

MEMORIAL RESOLUTION
Fred McElroy
(1950-2018)

Frederick L. McElroy retired from Indiana University Bloomington as an admired and dedicated instructor and deeply committed citizen of his department and the university. He left a lasting signature on the teaching and service scrolls of distinction of the Department of African American and African Diaspora Studies.

Fred was born on January 16, 1950, in Louisville, Kentucky and graduated in 1972 from Brown University with a concentration in American Civilization. He received his Ph.D. in English and American Studies from Indiana University in 1987. He was appointed assistant professor in (then) Afro-American Studies that same year. In 1993, he was promoted to associate professor.

Even as an associate instructor in a very young department, Fred created, advocated, and supplied undergraduate courses in African American literature. Of special note was his course on early Black American writing. While nationally many departments dismissed nineteenth century Black writing as precious imitations or merely didactic—preferring to introduce their literature courses just before the Harlem Renaissance (1918-1940)—through his tireless excavations, Fred revealed the roots of a powerful and moving literature to his students. Undergraduate and eventually graduate students were fortunate in following pathways to early conversations among culture, aesthetics, and power. These could range from close readings to historical contexts for connections linking the poems of Phillis Wheatley, Thomas Jefferson's *Notes on Virginia*, David Walker's *Appeal*, Frederick Douglass's *Narrative of the Life of an American Slave* through W.E.B. DuBois's *Souls of Black Folks*. By the end of his tenure, Fred had taught or developed nine different courses offered at the undergraduate and graduate levels. The topics ranged from "Afro-American Autobiography" and "Introduction to Afro-American Studies" (an interdisciplinary graduate seminar) through "Black Intellectual Traditions." Frequently, responding to departmental needs or his own intellectual interests, Fred willingly shouldered course overloads. He won at least four teaching excellence recognition awards offered by the department through the auspices of the College of Arts and Sciences.

Fred taught in a variety of venues and settings. In addition to traditional classroom settings with undergraduate and graduate students, he taught in the Individualized Major Program. He also taught courses at the Collins Living and Learning Center. He co-taught courses to rising high school sophomores in the Telluride Association Summer Seminar, as well as to rising college juniors in the Black Atlantic Summer Seminars sponsored by the Ford Foundation. A select pool of rising high school juniors from around the country were attracted to this campus through the latter two programs. In every setting, he demonstrated consistency as an able lecturer and superb discussion leader. He offered an easy grace and deft sense of humor when an

individual or small group of students, undergraduate or graduate, gathered in his office on many an afternoon. They could be treated to a patient discussion of a modernist poem or to Fred's take on the latest IU basketball game. Still, they cherished his gift as a close listener to their evolving ideas and life experiences.

There are many testimonies to his abilities and will to connect with his students, but perhaps two might suffice in this moment. This following is an excerpt from an ode at a 2018 memorial service offered by a former student and the first Ph.D. holder from the department: "You who heard thunder in our voices/and refused to silence us. You who saw lightning in our eyes/and refused to blind us....Those were the times/you asked questions simple enough/to hide their complexity but/transparent enough/ to reveal your desire/to know who we really were. Everyone and/everything/you touched/you changed."

The following is from another departmental doctorate degree holder and a current tenure-track assistant professor: "...What I admired about Dr. McElroy was his ability to steer the minds of his students across unexplored territories, challenging them to critically examine the social, economic, and political factors that shape the Black experience. Dr. McElroy's devotion to empowering his students to navigate the complexities of our world continues to inspire me as I embark on my journey as an educator and mentor."

Fred served on 22 graduate research committees, eight as chair. He was at different times the director of undergraduate studies, director of graduate studies, and an invaluable contributor as member of the M.A. planning committee. In addition, he served on the department's curriculum committee and its undergraduate task committee. He was a member of the Collins Living and Learning Center's curriculum committee and for ten years he served on the selections committee of the College's Individualized Majors Program.

Fred was often called upon to deliver department history in public settings. He was able to place the establishment and development of the department in the context of an earlier national Black Studies movement in the late 1960's and early 1970's. He was adept at tracing and evaluating the evolution of programs, departments, institutes, and graduate programs. In sum, he was able to demonstrate the uniqueness of the African American and African Diaspora Studies department in terms both specific and broad.

Dr. Frederick L. McElroy died July 11, 2018. He is missed by colleagues, former students, and friends who carry his legacy of dedication and excellence.

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