

**Herman B. Wells:
Champion for Racial Equality at Indiana University**

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Herman B. Wells, President of Indiana University for 25 years, was instrumental in promoting racial equality on the campus. Driven by the ideals of democracy and blessed with a unique and effective style of leadership, Wells was the driving force behind the desegregation of the campus. The following paper provides a historical account of Wells' efforts in desegregating the Indiana Memorial Union, athletic teams, campus housing, and local restaurants.

The state university is the crown of the public school system, and as *such* should both by precept and by example vitalize the democratic way of life. In its own organization and operation [the university] must set a dramatic example of democracy in action inspiring to all citizens of the state (Clark, 1977b, p. 382).

So spoke Herman B. Wells on December 1, 1938 when he was inaugurated as the eleventh president of Indiana University, a position he would hold for the next 24 years. In his speech, Wells articulated his firm belief in the ideals of democracy, a principle which would guide him throughout his years of leadership at the university. According to Indiana faculty member, Henry Remak:

Wells believed, with all his heart and mind, the access to education was absolutely fundamental to democracy. Giving the African American more access, and ultimately, complete access, both socially and residentially as well as academically, was something that was simply part of his belief in democracy that was practical rather than talked about. (Brancolini & Metz, 1993)

Indeed, over fifteen years before the 1954 *Brown vs. Board of Education* court decision legally mandated racial desegregation, the campus of

Indiana University was already making great progress towards integration under the guiding hand of Wells. However, in order to grasp the vision that Wells possessed, it is necessary to understand that he was living in a world that had not yet adapted the idea of racial equality.

Background

Educational policy of the day was shaped by the "separate but equal" doctrine which was endorsed in the *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) decision (Pilgrim, 1985; Stefkovich & Leas, 1994). Reflecting the social mores of the time, the decision maintained that "such separation does not imply inferiority of either race, that there were time when and places where the races preferred separation, and that it was within the police power of the states to pass legislation requiring separate facilities" (Stefkovich & Leas, 1994, p. 408). Unfortunately, the equality promised by *Plessy* was never realized. This was especially true with regard to the treatment of Blacks at colleges, where they were confronted with racism in nearly every aspect of their experience (Pilgrim, 1985).

Indiana University proved to be no exception. According to Frank O. Beck, former curator of the Beck Chapel, "In the year 1920, when the University entered upon its second century of history, the highly difficult field of race relations was undoubtedly its most insistent and unsolved problem" (Beck, 1959, p. 29). Unfortunately, at this time, "Little if any efforts of the administration to correct the situation were made public" (Beck, 1959, p. 33). However, it is important to keep in mind that this was a time when racial discrimination was commonplace throughout the United States (Stauffer, 1966), including the state of Indiana (Clark, 1977). According to Madison, "Racism and segregation were common experiences for most blacks in Indiana. . . It was nearly impossible to find in Indiana a public place, institution, or group where whites accorded blacks an equal and open reception" (1982, p. 8). Furthermore, the Ku Klux Klan had a strong presence in the state, and "By 1925, the Klan controlled the governorship, the legislature, and the Hoosier mind" (Gilliam, 1985, p. 42).

Despite the forces that kept racism part of the status quo, "Important changes in race relations occurred as institutions of higher education were forced to reconcile their own traditions with the national

and international struggles against nazism, anti-Semitism, and racism” (Cobb, 1998, p.1). Indeed, Indiana University was poised and ready for a change with regard to issues of racial equality on campus. Soon the “University was to have a new President, and with him, as it proved, a new approach to the problem at hand” (Beck, 1959, p. 35).

The Rise of Herman B. Wells

In 1902, seven years after Indiana University graduated its first black student (Beck, 1959), Herman B. Wells was born in Jamestown, Indiana (Wells, 1980). Young Herman’s character and values were shaped to a large degree by his parents, both educators, who placed a premium on education, hard work, and integrity. Early in Wells’ life he received a lesson from his father in the importance in holding fast to your beliefs. As Wells recalls, the Ku Klux Klan offered his father an ultimatum to dismiss a schoolteacher whose views were contrary to their own. When the senior Wells refused to dismiss the teacher on those grounds, the Klan began a rumor, which closed down his bank. “Nevertheless, [according to the younger Wells] my father did not think of yielding to that kind of immoral pressure” (Wells, 1980, p. 23). This incident in his young life foreshadowed Wells’ leadership style.

With the lessons and values of his parents and a sound education firmly in place, Wells quickly worked his way up the ranks of the banking industry in the state of Indiana and then the administrative ladder at Indiana University (Bantin & Capshew, 2000; Brancolini & Metz, 1993; Wells, 1980). After serving for one year as the acting president of the university, Wells was elected, by a unanimous vote of the board of trustees, the youngest president ever to serve IU.

With the Wells administration began a new era for the university, and a new era with regard to racial relations on campus. According to IU historian, Thomas Clark,

Acting President Herman B. Wells came into office at one of the most dramatic moments in Indiana and American educational history. From 1937 to 1946 the United States and the world would make the heaviest calls on capable human resources in the history of civilization. These demands would shatter the old

objectives and ideals of the Bryan period and destroy complacency in academia in Bloomington. Herman B. Wells proved alert to the signals of the time and determined not to allow his institution to dawdle. (1977a, p. 3)

Wells immediately dove into the role of the presidency and began setting an agenda to make positive changes for Indiana University. According to Wells, “One of the most time-consuming and important responsibilities relating to students that occurred during my administration involved the effort to shake off our previous university practices that discriminated against Black students...” (Wells, 1980, p. 214).

While some of his contemporaries were content to let *Plessy’s* “separate but equal” philosophy govern their campuses, Wells saw that this doctrine was against his fundamental beliefs and would not be sufficient or acceptable for his university. As declared by Wells:

We must renounce prejudice of color, class, and race... Where? In England? In China? In Palestine? No! We must renounce prejudice of color, class and race in Bloomington, Monroe County, Indiana. (Thornbrough, 1962, p. 68)

The young visionary had the insight to see that racial inequality had no place in a country that espoused freedom and equality.

Unity for the Union

Today the Indiana Memorial Union is a place where the entire campus community is encouraged to congregate. However, in the late 1930’s, many restrictions existed which limited the use of this facility for black students. One of the first successes of the Wells administration with regard to integrating the campus was in eliminating segregation from the Union (Wells, 1980).

One method of restricting students of color from the Union was through the use of “reserved” signs which were placed at a limited number of tables within the Union Commons (Beck, 1959; Wells, 1980; Yancey, 1989). Black students were only allowed to eat their meals at the designated tables; if the tables were full, the black students

were forced to stand or eat elsewhere. Furthermore, the Commons was one of their few dining options, since people of color were banned from eating in the local restaurants at that time.

A letter to Wells from Charles Stewart, a local high school teacher, expresses his concern about the Union policies after he and some members of the Kappa Alpha Psi fraternity, a black fraternity on campus, were prevented from eating in the Men's Grille. The men were informed that "it was the policy of the University not to serve colored people in the Grille" (April 22, 1942). In response to Stewart's letter, Wells made an inquiry into the current Grille policies. The Union director informed Wells of the following:

At the present the policy stands that the colored people are to have access to the cafeteria and soda shop service, but not in the remainder of the building except the bookstore. I am sure that the colored students are given more freedom in the Food Department than they received a few years back, and I presume that one could say that they have received considerable ground. (James Patrick to Wells, May 5, 1942)

Indeed, Wells took the appeals of Stewart and the students to heart and quietly took action about the situation. According to Wells, one day as he walked through the Union Commons with the director, he turned to him and said, "Pat, I want you to remove all those [reserved] signs. Do it unobtrusively and make no mention of what you've done" (Wells, 1980, p. 216). Because Wells conducted this matter without fanfare, it was two weeks before anyone realized that the signs were gone, and by that time "the absurdity of the previous situation was apparent" (Wells, 1980, p. 216).

According to Wells' longtime assistant, Dorothy Collins, the manner in which he handled the Union situation was very typical of his leadership style. "[Wells'] way of rectifying problems was to work backstage, work in the back of the scene.... He's probably the most liberal president we ever had and yet he didn't take the protest method; he had the back of the scene way" (1994).

Wells often had to fight this battle toward integration in the face

of opposition from his administration and staff. In one example, the Union director wrote to Wells regarding an unfortunate incident that occurred in the Union Grille (H.W. Jordan, July 19, 1945). While a "well-mannered" black boy quietly sat eating his meal, a white couple loudly expressed their displeasure at his being there, asked the waitress not to serve him, and offered her a large tip if she would throw water in his face. The director's point in writing to Wells was to emphasize that "Such actions are a challenge to the race to push their way into the building. We have had very few negroes ever come into the Grill, but I feel if such actions between white citizens are continued that it will make it a challenge to them and that they will shove themselves upon us more and more."

Others expressed concerns that the business in the Union was decreasing because Blacks were now allowed to use the facilities. In a memo from W.G. Biddle to Wells, the comptroller cites a report which shows a decrease in the number of meals served in the Union cafeteria over a six month period. Biddle states, "I am told that the decrease has been among the white people, and that the number of Negroes has increased some. I am not sure what the future holds for the Indiana Union" (April 11, 1945). Wells responds to Biddle's rather dramatic statement with a matter-of-fact response in which he points out the fact while the cafeteria has declined 16% in the number of its customers from the previous year, the enrollment records show a 25% decrease for the comparable period (April 20, 1945). Clearly, Wells was unfazed by the concerns of his colleagues.

Wells' efforts on the Union front did not go unnoticed by the black community. On May 28, 1942 he received a letter from Walter C. Bailey, president of the Negro Student Council, expressing appreciation on the council's behalf for "the clear-cut stand taken by the administration concerning the Negro Student Union problem" and for the administration's efforts in "promoting mutual understanding and harmony between all campus groups." According to Bailey, "The timely solution of this problem, provides a welcomed illustration of the spiritual lead which the University has traditionally taken in both national and community affairs, strikes another blow at those crippled Fascist forces of Hate and Prejudice which still struggle for survival in our Democracy."

Athletic Victories

Although there were black football players at Indiana University before the turn of the century, a “gentleman’s agreement” existed between the Big Ten coaches which prevented students of color from participating in other sports, such as basketball. According to Wells, “There was some kind of mumbo jumbo about the fact that the sport included too much bodily contact to make it feasible to mix the races” (1980, p. 217). That is, until the president stepped in.

In 1947 the Hoosier’s basketball coach, Branch McCracken, was interested in recruiting a star basketball player, a black student by the name of Bill Garrett, to play for the team (Beck, 1959; Wells, 1980). However, due to this “gentleman’s agreement” Coach McCracken was concerned about being ostracized by the other coaches within the Big Ten conference. President Wells, offering his support and encouragement, urged the coach to proceed in recruiting Garrett. Wells stated, “if there’s any conference backlash against it, then I’ll take responsibility for handling it” (Wells, 1980, p. 217). Wells was a member of the Council of Ten, an organization of the Big Ten university presidents, and knew that he could use his influence with his colleagues to put pressure on the other Big Ten coaches. With this action came success. “Despite the openly voiced disapproval of the Western Conference, Coach McCracken—with the full backing of President Wells—stood his ground and put Bill Garrett in his first string” (Beck, 1959, p. 52). Garrett became the first black student to receive a scholarship in basketball from IU and was the only black student to play in the Big Ten at that time (Garrett, 1970).

As a result of Garrett’s victories both on and off the court, other coaches began to recruit qualified black players. As stated by Wells, “It just took one school to break that vicious circle” (Wells, 1980, p. 218). “[Garrett] won good will for Negroes worth half his value and—with the wise and courageous support of the administration—lowered the barrier for them to intercollegiate sports” (Beck, 1959, p. 52). Other sports at Indiana were successfully integrated in a similar fashion, and the university led the Big Ten in being the first to have Blacks play golf and baseball, in addition to basketball (Wells, 1980).

However, in 1956 the good will created during Garrett’s day hit a snag as a controversy over another black athlete, Eddie Whitehead, came to the forefront. Whitehead was the first black student to play on Indiana’s baseball team and traveled with his fellow Hoosiers to the South where the team was scheduled to play six games in Florida and Georgia (Hudson, 1997; Kress, 1999). Unfortunately, the southern schools abided by a “gentleman’s agreement” just as the Big Ten coaches had during Garrett’s day, which did not allow students of color to play intercollegiate sports alongside white players. As a result, Whitehead was prevented from playing with his teammates. Adding insult to injury, Whitehead was not permitted to eat in certain restaurants or stay in the dormitories with his white teammates. On one occasion, Whitehead and his coach were forced to take their meals to the coach’s car where the two could eat without hassle.

Upon the team’s return to Bloomington, Wells was appalled to learn of the treatment of Whitehead during his trip down South, and headlines in and out of the state proclaimed his indignation. For example, *The Indianapolis Times* exclaimed, “Dr. Wells calls treatment of Negro outrage” (1956), while the *Courier-Journal* in Louisville announced “Wells is outraged by Negro’s abuse” (1956). The *Courier-Journal* went on to quote Wells: “It’s outrageous the indignities now being suffered in the South by Eddie Whitehead. . . I’m opposed to segregation in any form. IU is the leader in the nation against segregation in school as well as in athletics”. The *Times* article stated that Indiana University would no longer schedule athletic contests against schools which discriminate against black students.

Wells’ strong and public stance on the Whitehead incident was followed by a barrage of criticism and hate mail from all over the Midwest and the South (Hudson, 1997). These critics had some very harsh words for the IU president:

so the great white father is mad because his loving nigger had to eat dinner in the kitchen. . . Yes I.U. is the leader in the nation against segregation. They are also the leader in the destruction of mankind and human happiness. . . just go to hell and don’t worry about the South. Jim Dumas (undated)

You so-call [sic] professors why don't you keep your Niggers away from the South... You are a disgrace to the white race. Segregation will return to all America some day, and I do hope it will be real soon. America will wake some day soon. a real American (June 9, 1956)

Herman: You cheap negro loving son of a bitch- only way you can get your name in paper- heartbreak over baseball team in Fla- Keep your team out of South- learn how many tears we shed. K K Kean (March 29, 1956)

On the local front, Wells was criticized for allowing the team to travel to the South in the first place if Whitehead would not be allowed to play.

Never one to bend under pressure, Wells responded to his critics with a swift plan of action. On April 7, 1956, an article in the *Gary Post Tribune* ("Hoosiers answer Dixie's curbs") reported that Indiana University, Notre Dame, Butler, and Purdue had agreed on a policy of refusing to play any teams which require racial or religious segregation. According to the policy, none of their teams would play unless all players were permitted to participate. The article went on to say:

Some southern lawmakers, as in Florida and Georgia, have been sponsoring laws to bar games between amateur teams of mixed races. They would require other teams to withdraw Negro players if they want to play Dixie squads. The answer should be the one made by the Hoosier schools- no contest. If it is made generally, throughout the college sports world, we can predict the reaction in the South Colleges and their students will tell the lawmakers to keep their hands off college sports. They will not like to be segregated.

Clearly, this proved to be another victory for Wells, the university, and all the students who reaped the benefits of the policy.

University Housing for One and All

When Wells took over the presidency in 1937, the university did not provide housing and it was the custom of both black and white students to secure residency in the homes of families within the Bloomington community. However, as black families became more segregated on the west side of town, a far distance from campus, the issue of housing for black students became problematic (Beck, 1959).

The first to move toward a solution to this problem was Sam Dargan, a black entrepreneur and IU graduate, who acquired several houses near campus which became the main source of housing for black women (Gilliam, 1985). However, as the enrollments continued to rise, the housing for black students became more and more congested (Beck, 1959). In addition, many black students expressed great dissatisfaction with the Dargan House, referring to it as "shabby," "run-down," and "inadequate" (Yancey, 1989). Alarmed at the situation, Wells began the uphill battle toward the goal of integrated university housing facilities for all students, a battle which would last for the next fifteen years (Beck, 1959).

A letter from Wells to W.G. Biddle in May of 1940 shows the advent of an idea forming in the mind of the president, a first step toward the goal of integration:

I am of the opinion that we cannot depend on Sam [Dargan] to furnish complete facilities for colored girls... I believe we should develop in one of our houses, either owned or rented, facilities for a few girls which would be similar in furnishings and appearance, considering the number of persons to be housed, to the best we have to offer in our dormitories. I am likewise of the opinion that this house should be a part of our dormitory system and that we should have it ready for occupancy beginning next fall... This is only a quick reaction of mine and the plan may not be feasible.

Wells' proposal, as it turned out, did seem to be feasible and quickly began to take shape. Only a few weeks later, Wells wrote to Dargan (May 24, 1940) to inform him that the university would begin to

provide housing facilities for black women as early as that fall. According to Wells, "It is solely because the University has decided that there must be comparable facilities available to students of both races that the project is being undertaken to supplement the facilities which you have provided in the past."

In August this plan continued to progress and dean of women, Kate Mueller, sent out letters to black women in order to assess their interest in a new housing facility. "If there is sufficient demand, Indiana University hopes to make arrangements to provide better housing for colored women either on the campus or one street removed from the campus for September 1940. . . ." Mueller assured the women that the house "will be furnished in the same style and quality as the new dormitories for women. . . for girls of cultivated tastes" (August 1, 1940). The costs would also be identical to those that the white women paid for the dormitories. The efforts of Wells and Mueller resulted in two new off-campus housing facilities for black women (Beck, 1959).

Reactions were mixed regarding this expansion of housing for black women. One complimentary letter was sent to Wells from a representative of the Alpha Kappa Alpha sorority (Blanche Patterson, February 10, 1944) in which she states: "The improvement that has been made in housing. . . for Negro women in general impressed me so favorably that I want to express to you my deep appreciation." On the other hand, some Bloomington community members submitted a petition to the Indiana board of trustees in which they proposed that the university vacate the properties that were occupied by black students and lease them to white people instead, to which Wells gave a firm response:

Indiana University is a tax-supported institution. Both State and Federal constitutions charge it with the responsibility for serving all the youth of the State without regard to their color, race, or religion. If the Trustees were to grant this petition, they would do so in direct violation of the basic laws of the land. Therefore, since there is no legal, ethical, or economic justification for the demand of the petitioners, their request was not granted. (Wells to Harley Skirvin, October 1, 1942)

While other campus and community members were impressed with the amount of progress the Wells administration had made in providing housing for black women, they stressed that there was still a need for more housing for these women on campus. However, on numerous occasions Wells was quick to clarify the responsibility of the university with regard to providing housing, as in a letter he wrote to the NAACP, which stated:

[T]here is some misunderstanding with regard to this whole housing matter. Neither the state nor the University has or can assume total responsibility for the housing of students [because the state has a policy of not appropriating money for dormitories]. Such facilities as we are able to develop can only be supplementary to those provided by private means (to Robert Starms, August 22, 1945).

Wells emphasized that it was important for the black leadership of the state to interest itself in the development of housing for students of color.

Although the university did not have a responsibility to provide housing for all students, the Wells administration soon began making efforts to move toward that goal. On January 6, 1947, the concept of having black women living in the regular Halls of Residence began to take fruition when it appeared on the agenda of the Halls of Residence Committee Meeting Agenda. After a lengthy discussion of the issue, the Committee voted six to one in favor of the following:

The Halls of Residence Committee recommends to the Board of Trustees of Indiana University that Negro girls be permitted to live in the Hall of Residences and that their applications should be considered on the same basis as all others. (J.A. Franklin to H.W. Jordan, June 6, 1947).

While Wells' ultimate goal was the integration of the residence halls, he also recognized the apprehensions of the housing administrators who anticipated a backlash from the parents of white students. This

concern regarding the reactions of parents seemed to be more of an issue for the female students than the male students. According to Wells:

The pressure from that direction against having Black students in the residence halls was sufficient for the trustees to become fearful that integration could not work just then. As a consequence, in order to achieve our goals, we had to take an intermediate step, which was to create a residence hall for Black women that was nevertheless a university facility (Wells, 1980, p. 218).

With the assistance of the only female board member, Mary Maurer, Wells recommended to the Board of Trustees that the Lincoln House "be completely redecorated and refurnished comparable to our best equipped dormitory, for colored girls" (Wells and Maurer to Board of Trustees, August 16, 1948) and made a request for their authorization of this proposal. However, he still met with some resistance from the board.

In an interview conducted with Maurer (1969) she discusses Wells' handling of the board during the housing situation. According to Maurer, "The colored housing was very bad... and some of the trustees couldn't care less." Maurer went on to elaborate about Wells' power of persuasion with the board: "[Y]ou might go into the meeting and know what [Wells] was going to say, know what he was going to propose, and think you opposed it. But he had a way of making you know that you were just dead wrong." On August 26, 1948, a telegram sent to all the board members from Wells and Maurer announced: "We are happy to inform you that we now have unanimous approval to proceed with the Lincoln House."

One week after this telegram was sent the *Indianapolis Recorder* featured a story about the Lincoln House. The headline proclaimed, "Girls enjoy 'home life' while attending Ind. U." (September 6, 1948). According to the article, which was prominently displayed on the front page, "Officials of Indiana University believe they have gone a long way toward solving the housing problem for colored female students by opening up and allotting to them one of the choice dormitories on the

campus known as the Lincoln House."

While this seemed to be a success for the administration, there were still those people who felt that the university did not go far enough. The NAACP was especially vocal in expressing their concerns about the "separate but equal" housing policies of the university (William Ransom to Wells, August 30, 1948).

In 1948, "separate but equal" facilities were provided for black men (Beck, 1959), and by 1952 there was no longer a need for segregated housing at Indiana University (Wells, 1980). Despite opposition from the community, parents, trustees, and others within the administration, Wells won the long and hard fought battle towards integration of the residence halls on campus. But in the typical Wells style, his battle was fought behind the scenes and without fanfare.

Wells attained results without blowing any trumpets or seeking recognition for himself, but others did not let his actions go unnoticed. In October of 1949, Wells received a letter from the NAACP, an organization that had at times been critical of Wells' handling of the housing situation. However, in this letter, the group praised the president:

[T]he members voted unanimously to express to you our sincere thanks for the efforts you have make on the behalf of the successful achievement of attaining democracy in the Women's Residence Halls with the elimination of segregation. It is indeed heartening to know that we can always depend upon your assistance in our attempts toward achieving those principles to which our organization is dedicated. (Hazel Lockett, October 2, 1949)

Beyond the Campus Borders- Restaurant Desegregation

In the spring of 1937, a sign at a local Bloomington restaurant on Tenth Street proclaimed, "We serve white customers only" (Beck, 1959), thus sparking an issue which would become much debated in Bloomington and on the Indiana campus for over ten years. A letter published in the *IDS* on February 15, 1939 revealed that, "There exists only one eating establishment, outside of the colored cafeteria, in the entire city where Negro students can secure food" (cited in Beck, 1959, p. 48). These conditions existed despite the fact that there was a

statute that made it illegal for public restaurants to discriminate on the basis of race (Wells, 1980).

Although these restaurants were not under the jurisdiction of the university, there is evidence that work was occurring behind the scenes on behalf of the Wells administration to remedy the restaurant situation. A letter from Charles Brown to Wells' assistant, Fenwick Reed on October 6, 1947 offers a list of local restaurants that Brown visited "in reference to our proposal for solving the immediate racial problem on campus." Among the eleven restaurants listed, Brown indicated that six of them would be "more hesitant about okaying serving of colored people," but would most likely cooperate if the majority of the other restaurants did. From the communication, it appears that they planned to have Wells address the group of restaurant owners, with the goal of attempting to sway them from their policy of refusing service to Blacks.

Meanwhile, a black student athlete by the name of George Taliaferro decided to take action about the situation. Taliaferro, with little time to eat lunch between classes, was frustrated at having to hustle to the west side of campus where the special black cafeteria was located (Strong, 1984). Adding to his frustration was the fact that a life-sized picture depicting him as a university athlete hung in the Book Nook, a restaurant that he was not permitted to enter (Gilliam, 1985).

As such, in the spring of 1948, Taliaferro paid a visit to Wells and expressed his concerns regarding the policies of the downtown establishments (Gilliam, 1985; Pratter, 1994; Strong, 1984; George Taliaferro, personal communication, December 5, 2000). Wells was sympathetic to his concerns, and together the two of them worked out a low-key strategy. First, Wells placed a call to the owner of the Book Nook, who expressed concern that serving Blacks might upset his regular customers and cause him to lose business. Using his finely tuned powers of persuasion, Wells convinced the owner to permit Taliaferro, a popular football player who was well-known among the student body, to bring some friends and dine at the establishment in order to test the reaction of integration. Within two week's time, Blacks were eating in the Book Nook with no resulting problems (Brown, 1997; Gilliam, 1985). Taliaferro, sung the praises of his president: "Herman Wells smoothed the way with the faculty and with the staff and the integration

of the facilities came about without anyone raising their hackles... He was there and he was a force when called upon" (Brancolini & Metz, 1993).

Despite this success in integrating the Book Nook, by 1950 segregation still existed amongst the downtown restaurants. In March of that year, the failure of these establishments to serve students of color was a hot topic and the headlines from the *IDS* chronicled the events like a soap opera. The March 16, 1950 edition of the *IDS* ignited the issue with a headline on page one, which read, "We got no hamburgers; City cafes close early". According to the article, the restaurants closed after a mixed-race group of students entered the facilities and were served. Two days later the *IDS* informed the campus that "Restauranteurs to meet students," an event to be held at an unspecified time the following week in response to student action. A few weeks later on March 24, the issue seemed to be losing some of its steam. The topic was now relegated to page two of the *IDS* where the headline read, "Café parley fails to agree." Apparently the meeting between students and restaurant owners to discuss the relaxation of customs in serving Blacks did not produce the desired results.

The issue climaxed in May of 1950 when eight of the downtown restaurants closed "due to a forced movement of the colored students on the University campus" ("Eight restaurants close", 1950, p. 1). According to the article, the participating restaurant owners feared violence from the organized students, although no violent actions were reported. The article stated that Wells and the mayor had met with representatives from both sides and had urged them to get together and work towards a solution.

Wells (1980) recounts such a meeting, during which he was issued an ultimatum from the representatives of the local restaurant association with regard to the restaurant situation. The restaurant owners informed Wells that if he did not persuade the students and their faculty supporters to back off on their demands for service, they were prepared to permanently close all the downtown restaurants, thus depriving many students and community members of their customary places to eat. Undaunted, Wells pointed out that their actions were not just immoral, but also illegal. He was prepared to expand the facilities

in the Union, now desegregated, to feed all of their displaced customers. This unexpected response on behalf of the university was startling to the restaurant owners and, according to Wells, "Our ultimatum in response to theirs resulted in the evaporation of the whole issue..." (Wells, 1980, p. 220).

This was one of the few examples where the president used a confrontational approach to achieve his desired results. In fact, Wells relates a time when he was accused by a young minister of being a "traitor to the cause of equality" because of the non-confrontational methods that he used (Wells, 1980, p. 220). In contrast to Wells, the minister believed that "the greatest progress would be made only by bringing all issues to a state of confrontation" (Wells, 1980, p. 220). Wells' response was that he wanted to win each issue and not lose one. As such, he felt his subtle, non-confrontational approach was the most effective one, as it would prove to be time and time again, and he did not intend to alter it.

On May 18, 1950, the front page of the *IDS* proclaimed, "Cafes reopen today, say they will observe the law! State law requires equal enjoyment for all in restaurants." Clearly, this was a triumph for the black community and another feather in Wells' cap in terms of his successes in integrating the community.

Indeed, the efforts of Wells did not go unnoticed. The very day this *IDS* article was published, Wells received a letter of appreciation from Valjean Dickinson, president of the Indiana chapter of the NAACP, a group that had been openly active with the restaurant issue. Dickinson expressed his thanks to Wells for the "forthright stand which you took," as well as for Wells' efforts in initiating the series of conferences with the downtown restaurant owners. According to Dickinson, "It is our belief that those conferences contributed materially to the achievement of a favorable solution to the problem" (May 18, 1950). Similarly, Louis Greenberg, executive director of the Indiana Jewish Community Relations Council, praised Wells' leadership on this issue. He said:

It is reassuring to know that you, in your official capacity, played so constructive a role in the recent negotiations with

some of the Bloomington restaurant owners... We want to extend heartfelt congratulations upon the leadership you have given in the successful solution of a recurrent violation of Indiana laws, and in the fulfillment of the principle of equal opportunity and treatment for all citizens (May 25, 1950).

It is clear that Wells' leadership in ending segregation reached beyond the Indiana campus and into the Bloomington community. However, evidence exists that suggests Wells' influence reached even further. In an interview with George Johnson (1969), a 1915 IU graduate, he relates a tale told to him by a black football coach. This coach was denied service at a restaurant in Oklahoma, when a portly man approached him and asked, "Did I understand that you were turned down for an eating place?" When the coach responded affirmatively, the portly man said, "Wait until I do some telephoning." Shortly, the restaurant manager returned and invited the coach to eat in the restaurant. When the coach made an inquiry as to the identity of the portly man, he was informed that it was Herman B. Wells. The coach never knew to whom Wells made that phone call, but from this example, it appears that the bounds of Wells' influence were far reaching.

Conclusion

Slowly and steadily, under the guiding hand of President Wells, racial integration came to Indiana University. "Reserved" signs were removed from the tables in the Union and eventually all students could dine and congregate together under the same roof. Black athletes, once barred from sporting competitions, could now play alongside their white teammates. Where at one time black students were forced to live in inadequate facilities on the outskirts of town, they now lived in university residence halls with their white classmates. However, Wells' influence did not stop at the campus borders. When he saw the injustice of Blacks being refused service in the downtown restaurants, he took action and got results. Bloomington restaurant owners no longer closed their doors to black customers.

In 1954, seventeen years after Wells began his presidential responsibilities at Indiana, the Supreme Court made the landmark

decision, *Brown v. Board of Education*, which discarded the "separate but equal" philosophy that had been established by *Plessy* some 58 years before. The Supreme Court had finally concluded and legalized what Wells had believed and fought for all along, the ideal of equality for the races. Wells placed the concept of racial equality high on his priority list because he felt it was his moral obligation based on his deep rooted belief in the concept of democracy.

Not only did Wells himself strive for the goal of democracy, but challenged his students to work toward this ideal as well. In a commencement address delivered to the class of 1952, Wells posed the following question to the graduates, "What are you for?":

You are against communism; but are you for a true democracy which strives to provide equal opportunity and justice for every citizen regardless of race, color, creed, social and economic status, a society where there are no second class citizens?... We hope that you will... work always to build a more perfect democracy characterized by brotherhood and justice. ("What are you for?," 1952)

Wells delivered these words 100 years after the statute providing for the operation of Indiana University was enacted. Clearly, the university had come a long way since 1852.

In 1962, after over 25 years of service to the university, Wells stepped down from his role as president. In honor of his retirement, Wells was chosen by the campus chapter of the NAACP to receive its Brotherhood Award. The citation reads:

We consider that we have been partners with you over the years in the task of lessening prejudice and unreason, and that both you and we can feel satisfaction in the result. Both Indiana University and Bloomington are far better places, in terms of race relations, than they were a quarter-century ago. We gladly acknowledge the support, usually quiet and unobtrusive, which you have given to our organization at various critical stages in the struggle; and we are happy to attest the

various initiatives of yours to purge official University policy of all discrimination. ("Wells receives", 1962)

Epilogue

Herman B. Wells died on March 18, 2000. However, his leadership has made a lasting impact on the university, particularly in the area of racial equality. While racial prejudice continues to be an issue at Indiana University and throughout the world, Wells was instrumental in setting a standard and building the foundations for a campus where diversity is espoused and promoted.

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