

# NCstate

ALUMNI MAGAZINE

AUTUMN

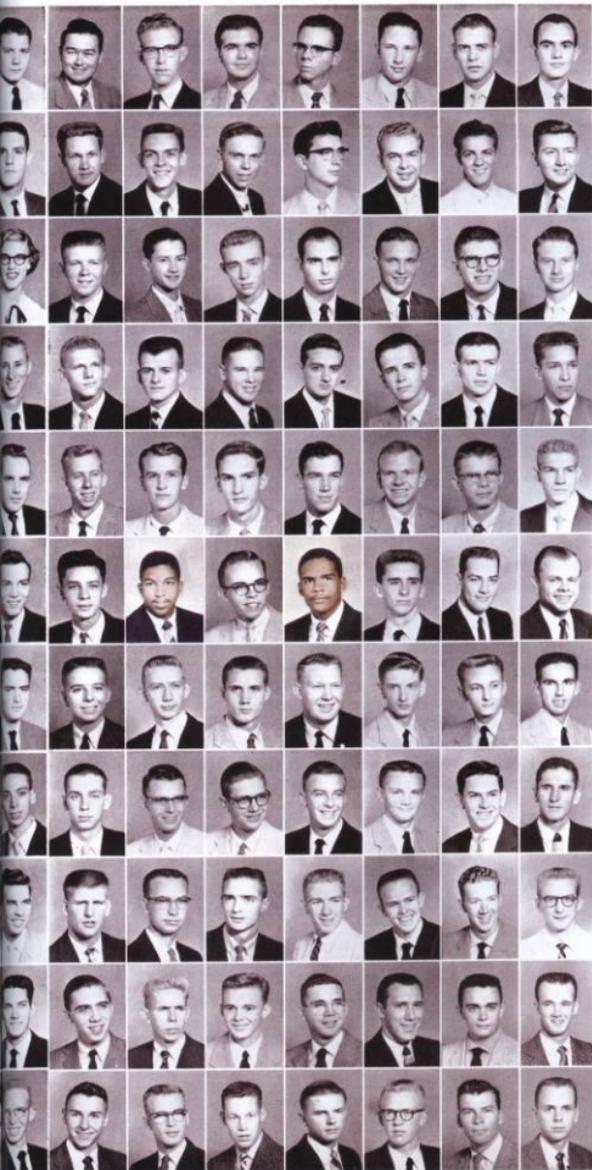
2006

Integrating NC State:  
How four freshmen made history in 1956.

Getting to know Sidney Lowe '83.  
Yes, you do have a permanent record.

The man who reinvented TV news.  
Tailgating with the Wolfpack Nation.





# ALL ALONE TOGETHER

**Fifty years ago, four black students integrated the freshman class, the marching band and ACC sports. They didn't face protests or death threats, but they had a tough time finding friends.**

*by Cynthia Greenlee-Donnell*

**O**n a sun-soaked afternoon in September 1956, a group of NC State freshmen assembled for a three-day orientation sponsored by the campus YMCA. About 150 students were there—all young men, all with short hair and shirts tucked into belted pants. They attended a picnic, nightly sing-alongs and a series of talks on wholesome topics such as "Growing Religiously in a Technical College." They sized up one another, hoping to make new friends to help them find their footing.

Like most NC State students, Irwin Holmes '60 was a North Carolina native who hadn't traveled far to attend college. Still, he was excited and nervous, and not just because he was starting a new school. He'd grown up in Durham, where he'd attended an all-black high school and rarely had cause to interact with white people. He was the only black student in the crowd, and he was acutely aware that the white students there had grown up on the other side of segregation. He wasn't entirely sure what they'd make of him, and he didn't know yet what to make of them.

In 1956, Elvis made his first gyrating appearance on *The Ed Sullivan Show* and Nat King Cole became the first black celebrity with his own TV variety show. Parents discussed polio vaccinations for their college-bound students, the "spread of the Reds" and a series of court cases



Manuel Crockett (left) and Edward Carson pose for a 1956 Associated Press photograph. The first four black undergrads made headlines for the milestones they set. But they didn't seek the attention. "I didn't come here as a test case or anything," Walter Holmes told an AP reporter. "I just want to get an education." BELOW: Text from the back of the photo.

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 (FOR USE SUNDAY OCT. 28, WITH BRYAN HAINSLIP'S BALTIMORE, AP-WIRE STORY ON INTEGRATION.)  
 THE QUIET WAY  
 ENGINEERING STUDENTS MANUEL CROCKETT, JR., LEFT, AND EDWARD CARSON, BOTH FRESHMEN FROM RALEIGH, N.C., SHOWS DRAPING CLASS WITH WHITE STUDENT AT NORTH CAROLINA STATE COLLEGE. THE SCHOOL IS ONE OF TWO BRANCHES OF THE UNIV. OF NORTH CAROLINA WHICH HAVE BEEN TAKING INTEGRATION IN STRIDES—IN HAVING CONTRAST TO SOME OTHER INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER LEARNING IN THE SOUTH. FAR FROM ENCOUNTERING HOSTILITY, CROCKETT SAYS, HE HAS RECEIVED FRIENDLY OVERS FROM WHITE STUDENTS. NOTHING APPROACHING AN "INCIDENT" BEEN REPORTED SINCE THE FIRST STEP TOWARDS INTEGRATION TAKEN A YEAR AGO. 4842  
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that would bring an end to segregated education. NC State had integrated its graduate school three years earlier when two black students enrolled in engineering. But the freshman class wasn't open to blacks until a 1955 court decision in the case *Frasier v. the Board of Trustees of the University of North Carolina*. Holmes applied to NC State and to Howard University, a historically black school, expecting that NC State admissions officers would delay considering his application until it was too late to enroll. But that hadn't happened. By the time an offer of financial

aid came from Howard, he'd already confirmed his place at the Raleigh college.

So Holmes was relieved when another student struck up a conversation at orientation. They chatted, learning each other's names and discussing their hometowns and prospective majors. That simple exchange was the longest conversation he'd ever had with a white person, and he was surprised at how comfortable it felt. He scanned the crowd at subsequent sessions, searching for the affable young man he'd spoken to before. "I couldn't find him because they all looked alike to me."

Later, Holmes would read what happened at other Southern campuses as they integrated. At the University of Mississippi, where James Meredith enrolled in 1962, there were death threats and jeering mobs. Riots left two people dead. Holmes felt lucky: Most students at NC State had been content to ignore him, and some had been kind.

Nor would he have to go it alone. Three other black undergrads started their engineering studies in 1956, including his Hillside High School classmate Wal-

**1889** Classes begin at the N.C. College of Agriculture and Mechanic Arts (N.C. A&M, now NC State). The college's roots are in federal legislation signed by President Abraham Lincoln. The Morrill Act of 1862 provided for the creation and funding of land-grant universities nationwide. A second Morrill Act—in 1890—required states to provide technical education for blacks, too, and said that no federal monies

would be disbursed to any college that made distinctions between students on the basis of race. But states could comply by providing separate colleges for blacks and whites. That provision led to the 1891 establishment of what is now N.C. Agricultural & Technical State University in Greensboro as an alternative to offering blacks admission at N.C. A&M.

**1950** The U.S. Supreme Court issues several rulings regarding blacks in higher education. One says that blacks must be given access to programs of study not available in historically black colleges. Another ruling mandates that black students must be accorded equal protection and treatment under the law in state-supported schools. These decisions open the door to integration in higher education in North Carolina and other states.

**1951** The UNC System decides black students are eligible for admission into graduate programs.

**1953** State College admits two black graduate students into the School of Engineering. Robert Clemons '57 FREE would be the first black graduate of the college in 1957; the other student, Hardy Liston '57, withdrew and didn't complete his degree. In the early 1950s, black extension agents attending university workshops weren't housed on campus.

ter Holmes '62. The son of Hillside's respected principal, Walter Holmes was a talented musician who struggled to balance his creative side with the need for a "practical" career. Then there was Edward Carson '62, the gregarious student council president at Raleigh's black Ligon High School, and 17-year-old Manuel Crockett '60, a quiet, independent Ligon graduate and the youngest of the bunch.

Crockett and Carson were already NC State veterans by the time the two Holmeses arrived; they'd enrolled in summer school. Earlier that spring, they'd skipped lunch and slipped out of the fence surrounding the Ligon campus to apply for admission at NC State. When the duo returned to campus, they landed in hot water for playing hooky. Crockett hadn't consulted his parents—who both worked at the Garner Road School for the Blind and the Deaf, the "colored" sister school to the Governor Morehead School—about his plans. His father, the Garner school's principal, vowed "he'd snatch me right up out of there if there was any sign of trouble," Crockett says.

Crockett himself didn't anticipate any hostility—NC State's proximity to home was his chief criterion for selecting the school—but the elder Crockett had ample reason to worry about how his son would be received. The UNC System had resisted challenges to segregation in higher education since the early 1930s, and though a series of court cases asserted that blacks had the right to be there, many people didn't agree.

## Laying the groundwork

**I**n 1951, just after the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in *Sweatt v. Painter* that black students must be admitted to programs of study not available at historically black colleges and universities, *Technician* interrupted its coverage of the perennial campus dilemmas of parking, student housing and getting tickets to the Carolina game to take on the "integration question."

An editorial writer in the Feb. 16 issue polled six students about whether they'd support desegregation. "To a man, the students raised a vociferous NO! Most of them were true to the Old Southern Tradition, 'Would You Let Your Daughter Marry a Negro?' Some said they wouldn't room with a negro; some said the fine parents of the South would take their children out of State and send them elsewhere. . . . But even the fiercest antagonist of the negro situation must admit that the negro student has a very good argument." A later editorial disputed the informal poll, saying that the newspaper had received a number of letters supporting desegregation and thanking students for expressing their feelings by writing, not firebombing *Technician's* office.

But the issue wasn't for students to decide. Later that year, in a fiery April meeting of the UNC System's trustees, President Gordon Gray said he personally objected to allowing blacks in graduate and professional programs but that the trustees must concede that "from time to

time," qualified black students would be admitted.

Gray's pragmatism riled the segregationist minority among the trustees. State College alumnus and Franklinville resident John W. Clark (1906) supported increasing taxes to build a black medical school rather than admit blacks to UNC-Chapel Hill's. He also offered to show photographs of white women who married black men, fanning fears about "racial mixing." Trustee John Kerr Jr. of Warrenton was quoted in newspapers saying, "If you're going to let 'em in graduate schools of North Carolina, you're gonna let 'em in public schools. This is absolutely nothing but a wedge to get 'em in public schools. Within five years, there won't be a Negro left at A&T College. . . . If you want to maintain white supremacy, this is your opportunity to do it."

But most of the trustees rejected Kerr's battle cry. They decided, 61-14, to allow blacks into graduate and professional programs not available at historically black colleges. That decision chipped away at segregation in North Carolina's institutions of higher learning; a black student was admitted to UNC-Chapel Hill's School of Medicine that spring, and three black students were admitted to the law school a few months later. State College admitted two black graduate students, Robert L. Clemons '57 PREE and Hardy Liston '57, to the School of Engineering in 1953. (Liston later withdrew, but Clemons completed his degree.)

In 1954, *Technician* weighed in again,

**1954** Policies begin to deal with the issue of race on campus. Visiting basketball teams with black members stay together in Watauga dormitory and eat in the cafeteria, but in separate rooms with no other diners present. It's also mandated that Clemons—the only black student on campus—must be served in snack bars around campus and can attend all functions with his wife.

The U.S. Supreme Court decides the landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* case. The doctrine of separate but equal in public education is dead.

**1955** In *Fraser v. the Board of Trustees of the University of North Carolina*, the courts determine that undergraduate colleges and universities should be open to blacks. Black freshmen enroll at UNC-Chapel Hill.

**1956** The first four black undergraduate students enroll at NC State, with Manuel Crockett '60 and Ed Carson '62 starting in summer school. Irwin Holmes '60 joins the school's tennis team, making it the first integrated team in the ACC. Walter Holmes joins the marching band.

## N.C. State, Raleigh, Gets 1st Undergrads

RALEIGH, N.C. — The gates of the North Carolina State College opened this year to the first two colored undergraduates.

The two, Edward Carson and Irwin Holmes, were admitted to attend State at the opening of the summer session. Both are other competing their high school work at Ligon High School.

The third year, Walter Van Buren Holmes of Durham, has been admitted to attend State at the opening of the fall term.

*Technician* Press has offered the following notice for a directory course, high school graduates

for admission this fall are under consideration.

**STATE COLLEGE** has had colored students in its graduate schools for several years, but the first undergraduates.

Their admission resulted from an order issued in Federal District Court at Greensboro last September which directed the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill to admit three colored students as undergraduates. The university approved the application. Press has offered the following notice for a directory course, high school graduates

for admission this fall are under consideration.

**STATE COLLEGE** was affected by a court decision in a suit filed by the consolidated University of North Carolina.

**CARSON** and **HOLMES** are studying electrical engineering at State and Holmes is enrolled in mechanical engineering in preparation for a career in aeronautical engineering.

The two schools synthesize and living at home while studying here. The college had not had received an application from Holmes for a directory course.



Irwin Holmes with his Father on graduation day.

**IRWIN HOLMES, 67,** was the first black student to

earn a bachelor's degree from NC State. He went on to work as a design engineer for RCA and later for IBM. He retired from IBM in 1984, after working there 25 years and managing an engineering team that designed what was then one of the world's largest and fastest commercial computers.

Since retirement, Holmes has dabbled in real estate development and today helps manage a family-owned staffing business. He and his wife, Meredythe, have three children: Kimberlee, Sherri and Irwin.

Today, he lives in Durham, but stays connected with his days at NC State. A painting by his Hillside High School classmate, acclaimed sports artist Ernie Barnes (whose art appeared as the paintings of character J.J. Evans on the 1970s sitcom *Good Times*), hangs in his breakfast nook. Barnes created the painting—the first tennis-themed canvas he'd done—in honor of Holmes' achievement of becoming the first black athlete to wear the Wolfpack's red and white.

Holmes has also come back to campus to speak about his experiences. He says that the university has come a long way; in his four years as a student, he saw about a dozen black students enroll on campus. Now, African Americans make up almost 30 percent of the student body. But he thinks, in part because of the campus' size, that interactions between black students and white students and professors still can be

superficial. "You have a campus within a campus, and that means you don't have to talk to anyone you don't like," he says.

**A**fter graduating from N.C. Central, **MANUEL CROCKETT** joined the Army, where he stayed—interrupted by a stint as a teacher—for 20 years. After leaving the military, he worked for the N.C. Division of Motor Vehicles. He retired in 2002.

Today, at age 67, Crockett still lives in Raleigh with wife, Gloria. He helps out with a family-run cleaning service, and he is a frequent substitute teacher with the Wake County Public School System. He prefers to work with troubled students.

Crockett's memories of NC State are bittersweet. He sometimes wonders what would have happened if he ignored the recreation department official who discouraged him from earning majors and stayed.

He's also ambivalent about his role in integrating NC State athletics. The introduction of black players revolutionized collegiate sports, he says, but it also has led to the exploitation and undereducation of African American athletes.

But history has a way of coming around. In 1993, Crockett's identical twin daughters, Jyl "Angelita" Crockett '93 and Kim "Danielle" Crockett Corson '93, accomplished what their father was discouraged from doing. They graduated from NC State with degrees in parks, recreation and tourism management and minors in forestry.

Angelita, who recently moved to Sweden from Raleigh, says that her father rarely

## WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

discussed his NC State experience. "It was only in high school that we really heard that he was one of the first black students," she says. "It was and still is vague. But I thought it would be neat to go to the same school that Dad did."

Danielle, an executive assistant in the Atlanta area, decided that her initial plans to go to vet school weren't going to work out. But she was given a warm reception when she changed majors and added a forestry minor. "If I asked for any guidance, my instructors gave it to me," she says. "Our advisers were encouraging us because they wanted to see more women and more blacks in our field and working for the U.S. Forest Service. But the ratio of Caucasian to black was really [disproportionate]; there were only three black students that we knew of in forestry."

**W**ALTER HOLMES returned to NC State several years after leaving for UNC-Chapel Hill and then Howard University in Washington, D.C. He graduated in 1962 with a degree in mechanical engineering and took a job as an engineer at RCA in New Jersey, where Irwin Holmes worked. He worked for several other companies before retiring to Durham. Holmes died in 2004 at age 62 and is survived by two daughters, Pamela Carter and Jennifer Holmes.

**E**DWARD CARSON lives in Raleigh. He worked as an engineer for IBM for more than 30 years. NC State made multiple attempts to contact him for this article but was unable to reach him.



Segregation was still the rule of the day in the late 1950s, as seen in this 1957 *Agromeck* photo showing a bathroom for white women.

**1957** Crockett and Irwin Holmes join the school's track team. Walter Holmes joins the soccer team.

**1960** In April, student government passes a resolution calling for racial integration of public facilities in Raleigh. Days later, at Shaw University, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) is born. It will develop into a major engine of the civil rights movement, organizing sit-ins, freedom rides and voter-registration programs throughout the South. In May, Irwin Holmes becomes the first black undergraduate to earn a degree at NC State.



**1962** Vivian Henderson, later president of historically black Clark College in Atlanta and a friend of Martin Luther King Jr., joins the economics department as a visiting lecturer and becomes the campus' first black instructor.

**1963** Baxley's on Hillsborough Street becomes the first restaurant on the main drag to serve blacks. Also, a memo to Chancellor John T. Caldwell reports a segregated toilet facility on campus. It is immediately integrated.



Some tennis players on other schools' teams refused to compete against Irwin Holmes, who was the top-ranked NC State singles player his freshman year.

## An invisible beginning

**I**t was especially easy to miss the four students during their first semester on campus. They'd been offered campus housing, but none lived in dorms. Perhaps they'd seen the Chapel Hill approach the previous year, where UNC's first black undergraduates were assigned to a separate floor in a university hall. Instead, Crockett stayed at his childhood home and motored to school on a scooter. Since the commute from Durham was impractical, Walter and Irwin Holmes could not stay in their families' homes. They boarded in private homes in Raleigh.

Irwin Holmes' parents had convinced him not to stay on campus. His father, who supervised Durham's black recreation department, trained as a chemist but couldn't find an employer that would hire a black scientist. Though whites might not mind sharing classrooms with blacks, he felt, they might balk at sharing their bathrooms.

In the classroom, where the four students were all taking the engineering curriculum's grueling introductory courses, it wasn't uncommon for others to pass them in the halls and pretend not to see them. Walter Holmes and Irwin Holmes sometimes dined together in the university cafeteria, but the other seats at their table were usually empty. And while their presence meant the campus was integrated, the city of Raleigh was not. It wasn't until 1963, for example, that blacks were served

by Green's Restaurant on Wilmington Street—which advertised a mouth-watering special of ribeye steak, french fries, salad, all-you-could-eat rolls and coffee for \$1 in *Technician* throughout March 1957. Just three Hillsborough Street eateries were integrated by April 1963.

Barred from many off-campus outlets for socializing, the students sought ways to get involved on campus. Music-loving Walter Holmes successfully auditioned for the marching band in 1956 and was one of three freshmen picked to play the French horn in the mobile musical group.

Meanwhile, Irwin Holmes earned a spot on NC State's tennis team in fall 1956, becoming the first black student-athlete to compete for the college in any sport and later the first African American to win a varsity letter in the ACC. In a sport then known for uniforms as lily-white as its rosters, he was sometimes called the "Negro Netter" in news articles.

Tennis coach John Kenfield later wrote in *The News & Observer* that Holmes, who started playing at 10, was the best player on the team. But he didn't always get to play. "Our first frosh match was with Goldsboro High School," Kenfield recalled in the Feb. 24, 1963, issue of the newspaper. "When the Goldsboro coach showed up with his team and saw Irwin on the courts warming up, he told me word had got around that I had a Negro on the team and that he had been instructed not to let any of his boys play against Irwin. I had anticipated this and said I was

in response to the *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling: "There are two negroes already here, doing graduate work in electrical engineering. They have been treated fairly enough and have caused no reaction on the part of the student body. . . . This integration can only come about on a gradual basis. It might as well start now if things aren't pushed too fast."

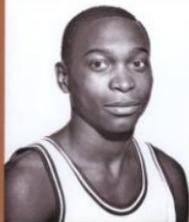
It took another year—and a legal challenge to the UNC Board of Trustees—before the courts determined that the ruling in the *Brown* case should also apply to undergraduate admissions in the UNC System. The result at NC State? Four black students out of more than 1,400 freshmen.

**1966** Two years after the Civil Rights Act of 1964, some area landlords who rent to students still refuse to offer housing to blacks. The university housing office excludes these landlords in its list of possible accommodations. Norma Wright Garcia '66 becomes the first black woman to earn an undergraduate degree from NC State.

**1968** Black and white NC State students assemble on campus after the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. to denounce the murder, but a citywide curfew prevents them from marching to the State Capitol.

**1969** Demand rises for black-studies classes, but NC State students must go to Shaw and St. Augustine's for such courses. The first basketball scholarship awarded to an African American goes to Al Heartley '71.

Al Heartley '71 and the 1968–69 basketball team.





MANUEL CROCKETT IRWIN HOLMES  
... Two Runners and Their Coach ... FRANK MURRAY



sorry that these were his orders, but since this was the case, we would have to claim forfeits for the No. 1 singles and doubles matches."

Kenfield dreaded telling his young player the news. But Irwin took it with aplomb. His response: "Shucks, coach. That's OK. If I keep this up, I'll be undefeated."

### Finding a place

**E**ARLY in 1957, Irwin Holmes and Manuel Crockett desegregated another sport when they made the track team, both competing in several events, including the 600-yard run on the indoor track and the 440 outside. After the season-opening statewide meet at Dorton Arena that spring, Crockett had barely crossed the finish line in third place in the 70-meter low hurdle when a reporter came hunting a quote. Still huffing and puffing from the race, Crockett uttered one sentence: "It's good to run for State."

Of course, not all shared that sentiment. Just as some individual players refused to play Holmes in tennis, many colleges below the Mason-Dixon Line still routinely set their athletic teams' schedules according to whether opposing squads had black players. Indeed, just a few years earlier, in 1951, NC State declined to host the Camp Lejeune Leathernecks for a track meet because the Marines had black runners. Southern universities might vie with multiracial clubs in Northern locations—to make sure they weren't excluded from tournament play—but inviting an integrated squad to home turf was treason of the highest order. And in some places, like Birmingham, Ala., it was illegal for blacks and whites to play together.

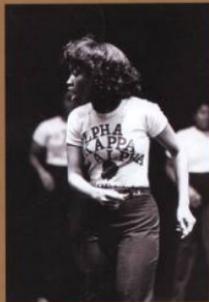
Irwin Holmes' and Crockett's presence on NC State teams didn't change those norms, though Walter Holmes did travel to the University of South Carolina with the marching band to play the French horn at a football game at least once, causing a stir in the local papers.

Each year during Irwin Holmes' tenure, the NC State tennis team hosted squads from South Carolina, but did not travel to the Palmetto State. But when Clemson University and South Carolina came to Raleigh, Holmes threw himself into the matches, using smashes and well-aimed forehands to drive home his point: "I can play with you, and I can beat you, too."

With a semester under their belts, Irwin Holmes moved into a Watauga Hall room with Walter Holmes, an easygoing guy who loved the musician's nightlife and had a "do-it-my-way" attitude that attracted girls like bees to pollen. Irwin Holmes used the opportunity to become involved in intramural sports as well, playing on the football teams organized around the dorms.

Crockett, meanwhile, was having second thoughts about his decision to attend NC State. His routine was "going to class, going to track practice" and then going home. The large college was a shock after Ligon High School, where the entire stu-

**1970** Students form the university's first African American Cultural Center. They use a space in the basement of the campus YMCA, slated for demolition.



**1971** Seven students found NC State's first black fraternity, a chapter of Alpha Phi Alpha.

**1972** A pamphlet, *In a Black Perspective*, tallies the university's black community: 222 students out of 13,809 and nine professors. It also lists courses that focus on black history and culture: two in political science and a sociology course on race relations.

NCSU  
IN A **BLACK**  
PERSPECTIVE



LEFT: Manuel Crockett and Irwin Holmes made the track team. CENTER: Holmes, with his father, was the first black player in the ACC to letter in a varsity sport. RIGHT: In his senior year, Holmes was elected co-captain of the tennis team.

dent body was smaller than the NC State freshman class. There, they used hand-me-down textbooks donated by white schools and didn't have enough money for a track team. But they did have a tight-knit community. He'd found his first two semesters "overwhelming, in those monster classrooms with more than 100 people." Plus, he adds, "electrical engineering wasn't what I thought it would be. I was exploring other majors, and I went to the recreation department." But when he approached an official there about switching majors before the end of his freshman year, the man "said that the department 'wasn't equipped for people like me.' That was a defining moment." He transferred to N.C. Central University in Durham the following fall, regretting that he didn't tell the official what was on his mind: "To hell with you. I'm here. Adapt."

## Together but separate

**T**HE OTHER three students returned the next fall, but their social lives still largely took place elsewhere. "On Fridays, I got the bus off campus down Oberlin Road to Highway 70," Irwin Holmes says. "I hitchhiked home and spent practically every weekend at North Carolina Central."

There were few women on NC State's campus, but even if there had been more,

dating them was out of the question in a society where the suggestion that 14-year-old Emmett Till had said something "improper" to a white woman had gotten him lynched in Mississippi in 1955. "I don't think I spoke to a white woman in four years, not even to say 'good morning,'" Holmes says. The students were able to find dates at N.C. Central to attend NC State's annual Engineers' Ball formal, one of the campus' biggest social events. They sipped punch and escorted their swirly-skirted dates at the dance but stayed apart from the crowds.

By the end of their sophomore year, Walter Holmes was wondering if he'd made a mistake by majoring in engineering. He had other frustrations, as well; in the spring of 1958, he'd made NC State's varsity soccer team and started many of the home games. But the coach wouldn't let him travel to away games, a decision that cost Holmes playing time and, ultimately, a varsity letter in the sport.

He transferred to UNC-Chapel Hill in the fall to major in business. But that wasn't the right fit either. He longed to move to a larger city with a bigger music scene and broader recreational options for African American students. He applied for admission to Howard University in Washington, D.C., and transferred into its electrical engineering program in 1959.

By then, other black students had enrolled on campus (there were at least 11 by 1960), but Irwin Holmes still received regular reminders that not everyone believed he belonged there. He had continued to

play intramural football for the Watauga-Tucker team. He and another black student, Ronald Yokely '63, were among the strongest players on the team and got lots of playing time. (Yokely was an All-State player at his High Point high school.) But the team captain couldn't make one game and the substitute captain benched them.

Yet such reminders that he was still an outsider were coupled with new signals that he was finding a place. The usual team captain vowed that Holmes wouldn't be benched in future games, and, in a later contest, his teammates rallied around him when a white opponent gunned for him. "I went up for a pass, and this guy knocked me sky-high. The next play, they took that player off the field with a broken leg," Holmes says.

On the tennis team, too, Holmes had found support among his teammates. "Because of Irwin's personality and behavior, it was easy to like him," says his former teammate, Mickey Solomon '59. "He was friendly, neither too proud nor too passive. He was just him. And we [as a team] were able to get along because we had some free spirits on the team and we had some players from up North" who thought nothing of close contact with black people.

Once, after a match in Chapel Hill, the team drove to the Glen Lennox Dairy Bar. "We just wanted to go in somewhere and get something cool," Solomon says. "But they wouldn't serve Irwin. I didn't make a big deal out of it. I just said, 'Let's all leave.'"

The team walked out.

**1974** The university has 17 black faculty members but aims to have 44 by July 1976. (By Aug. 31, 1976, there were 18 full-time black faculty.)

**1975** Ten women form the first black sorority chapter on campus, Delta Sigma Theta.

Hubert Winston '70, '73 MS, '75 PhD becomes first African American to earn a doctoral degree from NC State. His degree is in chemical engineering; he later joins the engineering faculty.

Kevin Howell '88



**1980** The university starts a mentoring program for black students.

**1986** The Black Repertory Theatre is founded.

**1987** Kevin Howell '88 is the first black student body president. He's followed by six others: Brian Nixon '90 in 1989-90, Bobby Johnson '95 in 1994-95, Harold Pettigrew '02 in 2000-01, Darryl Willie '03 in 2001-02, Michael Anthony '03 in 2002-03 and Tony Caravano '04, who served two consecutive terms between 2003 and 2005.

**1991** The African American Cultural Center opens.

Art is hung for the opening of the African American Cultural Center.



## The things worth remembering

**I**N 1959, Irwin Holmes' senior year, Kenfield urged his players to elect Holmes team captain: "Now, I want you to remember that it's a tradition to have a senior." He was the squad's only senior, but even with that not-so-subtle hint, Holmes tied for co-captain. His selection to occupy that position, just another first in a long line of achievements, was noted, with a tiny mug shot, in *Sports Illustrated*.

Although he still hadn't made close friends on campus, he no longer needed to scan the room for someone to talk to. In his senior year, he was invited for the first time to join a study group with four other upperclassmen. After cramming with his new academic partners, his performance in the core electrical engineering course jumped a full letter grade.

As a measure of how far he was outside the loop of campus life, he hadn't been aware such study groups existed, just as he didn't know that one of his instructors begged off teaching duties when she discovered he was in her class. During his freshman year, his female math teacher was replaced. He thought nothing of it until a year later, when he overheard a discussion about in-

tegration while walking past a classroom on his way to the YMCA. Through the open door, he heard a facilitator say there'd been few problems, except for a female instructor requesting she be relieved of her duties because she was uncomfortable teaching a black student.

Lingering in the hallway, Irwin Holmes realized that he was the student in question.

But reclining in an armchair at his home 50 years later, Irwin Holmes shrugs it off with a smile. That woman didn't influence his career. He remembers, much more fondly, William Stevenson, the engineering professor who pulled strings and helped him secure his first job as an electrical engineer at RCA in Camden, N.J., where he met his wife. He recalls, with feeling, Coach John Kenfield, who pushed him toward his athletic milestones. Opening a scrapbook filled with yellowing newspaper clippings and his 1960 graduation program, he points to a congratulatory handwritten note that Kenfield sent him upon learning of Holmes' marriage to his wife, Meredythe.

"Racism is everywhere," Holmes muses. "But there are a lot of good white people who want to overcome it. And if the atmosphere allows it, they can. . . . Coach Kenfield could have said, 'That guy won't play Irwin, we'll sit Irwin down.' But he didn't."

Cynthia Greenlee-Donnell is a Durham-based freelance writer who is researching racial violence in South Carolina from 1889 to 1955.

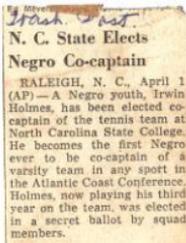
*In 1956, there were four. In 2006, there are more than 2,200. Black undergraduates at NC State can expect far different social and educational experiences than those of their counterparts 50 years ago. NC State talked to a current African American student to find out what's changed.*

**W**HEN the first black undergraduate students started their studies on the NC State campus in 1956, they could barely fill a cafeteria table.

The landscape is different today, says Deandra Duggans, a 21-year-old senior majoring in parks, recreation and tourism management. The Washington, D.C., native chaired the

Black Students Board—an organization that celebrates black culture and hosts programming for the campus community—from fall 2004 to spring 2006. Each year, it co-hosts the university's Kwanzaa Celebration; the Pan-Afrikan Festival, a weekend event that celebrates African American heritage; and the Martin Luther King Jr. Commemoration, which brings well-known speakers such as Desmond Tutu's daughter, Naomi Tutu, to campus to honor King's life and legacy.

In contrast to the lack of on-campus social outlets for black students 50 years ago, Duggans counts 26 groups that reach



**Irwin Holmes**  
**N. C. State Elects Negro Co-captain**  
RALEIGH, N. C., April 1 (AP)—A Negro youth, Irwin Holmes, has been elected co-captain of the tennis team at North Carolina State College. He becomes the first Negro ever to be co-captain of a varsity team in any sport in the Atlantic Coast Conference. Holmes, now playing his third year on the team, was elected in a secret ballot by squad members.



Members of African American Student Affairs go on retreat in 1993.

**2000** The administration creates the position of vice provost for diversity and African American affairs. One of the stated goals is to improve the experience of black students and other minorities.

**2002** The African American Student Advisory Council begins issuing report cards that grade the university on enrollment, retention and graduation of black students. The report card gives NC State an F for recruiting black students.

**2005** For the fall semester, 9.1 percent of NC State's almost 31,000 students are African American. About 4 percent of the university's full-time instructional faculty—71 out of 1,633—are black.

**2006** According to a survey of alumni who had graduated between the summer of 2000 and the spring of 2003, black alumni and white alumni felt equally positive about their experiences. Ninety-three percent of black alumni from those years

would recommend NC State to a friend compared with 95 percent of white alumni. And 83 percent would choose NC State again compared with 85 percent of whites.

SOURCES: African American Student Affairs records; University Archives; Alice Reagan, *North Carolina State University: A Narrative History, Technician, Various Issues*; Nash N. Winstead, *Inclusion and Involvement of African-Americans at North Carolina State University, 1953-1993*; Office of University Planning and Analysis.

RIGHT: Deandra Duggans poses with a mural of famous black Americans at the African American Cultural Center. Black students today have so many options, she says, that "our activities sometimes conflict." BELOW: Students hold a campus vigil for Coretta Scott King in 2006.

out to black students specifically. They range from the Society of African American Corporate Leaders to historically black Greek organizations like Delta Sigma Theta, Duggans' sorority. Taking advantage of the opportunities, like participating in a peer mentoring program that matches experienced students with incoming freshmen, made it easy for her to transition into college life, she says.

Though her experience at NC State has been positive, Duggans believes there's room for uniting the black community on campus as well as improving interracial relations and recruitment and retention of minority students.

Today, she says, there are almost too many organizations catering primarily to African Americans. "The biggest problem is over-scheduling, and our activities sometimes conflict," she says. "We would be so much more powerful if we came together, instead of being 26 separate organizations." A more unified African American community would give black students greater influence on campus policies and politics, such as the disbursement of fees to student groups, she says.

There's also work to be done in building bridges among racial groups on campus, she says—though as a sign of how things have changed in 50 years, she's experienced only one instance of hostility. Several years ago, when she became involved with the Black Students Board, a white student asked: "How would you feel if we had a white culture club?" Duggans replied that if he felt such a club was warranted, he should start one. The Black Students Board and the other organizations geared toward black students don't

exclude anyone from joining or attending their programs because of race, she told him. In fact, many of them strive to cross boundaries and educate others about African American culture. When the student's comments became increasingly rude, Duggans walked away. That student was the exception, she says, not the norm.

Duggans is concerned, though, that too few black students who start their studies at NC State actually graduate. "The main problem is retention," she says. Graduation rates for black students are significantly better than in the past—prior to 1999, fewer than 50 percent of black freshmen earned their degrees in six years. Still, the most recent data available—for students who started their studies in 1999—show that 59 percent of black freshmen graduated within six years, compared with 72 percent of white students.

Part of the problem, she thinks, is the shortage of black professors with whom African American students can identify. She's had only three African American instructors since entering NC State. According to the 2006 report card on African American student issues issued by NC State's African American Advisory Council, just 4 percent of full-time faculty members are black. But there are signs of change. The number of black faculty grew by 11 percent between 2002 and 2005.

Another issue is financial. Since 2001, tuition has increased by 45 percent to \$2,391.50 per semester for in-state undergraduates and by 28 percent to \$8,490.50 per semester for out-of-state students. Duggans pays her tuition bills with a combination of student loans and several scholarships from internal and external sources. But she says that some of her peers—particularly those from out of state—left after their first year because they couldn't afford to stay.

The university awards financial aid funds based on each student's demonstrated need and legally cannot award aid on a race-exclusive basis, says Julie



Mallette, associate vice provost and director of scholarships and financial aid. The university met 81 percent of the demonstrated need of all full-time undergraduate students in 2005-06, and 87 percent of black students received a scholarship or grant. The average scholarship and grant package to full-time black students, not including athletic aid, was \$6,819.

"The future of NC State includes a definitive focus on diversity and inclusiveness," says Chancellor James L. Oblinger. "We have made great strides in creating programs and outreach activities that embrace and foster these goals. Pack Promise, our student success plan, provided 316 students with 100 percent of their financial aid needs—33.5 percent of our Pack Promise Scholars are African American. NC State will continue to take significant steps in creating a campus climate that welcomes everyone."

Ultimately, Duggans has a positive message for prospective black students. "Everybody I know seems to be comfortable here," she says. That doesn't mean it will be smooth sailing always, she cautions. All students, regardless of race, will likely experience some sort of problem while on campus, whether it's with a professor or in a class. "But after being here a while, I know the right people to go to," she says. "And I can tell people where to go."

—Cynthia Greenlee-Donnell

NC State is hosting a yearlong series of events honoring the 50th anniversary of the first African American undergraduates, including panel discussions and commemorative celebrations at Homecoming. For details, or to contribute toward the events, visit <http://www.ncsu.edu/msa/goldenanniversary.php>.