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Black Enterprise Magazine-Affirmative Action Statement

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Jun. 12 1995 5:02PM P01

FAX COVER

CORPORATE COMMUNICATIONS OFFICE

BLACK ENTERPRISE MAGAZINE

DATE: June 12, 1995 TIME: 4:50 pm.

PLEASE DELIVER THE FOLLOWING PAGE(S) TO:

Name Alexis Herman
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IF YOU DO NOT RECEIVE 13 PAGE(S), INCLUDING COVER SHEET.
PLEASE CONTACT ME AT THE TELEPHONE NUMBER LISTED ABOVE.

NOTES

As you requested, following is a copy of Carl P. Graves'
position on affirmative action, and an unfinished galley
of the August '95 article on the class of '70 and
how affirmative action worked for them.

Justie Dumber



CELEBRATING 25 YEARS OF BLACK ENTERPRISE AND BLACK BUSINESS ACHIEVEMENT

Statement of Earl G. Graves, Publisher & CEO

BLACK ENTERPRISE MAGAZINE

RE: Adarand Decision

Given the current political climate, the Supreme Court's decision in Adarand Constructors Inc. vs. the State of Colorado was far from unexpected. While the decision is discouraging, it is far from being the decisive blow on the issue of the merits of affirmative action. The seeds for this decision were sown by politics, and reaped with the Supreme Court appointments of the conservative Reagan and Bush administrations. The Court's makeup--and the appointment of Clarence Thomas in particular--speak to the importance of African Americans making their influence felt in the political process. It is particularly disturbing--though, again, not totally surprising--that Thomas voted with the majority in this decision.

Minority set-aside programs have been critical to the ability of minority business to gain access to government contracts--business which, before the advent of affirmative action, was reserved exclusively for white-owned companies. The Supreme Court's latest

decision points to the need for black business to take action; this is why the formation of a political action committee that will advocate on behalf of black business is so vitally important at this time.

As you know, I have joined with other CEOs of the nation's largest black businesses to ensure that decisions such as this one don't go unchallenged. Safeguarding affirmative action is among the top priorities of our PAC, Mobilization for Economic Opportunity.

It's important to note that the Supreme Court stopped short of striking down Colorado's affirmative action program, instead sending it to a federal appeals court for further study of whether the program actually discriminates against white-owned companies. Again, the issue is far from decided. And the battle is far from over.

OVER STORY

MOM ENT of TRUTH for the of

by Caroline V. Clarke

470

Affirmative action
opened the doors
and they were the
first to plow through
ambitious,
determined and pre-
pared. Twenty-five
years later, they've
achieved the Dream.
But can they secure
it for their children?

THEY WERE BORN IN THE LATE 1940s, INTO A world divided by color—black and white. Given their timing and their race, the white world offered them little and expected even less. But all that quickly changed.

Just as they entered grade school, a victory in *Brown vs. the Board of Education* altered the nation's educational landscape. By the time they were seniors in high school, colleges that had been completely shuttered to their parents were not only considering them, they were recruiting them.

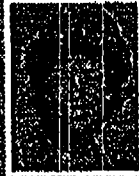
By then, the Civil Rights Act of 1965 had been passed, and the government was putting pressure on white institutions to either admit black students or lose federal funding. The incentive opened doors, first at the undergraduate level, then at the graduate level and, ultimately, at the professional level. Blessed with ambition, determination and strong families who instilled in them the value of education, the 11 women and 14 men interviewed for this article became first-line beneficiaries of a new program dubbed affirmative action.



Charles Allen
President
Grainmilk Inc.
Marchant, Illinois



Brenda Adams
President
Grainmilk Inc.
Marchant, Illinois



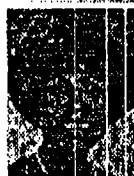
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Roberta Gurnea
V.P. and Director
Motorola Inc.
Tempe, Arizona



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David Jones
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Community College
Sect. of Ed. & H.
Wayne, Wisconsin



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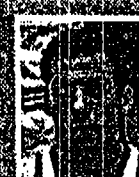
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Mamon Powers
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of State Construction Co.
Purdue University



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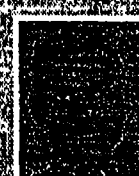
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Carolyn Thompson
Manager
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Ohio State University



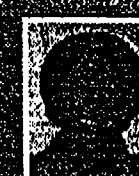
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Manager
Procter & Gamble
Ohio State University

COVER STORY

Carl Robbins

Personal Stats: age 47, married with four children, ages 2 to 12, and a stepchild, 25

Current Position: Senior Manager, Employment at The Vanguard Group of Investment Companies, Malvern, Pa.

Education: B.A. American History, University of Pennsylvania '70; M.B.A., Labor Relations Management, The Wharton School, '80

Reflections: "I am enraged about all the dialogue that's going on about affirmative action. We are the proof of the pudding. Who succeeds is not merely a question of talent, it's a question of opportunity."

Robbins was born into a close and extended Philadelphia family with West Indian roots and an impressive history rich in intellectual and entrepreneurial pursuits. A national merit scholar in high school, and a self-described "basketball monk" in college, Robbins traced his family's history as a senior-year project.

"At the time, the Nixon administration was touting black capitalism as the wave of the future," recalls Robbins. "Much was being made of self-help, and the whole bootstrapper phenomenon." Intrigued, he sought to learn why an old family catering business had not survived. His conclusion: Racism had destroyed the ability of the business to grow and succeed.

Robbins sought his own success in the human resources field, first at the Mobile Corp., then UNISYS and FMC Corp. Today, at Vanguard, he is enthusiastically leading his company's diversity efforts, but admits to being plagued with doubts. "I took an informal survey of the black members of Wharton's class of '73, and almost none of them are working at corporations anymore—they're self-employed. Why? Because it's not a glass ceiling we hit. It's much more profound than that. I'm one of the guys out here waving a big banner at other black folks, saying, 'Come join me!' But sometimes I'm very ambivalent about it.

"In the increasing competition for a limited number of jobs, there's a backlash coming from a small group yelling, 'What about me? We've done enough. I don't want this guilt trip anymore. Why should I give a hoot about someone who's had 25 years of so-called advantage? I've got enough to worry about with my own job and family.' They're totally wrong. And, what troubles me most is that I hear nothing from the business community about why affirmative action needs to be kept in place. It should be graphically, empirically evident that this needs to be kept in place."

expert who, just last month, advised the San Francisco practice to hire more blacks. Ronald Wilson (Stanford '70), a founding partner in the Los Angeles firm of Wilson, Connors & McCutcheon, captured in our words. Among the nation's leading black law firms, and Joyce Roche (Illinois '70), formerly the highest ranking African American executive at a major bank, are members of Women of Power, and the Black Executive (August 1991) and the Black Executive (February 1992). They are an impressive group, but the reason to be proud, but they realize that it is not for affirmative action. They would not be where they are. Unlike many executives of African Americans, they don't feel that acknowledging the impact of affirmative action on their careers takes anything away from their talent, their intellect or their achievement. They are clear and unabashed about what affirmative action did for them. "I'm African American," says Wilson (Stanford '70). "I'm proud of that. But if white people didn't have a chance, they should never have been in the first place."

Acknowledging the impact of affirmative action takes nothing away from their achievements

They are equally clear about what affirmative action did for them. Contrary to popular belief, it did not enable them to float above basic requirements and rely on the good will of guilt-ridden white professors and bosses. Quite the opposite. At Wharton, Wilson (Oberlin '70) recalls having to earn his money, short by several weeks to take special courses along with the other incoming black freshmen, designed to "prepare us for what would be the toughest program that was Oberlin." The fact that Wilson had come within a hair of being valedictorian at McDonald High School (where, as the only black student in his class, he was a star athlete and five-time class president) was never considered.

Joyce Roche still feels anger recalling similar presumptions of inferiority. A hard worker and

COVER STORY

*Wilhelmina Leigh***Personal Stats:** 47, single, no children**Current Position:** Senior Research Associate/Economist, Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, Washington, D.C.**Education:** A.B. Economics, Cornell '70; M.A. and Ph.D. Economics, Johns Hopkins '76 and '78**Reflections:** Her 16-page resume is dominated by a list of papers she has authored on the economics of housing, health and urban renewal. A member of Phi Beta Kappa who finished college a semester early, Leigh has also held teaching positions at Johns Hopkins, Georgetown, the University of Virginia, Howard and Harvard.

But what her resume doesn't detail are the professional slights she's suffered due to her race or gender, and the scars left by her college years.

Cornell because my father wanted me to, and because I thought he was the best thing since sliced bread." But the D.C. native was unprepared for what she would find there. "In my imaginings, Cornell was going to be the land of milk and honey, filled with all of these brilliant people. What I found was a mixed blessing. I learned a lot about myself and the world, but a lot

of the lessons were very painful.

"In the environment I grew up in, everybody was pretty much the same. In Ithaca, you had to define yourself, and that definition was likely to grow out of what you weren't, not what you were. There were about 40 blacks in [this school of] arts and sciences. For Cornell, it was a real bumper crop, but it felt like very few. My first week there, I just cried."

Cornell was then a hotbed of militant black activism—one of the most striking in the nation. Leigh contributed from the sidelines. Brandishing a weapon, as did some of her peers, "was not my style." Leigh never believed that the sometimes extreme action students took at Cornell, although widely publicized, would have much impact beyond the university. Her doubts were confirmed when she returned to D.C. after graduation. Thus, she says flatly, "I had no ivory tower views of what the world would hold for me. I did not expect to have the same career options as a white male, and I haven't. But I did expect to have more options than my mother, and I have."

Affirmative action dramatically diminished overt racial exclusion, but has done little to alter the racist mind-set, observes Leigh. In her field—in which Leigh is one of few women and even fewer African Americans—Leigh says she has been somewhat "ghettoized" in her research assignments, limited to black- or women-related projects "because it is tougher to be accepted as an expert on other issues." The enemy is still there, she says, but affirmative action has made it harder to pin down.

experience occurred while she was pursuing her M.B.A. at Columbia University in New York. It involved her grade in quantitative analysis, taught by a professor who Roche says was known for being pretty good to black and minority students. Roche, who had been a math major at Cornell and a B going into the final exam, so she was asked to receive a C+ in the course, although, "How in

"You don't hear this chorus of 'Oh, they're not really qualified,' being applied to

hell could this happen?" I called the professor and was told he had changed the scale so that all the "Bs" dropped to "Cs." In reality, he did not all of the black students, earning this grade reduction. But he would not give anyone black above a C+ as we all got "Cs."

Even all these years—a quarter century or more—later, affirmative action has not succeeded in altering that institutional mindset, which still views African Americans as inferior at work and in the case of real superstars, anomalous at best. "There are attitudes that white people seem unable to get out of their psyche," notes Martin Smith Holmes (Michigan State '70), an assistant editor of *Smithsonian Magazine* in Washington, D.C. "You don't hear this chorus of 'Oh, they're not really qualified' being applied to women. The misogyny over qualifications has been aimed almost exclusively at blacks. What else can you attribute that to but racism?"

Perhaps most important, they say, affirmative action has not yet done what it was most intended to—level the playing field. Now, it seems, it may never get the chance.

Roberta "Bobby" Guttman (Temple '70) is a straight-talking vice president and director of human resources diversity at Motorola Inc. in Chicago. As the only black female officer of Motorola worldwide, Guttman says she is where she is today for two reasons: affirmative action ("which helped open the doors") and results achieved ("once inside, it's all about performance"). Diversity initiatives—Guttman's specialty—are not a replacement for the public policy of affirmative action, she says. "The trend for affirmative



COVER STORY

Charles E. Allen

Personal Stats: 47, married, three children ages 12 to 20

Current Position: President and Co-founder of Grainmark Inc., Detroit

Education: B.S. Finance/Accounting, Morehouse '70; M.B.A. Finance, University of Chicago '72

Reflections: "When I was graduating high school, it was the heyday of prominent white colleges coming and pulling the best and brightest black students to integrate their schools. I talked to Penn and some others, but I decided I didn't want to be a statistic."

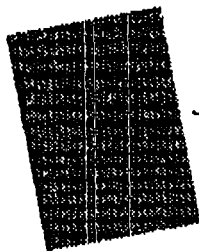
"The last year of Benjamin Mays' presidency was my first year at Morehouse. He was awe inspiring. He would always indicate that Morehouse was a builder of minds, not an athletic machine. We were constantly told we could do anything, be anything. It was a place of ideas and challenges."

Allen says that that rich, nurturing experience prepared him well for business school, where "they went to great pains to explain in detail theories that held that black intellectual capacity was less than white. I will never forget a white professor noting that one had to have the same cultural background as he did to understand the course curriculum. I had a fit. One of my friends had to calm me down. He pulled me aside and said, 'Don't let them provoke you into doing something stupid. Don't let them send you home...'"

"I was heavily recruited by banks, including First [National Bank of] Chicago. I arrived there with a blue double knit suit on with a flap over the pocket, a big tie with big birds—partridges—on it, and a big afro. I looked like a country hick, but I thought I was sharp!"

Despite his initial fashion faux pas, Allen moved rapidly through several groundbreaking positions. He served as a vice president and division manager at The Bank of California before becoming president and CEO of First Independence National Bank of Detroit, the ninth-largest black-owned bank in the nation. Now head of his own firm, which manages assets totaling \$1.5 billion, Allen believes the future for African Americans lies in the amassing of black capital and the rebuilding of those institutions—churches, schools, businesses—"that we dismantled in our quest for integration." But, he insists, this should not happen to the exclusion of further progress in mainstream sectors.

"There used to be an expression in the pre-affirmative action days, 'If you're black and you're in the post office, you could stop work, because great, bright, promising talent had been locked out of other professional possibilities. That was all changing. What will happen now?'"



AL CALTER

...tive action is almost as polarizing as it was 20 years ago," she adds. "But if you don't want to be a statistic, to?" The answer, for anyone who has ever been

chew gum at the same time, is no.

Because the same basic reasons that drew African Americans out of the South are still there," says Coleman. "It's not more time."

And so it was with a sense of urgency and more than a little ambivalence that the Class of '70 approached their college reunions last spring.

They reflected in lengthy interviews on how they'd come up, well, as they say, and some of that old '70 anger began to surface.

Anger that a program with such a shiny history is already being called into question.

Anger at the racist rhetoric and blame being perpetrated to fuel the debate.

The truth, they say, lies in their ongoing individual stories and those of thousands of African Americans like them. If only we could tell them all.

Unfortunately space allowed to share just a few (see sidebar).

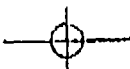
NEW GENERATION, SAME OLD TUNE

While their anger is palpable, so is their fear. For while this class has come a long way since the vibrant but traumatic '60s and '70s, the rest of the world seems to be cycling back. And that does not bode well for their children.

Some seem almost dazed at the speed with which the battles of their childhood have re-emerged—almost as if they were never fought in the first place.

Yvonne Bryant Reese (Spelman '70) came to a painful realization after a recent conversation with her daughter, who went to work at San Francisco advertising agency after graduating from Stanford in 1993. "She called me and said, 'These people are racist and they don't even know it. They will judge you and promote you based on the color of your skin,' and I thought, 'Finally! She understands what I've been saying all along.' But the color Reese felt initially was quickly overshadowed by a

"People are racist and they don't even know it. They judge you based on the color of your skin."



COVER STORY

Brenda Armstrong

Personal Stats: 45, never married, 2 adopted sons

Current Position: Associate Professor of Pediatrics, Division of Pediatric Cardiology; Director of Fellowship Training, Duke University Medical Center, Durham, N.C.

Education: B.S. Zoology, Duke '70; M.D., St. Louis U. '74

Reflections: When Brenda Armstrong was admitted to Duke, her physician father was thrilled. He believed a Duke degree would open doors for his first-born. He had no idea what she would go through to get it.

Armstrong's class of 20 (out of 1,500) doubled the total number of black students at the school, but by year-end only half that number remained. The severe attrition had multiple causes.

Chief among them was discrimination. "Advisors

would flat out tell you that you didn't have the requisite skills to handle science at Duke," Armstrong recalls. "We also had a number of situations where blacks were brought before the honor board and accused of plagiarism because the teacher felt such work could not have been produced by a black student."

In the fall of 1967, Armstrong helped found the Afro-American Society, which began discussions with Duke's administration seeking specific things: a dorm of their own, a cultural center, more black faculty and administrators, a more inclusive curriculum. On February 13, 1969, frustrated by a lack of responsiveness, 13 black students—aided by others—took over the administration building. Armstrong, then chair of the Society, was at the center of the standoff. When the school placed the group on trial internally, all 60 of Duke's black students joined them. They were successfully represented, pro bono, by Julius Chambers, chief counsel of the NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund. The experience, says Armstrong, "still drives my career and political involvement."

Graduation proved sobering. "My initial idealism that all of a sudden things would get a whole lot better for us was totally dashed," she recalls. "The only thing I was certain of was that the world would be a whole lot different, and we would have to work hard for whatever we got. I felt a window of opportunity, and a sense that we had to grab all we could before it slammed shut. I've always had a healthy sense of what my father calls paranoia."

The 60 students tried alongside Armstrong in the spring of '69 must have shared that sense. "Between us, we have about 160 degrees," she brags. "People always try to cheapen you with race and gender, but excellence makes it tough for them to stop there."

Still, she admits, even success doesn't dull the sting of racism. "We have never stopped looking back," says Armstrong, who, ironically, has built her career at Duke and is one of a small handful of black

sense of sadness." "I expected their children to change," says the Atlanta-based branch manager for AT&T's global services network division. "I didn't expect it to take so long."

Ronald Wilson, former Reagan attorney and founder of one of the nation's most successful black-owned law firms, Wilson grew up in all-black Compton, Calif., and returned to L.A. after graduating Harvard Law School. His first boss, Ramon, spent last spring choosing between offers from Stanford undergraduate—his son's alma mater—and Yale. The elder Wilson could not have been prouder, but he was also wary. "My son has more confidence than I do," Wilson confesses. "I'm better prepared to deal with the world than I am. I feel good about his chances. I feel less good about the world."

Wilson ticks off the daily reminders of unkept promise: "There's no black online. I look down town at the skyline—nir one black owns any of those buildings. I go to the Lakers game—all the best seats on the floor are occupied by whites. The *New York Times* and the *Daily News* are owned by whites. And I still have to tell my son—as my dad told me—to look out for the LAPD. So a lot has changed—and not much has changed."

Wilson fears most for those who are situated much like he was back in high school. "My

"My son has confidence, I feel good about his chances. I feel less good about the world."

kids coming out of Compton now are not being recruited by Harvard and Stanford and Yale," he says. "Vertical mobility is a powerful thing. It's becoming less and less possible in this country."

Most of Wilson's peers share his concerns, pre-aching hopes that their children enjoy a promising, productive future with a prayer for something far more fundamental: that their children are able to successfully navigate the myriad dangers that could cut their futures short.

Rear Admiral Anthony Watson (U.S. Naval Academy '70) grew up in Chicago's now infamously

COVER STORY

David R. Jones

Personal Stats: 47, married, two children

Current Position: President and CEO, Community Service Society of New York

Education: B.A. Government Studies, Wesleyan '70; J.D., Yale Law School '74

Reflections: Jones knew in high school that he would become a lawyer and enter a life of public service. It was a family tradition. His father was the first black assemblyman elected in Brooklyn's Bedford Stuyvesant neighborhood—the same camp from which Shirley Chisholm sprang. In the Jones house, the kitchen table was a center of heady political and intellectual debate, from which he and his sister were never barred. They had also met several of the black cultural and political icons of the day, including Josephine Baker and Paul Robeson, both clients of their father.

Jones first found his own stage at Wesleyan, and he rose to the occasion with finesse. He was a leader of the largest black student population in the school's history, helping to found the black student union and its ensuing institutional offshoots. During the summer before his sophomore year, Jones interned with Sen. Robert Kennedy; months later the senator was assassinated. But Kennedy's shocking death—and the other assassinations of that era—did nothing to dampen Jones' enthusiasm for being "a leader for change on both the campus and in American society." In retrospect, he says, "We were naive."

Reality hit hard a few years out of Yale Law School, where Jones had done well and been recruited by New York-based Cravath, Swaine & Moore, one of the most prestigious old-line law firms in the nation. He later published an article detailing what became of his black colleagues at Cravath.

"One committed suicide, one ended up disbarred and homeless, another had a severe mental breakdown," Jones recounts, ticking off the horror stories. Why? "The rules for us were different. You couldn't learn the trade—which means basically making one mistake after another—without it being held against you, used as a reason for not promoting you and not hiring more [African Americans]."

"A lot of promises were made—perhaps with real intentions—but then broken. A lot of us got sucked up in this euphoria of opening doors, and then things changed. We had bought into the notion—hook, line and sinker—that this was a meritocracy. Then we got marginalized. It took me years to recover my sense of worth and potential. And I was one of the lucky ones."

At 38, Jones became the youngest and the first African American to lead Community Service Society of New York. Under his leadership, the agency is now the largest of its kind in the nation. A rather vocal opponent of New York's Republican mayor and governor, Jones held a fundraiser last spring to offset CSS' disappearing public monies. It raised more than \$380,000 net; a substantial portion came from black New Yorkers.

DOUG WEATHERS

ly (his mother still lives there) or choosing to stay in the city with young residents? A few years ago, Waters was escorting a reporter through the development. The abhor, the team learned, was that they had to live with a white man about seven. "I asked him why he wanted to be white," Waters recalled. "He said, 'Alive.' I never forgot that. A seven-year-old should not be preoccupied with staying alive."

Such responses add a terrible way about where the world is headed, particularly as it relates to black youth. Now called the Class of '70's drive to do what they can to improve the lot for all African Americans, old as they are, in their private circles say, "I don't want any more of these to show [young people] an alternative, we have to be there to help them formulate their dreams; so when they respond to questions about their future, they don't do it from the negative or the defensive, but with a real eye toward what they want to do in life."

WHITE FOLKS BENEFITED TOO

In interview after interview, the Class of '70 expressed their disillusionment and then, despite that, a mere 25 years after leaving the program, they were clearly aimed at positively impacting the lives

They could have given my spot to a white person. But they took me. And that was the right choice."

of African Americans—such as affirmative action—was being torn down. Their list of reasons why it needs to be maintained and, if anything, strengthened, is counted off in personal tales of the chilling effect racism—and exclusion—continue to have on their lives.

Several mentioned the glass ceiling, although Brenda Armstrong (Duke '70), a physician, likened it to "Plexiglas," noting that "the only thing that gets broken is your back as you keep banging against it." Procter & Gamble recruiting manager Carolyn Thompson (Ohio State '70) observes that while corporate America may be



OVER STORY

Reveta Bowers

Personal Stats: 47, married, 2 children

Current Position: Head of School, Center for Early Education, Los Angeles

Education: B.A. Theater Arts, University of Southern California; M.A. Developmental Psychology, College for Developmental Studies

Reflections: When Reveta Bowers entered USC, the most common professional options for women were nursing, social work and teaching. Always one to chart her own path, Bowers majored in theater arts.

"USC was a particularly conservative campus," Bowers says, explaining her choice. "The theater arts department was a place of more diversity of thought and action than others on campus."

GEORGE DELMAN

Although there were "very few" black students at USC then, and the influence of movements such as the Black Panthers "were a part of shaping who and what we all became," Bowers was more troubled by the gap between the haves and have-nots than about the rift between the races. Not surprisingly, though, the haves were mostly white.

"It was very clear to me that political forces were being shaped by economic forces," she recalls. "I was surrounded by students with a great deal of money, whose professional futures were clear. They were not at all plagued by the uncertainties I was. For them, there was a road map and they knew exactly where they were going to be on it. Either places were being held for them at their parents' companies, or made for them at their friends' companies. It was the first time I saw cultural networking. I didn't have a clue."

But Bowers caught on quickly. She logged a short time as a buyer and fashion coordinator for Bullocks (a plum job that resulted from "the convergence of the store needing to integrate its ranks and my having a college degree fresh in my hand"), but quit after a year. She then recalled her mother's sage advice: "You can always fall back on teaching." The rest, as they say, is history.

Bowers ended up at the Center for Education at the behest of a black parent who was concerned that her daughter's private school had no black teachers. At the helm since 1976, Bowers has made it her mission to be visible (she is a director on many boards, including that of the Walt Disney Co.) and to reach out to parents who are "great believers in public education, but couldn't in good conscience send their children" to the L.A. public schools that served Bowers so well as a child. The pivotal issue for these parents is quality education, not race, Bowers insists, noting that "those

more willing to embrace the dream of the American dream. We still don't have the opportunity to get the same rewards for being a part of the American society does." Alfred Harding (North Carolina A&T '70) maintains that for graduates of historically black colleges, the perceptions about one's ability can be even more damaging. Harding, chief of the Program Analysis and Support Division, Office of East African Affairs at the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), says that too often during his 25 years at the agency, he was given "assignments that seemed geared toward seeing what I could do, or whether I could

"We really felt that if we couldn't effect change, we weren't willing to survive"

do them at all." James Wood, who went from a black Morgan State to being the only African American in his medical school class at the University of California at Irvine, was flummoxed by a pleasantly surprised professor: "We didn't expect you to do so well." Such encounters—such awakenings by white people who had little or no prior contact with black folks—only prove that affirmative action has been both necessary and beneficial, says Wood—and not just for African Americans.

"They could have clearly taken my spot in med school and given it to a white person," he says. "But they took me. And that was the right choice. And I proved just as valuable to the white community as they were to me. I can say how often I've talked to white people who have never spoken with an African American, who have never seen a black doctor, no less been treated by one. [Meeting me] has clearly been a plus for them."

SAME WAR, NEW BATTLE

Perhaps most distressing to the Class of '70 is the stark contrast between where we are now and where most of them believed the world would be when they projected 25 years out on graduation day. While the image of their class that lingers in the minds of most Americans is that of a militant generation with a mob mentality, coming from

COVER STORY

Mamon Powers Jr.

Personal Stats: 47, married, one daughter, 18, and a son, 15

Current Position: President, Powers & Sons Construction Co., Gary, Ind.

Education: B.S. Civil Engineering, Purdue '70

Reflections: Mamon Powers Jr. began working in his father's construction company when he was 11 years old. The lifestyle—being his own boss, running his own ship—was appealing. But his access to it was perhaps too easy for a kid who relished a challenge.

So it was that at 15, Powers spotted his goal after learning that there were no registered black professional engineers in the entire state of Indiana. "I wanted to be the first," Powers says. By the time he graduated from Purdue, then regarded as the nation's engineering mecca, someone else had grabbed that distinction. But Powers felt no less fulfilled. Purdue was no cakewalk for anyone, but for black students—who totaled 130 out of 25,000—the sense of isolation made it tougher.

After a brief stint with Amoco Oil Co. (which offered all engineers deferments from the Vietnam War), Powers rejoined his father in the family business, gradually taking it over and building it to the point where, in 1988, Powers Construction premiered among the **B.E. INDUSTRIAL/SERVICE 100**.

Even though they were well known and respected in the community, financial and entrepreneurial success did not translate into full social acceptance for the Powers family. The most striking evidence of this came in the mid-'80s, when Mamon applied for membership at a country club where several of the local contractor organizations—to which he and his father belonged—held regular meetings.

"I called around to my so-called friends to seek sponsorship," he recounts. "One guy said, 'Well, I'm about to quit,' another said, 'The food's horrible,' another never called back. Then I called our banker. He said, 'No problem, and, by the way, do you know there are no other black members there? If you were white, they would've been after you years ago.' He called back a week later, shaken. He said he didn't know me that well and, therefore, couldn't sponsor me."

Powers countered by calling the newspapers and threatening to sue. He also filed a complaint with the Indiana Civil Rights Commission. Finally, after a lengthy public battle with not one, but two clubs, he was offered and accepted a membership at the Woodmar Country Club. Since 1990, he and his family have been swimming and golfing at the club without incident.

"As I've gotten older, I've realized the world is just not as fair as I'd hoped," Powers sighs. "But the country club incident in particular really left a scar. It let me know that racism is still very much alive and well. On the other hand, in order for us to be effective and productive as a company, we can't let racism become a part of our thought process. If we do, it will hamper us. I tell everyone here, we have to be better than everyone else all the time. And in doing so, we

DEMETRIUS POWERS

and cynicism, sporting wild hair and wild clothes, their self-image looking back to an internally-focused. They were really quite hopeful and have in those days seen

Gregory Scott (Columbiana '70) recalls in detail, with a mixture of deep pride and sadness, how he saw his moment as a leader among his school's small but active group of black students. "We believed we could alter the path of history," says Scott. "There was a great deal of change occurring throughout the country, and African Americans were in the forefront with greater influence and power in effect change than white—and more than we have today. We really felt that if we could

"I believed that each year would be better than the last. In a sense, they have been."

affect change, we weren't willing to survive. I really felt that if this country could not tolerate me, I was not willing to pursue a life within society's rules." Scott is now a justice on the Supreme Court of Colorado.

Back then, the future seemed wide open. Says Henry Gainer (Columbiana '70) "You felt anything was possible. We were critical, but also very optimistic. We believed change meant improvement and felt that we were a part of affecting that change."

Gainer, who went on to Harvard Medical School and is now an internist at Columbia Presbyterian Hospital in New York, as well as a faculty member at Columbia's School of Medicine, took a leadership role in his alma mater's notorious 1968 uprising, risking his long hoped-for medical career in the process. Twenty-five years later, he says he harbors no regrets.

"I believed that what I did would not just be part of the action, but part of the right action, and that each year would be better than the last."

"In a sense," he adds, "they have been." The current challenge for the Class of '70—and for us