

## Awards

### Archie Motley Memorial Scholarship for Students of Color Essay

*By Erik Henderson*



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I want to start with expressing my appreciation for being selected for one of the 2020 Midwest Archives Conference Archie Motley Memorial Scholarships for Students of Color.

Growing up in Chicago, I was always fascinated by community members who created and facilitated change and who are preserved at the DuSable Museum of African American History. This early engagement with history translated into pursuing my undergraduate education in history, which then led to me working within the Special Collections and Archives at Grinnell College as an undergraduate. From that experience, I realized that the stories of people who look like me are difficult to find. It becomes arduous for historians to share Black voices when their history has been often forcibly concealed.

I am currently at the University of Iowa pursuing my master's in library and information science with a certificate in special collections librarianship. A consistent goal that has pushed me to continue my education has been striving for accurate representations of Black Americans, past and present. We need to push archivists in charge of collection development toward obtaining more collections about Black Americans. Lifting the veil of history that has blinded America, offering a more inclusive representation

of diverse stories, and portraying more accounts of the past will hopefully begin a real movement toward progress inside and outside of the archives.

The peak of my graduate career so far was the opportunity to speak on the behalf of the Iowa Women's Archives (IWA) and the University of Iowa during the Special Collections Summer Seminar Series. The title of the project was "Racial Injustice in Iowa and the Midwest," and it can be found on YouTube. Alongside the assistant curator of the Archives, Janet Weaver, I shared my research on Esther Walls and Martha Nash, Black community activists from Iowa whose collections are preserved in the IWA. I highlighted their individual and collective efforts to make Iowa inclusive for all people, which added to the Archives' blog series on our African American Women in Iowa materials.

Receiving the Motley Scholarship has reaffirmed the path that I have been taking toward a career in LIS. I have realized that, as an archivist, I have the opportunity to reach people who are outside of my community. I know that it will take more than one person to do this work, and I understand my place in a system of already functioning activists and academics. At the same time, I hold myself accountable to my responsibilities to my community. With this scholarship and the energy from Black Lives Matter and the Iowa Freedom Riders, I have been able to use this moment to document the revolutionary revival going on around me. This renewal of energy led me to conduct oral history interviews. I am hoping to do interviews with Iowa City government officials who have been involved in social justice reform.

This scholarship has gone toward paying fees for my SLIS degree. I thank the MAC committee for seeing the potential that I bring to the profession of archives, special collections, and librarianship. I would like to leave you with this: I challenge you to go out and talk to someone you never met and find a singular common ground. When we alter our perception by finding common ground, living on this planet together becomes a little more meaningful.