

This second edition is a special effort to include every class which graduated from Central. Although I have tried many times I have been unable to obtain all the class pictures. If you notice that your class is missing, please know that I tried and failed.

It is my hope that you will find a name or picture of your love one somewhere within these pages and that it will ignite that old Central spark that lives on in all of us.

Thanks to many who have sent pictures and books which are used unapologetically. I have also made liberal use of interviews, newspaper articles, magazines or any other source of historical information to tell our story. If I am found to have erred in the telling, I bear full responsibility; but if you find this book fulfilling to your soul, thank all those who have helped in this effort.

It is always my wish to glorify God in all I do and so, to
GOD BE THE GLORY FOR ALL HE HAS DONE.

PREFACE

The Storyteller's Creed

“I believe that imagination is stronger than knowledge.
That myth is more potent than history.
That dreams are more powerful than facts.
That hope always triumphs over experience.
That laughter is the only cure for grief.
And I believe that love is stronger than death.”

Anonymous

Deep down, somewhere we all felt it. Something
intangible, but stronger than life.

In our minds we believed that all things were possible; that
just like the preacher said we had to hold on to faith--for
faith in God was truly all we had. And, faith gave us hope.

And so we held our faith tight, we laughed in our pain and
silently cursed the naysayers.

We never gave up our dream, **because dreams are more
powerful than facts!**

DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to Mr. Roy Cooper who founded the original Hayti Central High School Alumni organization in our hometown of Hayti, Missouri. Roy has worked tirelessly over many years to secure the property on which the school stood. He has attended numerous meetings, written and responded to many inquiries and has done untold legwork to get us to where we are now.

In addition, Roy has been our unofficial “KEEPER OF THE FLAME” for Central. He has helped to secure a place for the school pictures, which once lined the halls and has worked to keep them from being damaged. He has recorded our history time and time again and has worked selflessly to find a permanent home for our history.

I SALUTE YOU, MR. ROY COOPER, CLASS OF 1946.

Carter G. Woodson once said, “ Those who have no record of what their forefathers have accomplished lose the inspiration which comes from the teaching of History.” Roy knows what we all know, that in order to intelligently participate in the future, we must have knowledge and appreciation of what and who has gone before. It is to our past and those who have kept us aware of the past that we owe it all.

To you, Roy, and other keepers of our flame, thanks.

Roy Cooper, Jr.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A great debt is owed to our teachers. I still remember those who kept us and fed us after school because we had no way to get home and back to school. It made it possible for those of us who lived outside Hayti in other little towns and in the country to participate and be a part of the school socially. Mr. Cheatham, Miss Scipion and Miss Reagan (now Mrs. Cooper), Mrs. Smith and my personal guardian angel, Mrs. Mary McIntyre (now Mrs. James) and there were so many more who did so much and gave so much.

Mr. Young, Mr. Cooper and Mr. Smith were father figures to so many, as they instilled values of virtue, honesty, hard work, inquiry, and the love of learning.

These dear teachers loved and nurtured us and treated us as if we were their very own family. From them we learned compassion and caring, and the value of sharing. They did whatever necessary to boost our fragile self-esteem and teach us self- respect. It is because of these teachers, I teach.

To Miss DeBoe (now Mrs. Taylor), Lucius James and Mattye Griggs (now Mattye Sanders), thank you for trusting me with your precious personal albums. You'll get them back soon ...I promise.

To my personal editor, my own daughter, Ms. Mia Hollins-thanks for spending so much time to proofread this manuscript.

To Mama, “the wind beneath my wings”, it is because of you that I can fly. Thank you for loving me.

And finally to my best friend and lover, Poochie, Sonny Austin, thank you for loving me so perfectly and for giving me the space I needed to research and write this book. I’ll love you forever!

A GREAT DEBT OF LOVE I OWE!!!! Iona J. Hollins



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Chapter 1

ROOTS

Imagination is stronger than knowledge

Everybody knows that since facts are true, they cannot be disputed. Furthermore, facts are powerful and useful to keeping the status quo. But to people who are left out, the status quo is just something to change.

The gruesome facts of the education of Negroes in Missouri are that in 1847 the Missouri legislature passed a law prohibiting the education of Blacks, free or slave. But, on December 18, 1865 the 13th Amendment to the United States Constitution (abolishing slavery) was ratified. This set the stage for (separate and unequal) schools for Blacks in Missouri.

James Milton Turner was the most effective Black advocate for the education of former slaves in Missouri. As an appointed agent of the Freedman's Bureau in 1869 his major responsibility was traveling around the state to set up Black schools. He reported in 1870 that he traveled between 8-10,000 miles to assure Black children they would receive money for public schools. He was instrumental in opening 32 schools and erecting 7 new school buildings. The major problem was finding qualified Black teachers since Blacks had been denied an education in our country.

The establishment of Lincoln Institute (now Lincoln University) in Jefferson City by the Sixty-Second U.S. Colored Infantry assured the training of Black teachers for the growing number of Black schools. These men raised the money (many giving of their own meager monthly pay).

After trying and failing to be able to use the space in a church, they found an old log cabin on the outskirts of Jefferson City at a place called Hobo Hill. It had been previously used as a white school but was declared unfit for human occupancy. There, Lincoln Institute was born on January 14, 1866. With the passage of the Normal School Law in 1877, Lincoln graduates were able to teach for life in Missouri without further examination.

Most Black teachers in urban areas were now able to receive training commensurate with their counterparts, but many teachers in farming communities (such as the Bootheel) were only high school graduates and a few had 2 years of teacher training.

SEPARATE AND NOT EQUAL

In the Bootheel, and all over the south, in our schools and in the schools where our parents went, Black students attended separate schools. Black students used the books that white students discarded. Eighth grade was the extent of education for most of our parents. I distinctly remember my parents telling us about their opportunities. If they wanted to go further than eighth grade, they would have had to leave home to stay with a family in a town where there was a high school for Blacks. And so, for most of our parents, eighth grade meant the end of their education.

A survey in 1916 disclosed that there were only sixty-four public high schools for Blacks in the entire south. By 1920, there were fewer than one hundred public high schools for Blacks in towns and cities of the south and none in rural areas.

The schools themselves were only dilapidated, wooden shacks, often lacking windows or heat. There was no bus service, so students walked, at times several miles to get to school. In all this, our parents, and many of us, still persevered.

FREEDOM AIN'T FREE.

That lesson was taught to our parents over and over and it is a lesson they learned well. Although declared free by the constitution, and no longer 3/5 of a man, Blacks now (in theory) were able to vote and own land. Although they now had access to a free public education, Blacks were still held captive in many ways. Missouri's Bootheel Blacks have been and remain its poorest and most at-risk population.

The three counties of Pemiscot, Dunklin, and New Madrid are the counties from which Hayti Negro (Central) High School drew its population. It is here we find the poorest people and the highest rate of teen pregnancy and infant mortality in the entire United States.

It is here we also find the New Madrid Fault resulting from the series of earthquakes which occurred during 1811-1812. With the help of Civil Engineers mobilized and sent to the area by the government, the Bootheel became one of the most fertile areas for farming in the state. The long hot summers and mild winters help secure the area a place in the south's "Cotton is King" land.

Between 1900 and 1930 many cotton farmers moved from Tennessee, Arkansas and Mississippi seeking new lands to grow cotton. From the first cotton crop until the 1980's, the primary economic force in the Bootheel was "King Cotton".

The Cotton Economy had a life of its own. It determined everything from the schools built and the teachers hired, to the books purchased and school attendance. In fact, the school year itself was structured around cotton.

The school year ended in May, as it did in many schools in Missouri. During May and June the cotton was chopped (the weeds were cleared from around the cotton plants). School started again in July, but closed in September. Just as other students were going back to school, the Bootheel students were going back to the cotton fields to pick the cotton crops. In November, when most of the cotton had been picked from the fields, school opened again and ran until about May 20th just in time for the return of the chopping season. The rhythm of the seasons(cotton season) ruled every detail of our lives; for if your family failed to work, the family failed and often lost everything.