up a list of demands. We wanted Black history courses and Black faculty members. We wanted guidance counselors familiar with African American communities and cultures, places where we came from. And we wanted Penn State to recruit Black students, because Penn State did not recruit the inner city back then. At the time, there were about 200 Black students, and just one Black faculty member.

After months of intransigence from the university’s representatives regarding our demands, the DA community green-lighted the need for direct action—sit-ins, walkouts, marches—and indirect action such as teach-ins, forums, press conferences, and lobbying the University Senate, the University Student Government, and the Interfraternity Council.

In January of 1969, I got to be president of the DA, more or less by default—the president and the vice president both had dropped out. We had a march planned that April, and Joe Paterno called me up at the fraternity house and said,

“My ball players are thinking about joining the demonstrations. I’m thinking about playing ball.” And I said, “They’re going to have to do what they’re going to have to do.”

Paterno told the players, “You guys can go on demonstrations, but if you get picked up, locked up, you’re off the team totally.” **Charlie Pittman ’70 Bus** and I talked about that years later. Some of the football players did participate. We marched right up South Allen and walked into Old Main and built a brick wall in front of President Eric Walker’s office. Real bricks, painted black. The students—the sisters and brothers, as we called them—who were engineering and architecture majors, they made it so the wall didn’t fall down.

We finally sat down with Eric Walker, and he lied to us. He said, “We can’t do this. We’d have to change the world to recruit more Black students and Black faculty.”

But we kept fighting. We approached Black people with influence, like state Rep. K. Leroy Irvis, the most powerful Black elected official in Pennsylvania at the time, and Dr. Charles Davis, the lone Black faculty member, who helped pave the way for us to address the University Senate. We even took a busload of 50 Black students to Harrisburg to directly address our state representatives.

Every week Black students were somewhere pushing for our agenda. My fraternity, Omega Psi Phi’s Nu Chapter, held a dominant role in my life and at that time was the most influential of the Black fraternities on Penn State’s campus. Black women were also key to our community’s endeavors. **Cynthia Cotten ’69 Lib, Beverly Rouse ’69 Lib**, and many more held up more than half the sky in terms of leadership, work ethic, and what we now call “Black girl magic.”

Finally, Leroy Irvis spoke to Eric Walker on our behalf, and the next year Penn State included \$1 million in the budget for recruiting Black students. The number of Black students went from 200 to about 800 in one year, because they reached out to the inner-city high schools. They started reaching out to places like Pittsburgh and Harrisburg and Philly, Erie and Allentown, wherever Black kids lived.

It was a highly emotional time, but we came together. I knew that our people had helped build Penn State; through Roosevelt’s Public Works projects, they had literally helped to build up the campus. So I knew we stood on the shoulders of Black people who preceded us. Each generation of Black Penn Staters has made an imprint, and has taken the ball a little further down the field.

PREVIOUS SPREAD: LAVIE



## “For Black Students, Self-Advocacy Is Heightened”

*Candice Crutchfield '18 Lib came from a predominantly Black high school in Virginia in search of “a big school with a football team.” A Bunton-Waller Fellow and member of both the Presidential Leadership Academy and Schreyer Honors College, she says her time at University Park was very positive—and, at times, disheartening. “You can hold two things at once,” says Crutchfield, a program analyst of issues related to women’s incarceration at the Vera Institute of New York City. She remains active with the PLA as an alumna and occasionally advises current editors at The Underground, which she co-founded.*

**AT SCHREYER, I FELT LIKE THE TOKEN** Black student a whole lot—being sought out for photo or video opportunities. I knew the people responsible for those materials, and I did appreciate that they sought me out, but at the same time I always thought to myself, *What does it look like to prospective students seeing one Black person in all these marketing materials? When they come to campus and actually ask me about my experience, can I honestly tell them that this is the best place to be? And how do I feel about myself trying to market something that I may or may not believe in?* It’s really odd. I tell everybody that I

“YOU CAN’T BE WHAT YOU DON’T SEE”

loved Penn State and I had so many great experiences, but when I think about some of the things that I don’t talk about, I realize not everything was happy-go-lucky all the time.

When I was finishing up my first semester in December 2014, I participated in a series of “die-in” protests after Ferguson, Mo., police officer Darren Wilson was not indicted for shooting and killing Michael Brown. Students would meet up somewhere on campus—outside Old Main, in the library, in the HUB—and at the signal we would lie on the ground in complete silence, which was a symbol of how Michael Brown’s body was left in the street with no care for far too long. Primarily white men would walk among the Black students, “accidentally” kicking people and saying things like “I wish I had metal cleats on so I could stomp all over them.” We were called all kinds of racial slurs while many of us had tape over our mouths or were holding Black Lives Matter signs. I knew then that I had to figure out how to navigate through a racially ignorant campus.

My friend and I watched the student media groups attempt to cover the protests and the general campus unrest, and no matter what we read, there was something missing. Very few Black or brown students were quoted or cited, and if they were it was always the same person in every article. Then early the next semester, broadcast journalist Soledad O’Brien came to campus, and her message was that if you want something and you don’t see it happening, make it happen. As we walked back to the dorm afterward, we talked about how cool it would be to have a campus media outlet that was actually tailored to the experiences of people who look like us and who could cover protests and issues in a more holistic way, because we’ve experienced these things and we know the kinds of questions to ask. We wanted to create a media outlet that would cover things we didn’t even see covered in other outlets. So we gathered a few friends and we made it happen, launching *The Underground* that year. By the time we graduated there were over 30 students from diverse backgrounds and experiences all covering campus news for *The Underground*.

Every college student is learning to advocate for themselves as they’re becoming adults. But for Black students, that self-advocacy is heightened. You have to go out of your way to find safe spaces and safe people and mentors who understand your experience. I felt safe here because I knew where to go to feel safe. College was great for me overall. Sure, we had our problems, but I love my university—we are Penn State. I would recommend it to Black students, with the caveat that you’re going to have to do a lot of work for yourself that your white peers will not have to do.

## “You’re Always Second-Guessing Whether You’re Good Enough”

*Originally from Chicago, **Kyler Sherman-Wilkins '15 MA, '17 PhD Lib** spent part of his youth in rural southern Illinois, so he felt prepared for the demographics he encountered in Happy Valley. He earned his master’s and doctorate at University Park, then left in 2017 for a job at Missouri State University, where he’s an assistant professor in the department of sociology and anthropology.*

**PENN STATE’S ONE OF THE** few places that has a dual Ph.D. in sociology and demography, and I thought it would be the best place for my training. The transition wasn’t that bad; I was used to being in predominantly white spaces. I was the only Black male grad student out of 60 or 70 people—there were three Black women, and me. Especially in grad school, there’s the whole idea of imposter syndrome, feeling like you don’t belong. You’re critiqued by largely white faculty, and you’re always second-guessing whether you’re good enough.

The only explicit thing I experienced was the pushback against calls to recruit more diverse students and faculty to the department. People were reluctant to have conversations. But the challenge is the implicit things, the microaggressions. There was a time I gave a lecture as a TA, and as part of the study guide, I gave the class a list of resources. I put my name on it, and the professor took issue with that: “Why is it so important for you to put your name on things?” In many ways, it’s easier dealing with explicit racism; you can point to it and

say, “That person called me the n-word.” This felt covert, like not remembering your place.

I think as Black professors, we have these conversations in our heads constantly: *If there’s an issue, how much of it is because I’m outspoken or strong-willed, and how much of it is because I’m Black?* I’ve never been able to really sort through that. Whatever the intent, it’s still the reality that you feel you’re treated differently. And it doesn’t help when you’re the only Black man there.

Eventually some of the Black graduate students formed a group called “the Dashikis,” and we got together once a month to talk and support each other. I was concerned with issues facing undergraduates, too. I was involved with the LGBT students of color, and I got a lot of insights in that area. My family was very accepting when I came out, and I was struck by the disproportionate number of Black youths who were alienated from their families. It really opened my eyes to challenges at the intersection of being a person of color and LGBT.

My experience at Penn State has shown me how important it is to be an advocate for making predominantly white institutions safer for Black students. That’s the main reason I’m committed to staying at Missouri State. My job is to expose people who usually don’t think about diversity to start thinking about it. There’s a lot of fertile ground here for that. It would be easy to go to Chicago or an HBCU, but I feel like I’m needed here, and my experience at Penn State really solidified that.

## "I Know How to Fit In"

Tom Hogan's Penn State affiliation spans more than 30 years. A professor of human resource management, Scholar-in-Residence at the Center for the Performing Arts, and a Teaching and Learning with Technology Faculty Fellow, Hogan '77 MPA Lib, '83 MRP IDF was recently appointed to the SHRM Blue Ribbon Commission on Racial Equity. He spent his first 13 years in Pittsburgh's Hill District, which was predominantly Black, before moving to predominantly white Penn Hills, which he says helped to prepare him for University Park. "It is a great university," Hogan says. "And we can do better."



**I GOT MY UNDERGRADUATE DEGREE** at Point Park University in downtown Pittsburgh; it was a small school, but it had students and faculty from around the world. When I got to Penn State for graduate school, I saw that it was not nearly as diverse as Point Park. But I'm flexible, I'm adaptable, and I know how to fit in, get along with people, and collaborate. So the transition was not hard for me. From day one, Penn State was an extremely positive experience for me.

I'd only been taking classes for a couple weeks when the director of the Institute of Public Administration, Dr. Robert Mowitz, offered me a graduate research assistantship. I did that for a year, and that was a great experience. I suspect being a student of color had something to do with (getting the job); they probably had some research assistantship left open, and they were checking out the student body for the first week or two. But I was very grateful for that. And in my second year, I became an RA, and that was great. I don't recall having any issues related to the fact that I was a person of color. It was just the craziness of dealing with freshmen—firecrackers under the door, that kind of thing.

What I didn't have were Black professors, advisers, or mentors. None. And that's an issue, because as a Black man I've experienced many instances of bias and discrimination over the years; how can someone who hasn't had those experiences be the most effective mentor to me as a young Black man? They don't understand; they live in a different world. It's important that we have faculty and staff who are representative of our student body, because students will seek out guidance from people they're comfortable with. And that doesn't mean that a Black student will necessarily seek out a Black faculty member. But the student should have the choice.

Having said that, I found my faculty members to be supportive of what I was trying to do in the classroom. They supported me in terms of giving me a graduate research assistantship, and hiring me as an RA. Penn State Career Services introduced me to the AT&T branch manager in Bala Cynwyd, Pa., which led to a 23-year career with AT&T. It was a transformative experience for me coming to Penn State. It was the realization of a lifetime dream to come here.



## "We Developed Our Own Culture"

*Consuelo "Conni" Miller '65 Lib majored in social welfare because, she says, that and education were the main career options for Black women. After earning a master's degree at the University of Chicago in social service administration, she shifted to working with minority- and women-owned businesses and as a nonprofit development consultant in Chicago. At 60, she entered law school and finished her career as an attorney.*

**I CAN'T SAY I WAS FRUSTRATED** that I couldn't do this or go there, in part because Black people kind of learned, during the Jim Crow era, where they could and could not be comfortable, and passed that on to their children. There were 200 of us on a campus of 20,000 students. We had two African American sororities, and as soon as we landed on campus we were pursued, so we made friends fairly quickly. I rushed Alpha Kappa Alpha my freshman year.

I didn't always feel welcome everywhere on campus, but that was one of the values of having an Afrocentric social network—we kind of developed our own culture. That insulated us from most hurts we felt because of not being accepted in various situations. I did get involved in Thespians. I was not onstage—they weren't putting on plays for which there were roles that made sense for a Black woman—but I

liked to sew, so I said, Well, I can contribute by making costumes. So that's what I did.

By my senior year, we had formed an NAACP chapter, and I was president. We were the group that brought Dr. King to campus. If I'm starstruck, I tend to try not

to show it, but I'm sure we were; you're in the presence of greatness. The mission of the organization was all about civil rights, voter registration, voter education, so to have the primary spokesman of the day there was very impressive. Afterward, I wrote to the university president [Eric Walker] about his not being present. He told me he had something to do that was critically important, and that he was actually off campus while King was here. I still have those letters.

I was dismayed that I hadn't had any African American instructors until I took an art class in my senior year, and a Black woman was the professor. That experience was probably the one that stood out most from a standpoint of race, because at the end of the semester, she gave me a B plus and then took me aside to say to me, "You really did A work, but you understand why I had to give you a B plus."

I did understand, but it still wasn't right. I didn't like it, and yet I wasn't sure what I should or could do about it. How do you go through four years, finally get one Black professor, and would you want to raise a stink that makes her look bad? What she was really saying was that she wasn't secure enough in her position to give Black students the best grades, or the grades they earned, because she might be accused of favoritism. It's one of those things I guess I will never forget.



## “I Need You to See Me”

*Whitney Stringer '07 Lib grew up in State College, then spent two years at Indiana University of Pennsylvania before transferring to Penn State, where she got involved in Black Caucus and Latino Caucus. Today she works in Washington, D.C., as a brand strategist and founder of Whitney Stringer PR & Events. She's served on Alumni Council and is involved with the African-American Alumni Organization of D.C. and Penn State Professional Women's Network of Metro Washington.*

**I HAD AN IDEA OF WHAT PENN STATE** would be like in terms of diversity; I recognized that if I was only choosing from the typical classes, I would miss out. So I made sure my curriculum included Black history; for a science credit, I took a course on the geography of African nations, and I chose West African dance for an elective. I sought to broaden my coursework and felt enriched by doing so. My junior year I participated in a study abroad program; I was the only Black student in a program that sent 20 Penn Staters to the University of Salamanca. That semester was so eye-opening and rewarding; I would've liked to see Penn State do more to foster international experiences for other students who looked like me.

It wasn't until I moved away and gained a much broader worldview that I could see how this familiar place, which is still warm with memories, is so homogenous. My family goes

to the Nittany Lion Inn for Christmas dinner, and one year, I looked around and realized, *Everyone here is white. How did I never notice this as a kid?* When I expressed this revelation to my family they said, “That’s how it’s always been, Whitney.”

I often hear this notion that State College is a bubble. I heard that recently from some of my best girlfriends I grew up with. There are eight of us—three of us are Black, one is Indian, the others are white, and now we are all Penn State alumni. We have had quite a few conversations in the past couple of months; I really felt disappointed that I didn't hear from them after the protests began to at least say, “We know things are tough and we're checking in on you.” But when I made those feelings known, I was disappointed to hear, “Well, racism isn't a problem in Happy Valley,” or “we just don't see color.” One friend even suggested “I know you're in a big city and things are different,” to which I responded, “That's not it. I don't experience much racism in D.C. It's half Black here.”

I need my friends, former classmates, and fellow alumni to see that I am a Black woman, and all that that means. I am Black, I am a Penn Stater, I love God, and I'll continue to be an advocate for not just equality but celebrating true diversity, and that certainly extends to my blue and white community. I vow to see you for who you are. And in that same way, I need you to see all of me too.

**Chad Washington '98 Com** grew up middle class in Houston. A Collegian sportswriter while on campus, Washington has spent his career in media, and now works as a sportswriter at the Fort Bend (Tex.) Herald. He's an involved member of the Alumni Association's Houston chapter: “Watching Penn State football with a bunch of people is the best, no matter what color we are.”

**IT WAS A WEIRD DECISION,** coming up from Texas. I took a chance, and people were great. I met a lot of white people from small towns, farm towns, and I felt like it was my job to make them comfortable; that's just who I was. I remember a couple

## “They Didn't Know What to Make of Me”

of guys down the hall one year from western Pennsylvania, they didn't interact a whole lot with Black people. They didn't know what to make of me: I like “white” music, I can play hockey. We had *NHL '94* on Sega, and I kept beating them. They couldn't believe it. *How's this Black guy so good at hockey?* It was just people from different backgrounds trying to interact. It was the same with a lot of the Black students I met; I didn't understand the kids from New York and Philly. These students were from hardcore areas, and I

couldn't relate.

There was one incident my sophomore year. I was trying to find a party at “graduate towers,” and I didn't know they meant Beaver Canyon. I went to the old graduate housing on campus, walked around looking for someone I knew. And the campus police pulled up. They're asking me questions, and they put me on the car and patted me down. They didn't arrest me, but they detained me. Eventually they told me someone was robbing cars in the area. I was like, “Well, not

me. You had no reason to stop me. I'm not carrying hubcaps.”

One of the police had been talking to this white woman, while his partner kept his eye on me. I'm thinking, *That's probably the woman who called the police.* He came back and said I was free to go; he seemed angry that she called for nothing. I will say this: I cried later that night. That was the first time I'd ever had that happen. My dad worked in law enforcement. He taught me all this stuff—what to do and how to handle things, and I took it to heart.

But for the most part, the town was great, and people treated me well. Penn State was a big gamble for me, and it paid off.



Asia Grant came to Penn State as a Bunton-Waller Scholar and found compatibility with peers in the Presidential Leadership Academy and Schreyer Honors College. Today, Grant '17 Bus is a digital consultant with Capco and co-founder of a vegan skincare line, Redoux. She also is president of the Scholar Alumni Society Board and a member of Alumni Council.

**I WANTED TO BE A PART OF SCHREYER** because of the coaching of my mentor, who was also a Black woman Schreyer Scholar from the class of 2014, which allowed me to see how following in her footsteps would benefit my academic and professional career. She showed me it was more than just the thesis; it was the access and network you gain after graduation that gave Schreyer value. I wouldn't have been aware of this if she was not there to enlighten me.

But you can't be what you don't see. I've been a big voice in saying we need to be able to have Black students within Schreyer feel like they're supported and that they actually belong here, because it's always been a challenge, just as it's been a challenge at Penn State as a whole. How can we make sure minority students feel represented, and we're not pushing them away? Since graduation, I've been encouraged by the hiring of Lynette Yarger, Schreyer's first assistant dean for equity and inclusion. As president of the Scholar Alumni Society Board, I am actively working with her and the college to find ways to utilize our alumni to create a more inclusive environment for underrepresented students so they feel they belong. I'm trying to give back, in the best way I know how, to a community that gave so much to me.

## “It's Always Been a Challenge”

Shawn Manderson played baseball at Penn State Hazleton for two years before transferring to Brandywine to pursue an information science technology degree. Today, Manderson '03 IST is director of Global SOCR Compliance Program and Integrated Assurance Audit at ADP. He has served on Alumni Council and the Brandywine Alumni Society and campus advisory board, where he established a scholarship. “I wanted to show students of color, particularly Black men, that you can lead in a traditionally white institution.”

**I DO BELIEVE THE STRENGTH** of the University is the Commonwealth System because

## “The Strength of the University Is the Commonwealth System”

of stories like mine. It's easy to think that our Penn State experience is valid only if we attend University Park; my journey started at Hazleton and finished at Brandywine because I wanted a more culturally diverse experience. There was never a thought of “do I stay at Penn State,” or any expectation that University Park was supposed to be as diverse as NYC or Philadelphia.

Cultural diversity was important based on my experiences

growing up, and I found this at Brandywine. I felt comfortable there because the student body population was very diverse, and that contributed to the positive experience I had. But a pivotal moment for me was Sept. 11, two weeks into my first fall semester at Brandywine. Not only was my home city under attack, but I noticed a whole different racial divide.

It was noticeable that Muslim and Middle Eastern students

were looked at differently, and to me, that wasn't right. I took a stand and spoke up out of empathy because as a Black man, I know very well what it means to be judged based on your skin color. This ultimately led me to get involved with the International Awareness Club (IAC), which was focused on educating on global news and events that directly impacted our international students. This was about representation and being thoughtful in how we delivered this information across campus. My time with the IAC expanded my views of people and their experiences with race, but more importantly, I learned how to be an ally to others.

## “Be Vocal, Get Involved”

Philadelphia native Tracey Baker first went to Florida A&M, a historically Black university, but wasn't happy there. She fell in love with the University Park campus after attending a friend's graduation, and transferred to Penn State her sophomore year. Today, Baker '93 H&HD holds two master's degrees, and her career as a health insurance IT specialist for the U.S. government spans 20 years. She's also working toward her law degree. She serves on Alumni Council, has been an undergraduate admissions mentor and has chaired the Black Alumni Reunion. “We've been an invisible constituent. People need to see that Black alumni are here.”



**I'D READ A BOOK CALLED** *When and Where I Enter: The Impact of Black Women on Race and Sex in America*, and another book by the same author, *In Search of Sisterhood*, about the history of Delta Sigma Theta. I was so impressed learning how Black sororities had impacted the civil rights movement, so I pledged Delta my junior year, became president of my chapter, and learned a lot about activism and public service.

There was a comfort level in being part of an organization with people who have many of the same experiences and background. Safety is always a consideration, and not knowing what you might come across in other, white spaces. I

never experienced overt racism, as other Black alumni have said they had at Penn State. There were the subtleties, the micro-aggressions, but being with my sorority sisters maybe helped insulate me from feeling out of place or unsafe.

In hindsight, I wish that I had been involved with other student organizations, like Lion Ambassadors or student government. I didn't really know about many of those groups. They have more influence than the Black organizations, but they are mostly white. A lot of the Black students stayed in Black student groups—which, to be clear, were created initially because we were not allowed to join historically white organizations. So there's that history, and the comfort of being where you know you'll be accepted. I think that many Black students are also focused on their day-to-day—staying in school, staying safe, dealing with family situations they may have at home. So it's partially the bubble of wanting to stay in your comfort zone, and it's partially due to the university needing to do a better job of being more inclusive.

It's fine to want to be in a comfortable place, but comfort sometimes inhibits growth. I've said that to Black alumni who did not have a good experience at Penn State. I think the only way the university changes is if you do something about it. Be vocal, get involved, so things will get better. Do you want every successive generation to fight this fight? We are here. Be someone who's willing to try and fix what's broken.

“YOU CAN’T BE WHAT YOU DON’T SEE”

## “Two of You Won’t Be Here By Graduation”

*Darryl Daisey '83 Bus has spent his career in supply chain management and is currently a principal sourcing manager for Exelon in Philadelphia. In 2007, he began to compile information for the “Penn State University African American Chronicles,” a chronicle of the struggles and successes of African Americans at Penn State that lives at [blackhistory.psu.edu](http://blackhistory.psu.edu). The Lewes, Del., native came to Happy Valley with his twin brother, Darnell '83 Bus, as part of the then-Black Scholars program.*

**I HAD WANTED TO GO TO PENN STATE** since I was a freshman in high school—I only applied to one college. My twin brother and I were both resident assistants, and we had similar experiences. I had heard the word before, but I had never been called the n-word in anger until I got to college. Penn State was probably less than 2 percent Black at the time, so for the most part, everyone on my dorm floors was white. Usually things were great until people started partying on the weekends. As an RA, as long as they kept their parties contained, I was not busting into their rooms. But sometimes I had to break things up, and I’d say every other time I did, the n-word came out. Typically, a day or two later, the kid would apologize. I dismissed it sometimes as more ignorance than malice. I felt I needed to ignore that type of noise, but sometimes it was harder than others. There were a couple of instances I’d chase people down and take them to the dorm director. Most of the time all they could do was just give them a slap on the wrist.

I understood Penn State was predominantly white, but I guess I didn’t know it would be that different. I think generally people who grew up in predominantly Black areas struggled more than people who grew up in more diverse or predominantly white areas. I’d never had an issue working with people of any race. I didn’t view it as something that should be a problem.

That said, in four years I only had one Black faculty member, and that was for an African American studies class. Darnell and I spent a lot of time working with student groups like the Undergraduate Student Government, East Halls Black Student Union, and the Black Caucus, doing what we could to advocate for more Black faculty, staff, students, and programming while we were students. For a lot of Black students, you could tell it was difficult. I remember attending a freshman orientation, conducted by the Black Caucus, where we were told to “look to your left, look to your right; two of you won’t be here by graduation.” I don’t know the statistics, but I would say that was a fair statement at the time. Penn State is much better at Black student retention today, but there is room for improvement. ♥



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