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# Black Chorus, Project 500 founders need recognition

Terry Townsend

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The University of Illinois at Urbana recently commemorated Dr. Ollie Watts Davis' 25 years conducting the Black Chorus. That's great! What is not great is how the Black Chorus history has been marginalized by University of Illinois administrators.

In 1968, UIUC Chancellor Jack Peltason unilaterally created the Special Education Opportunity initiative or "Project 500," shortly after the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s death.

Project 500's aim was directed at ameliorating social problems by way of education. Actually, Project 500 was the second UIUC Affirmative Action recruitment effort, and has no equal in the United States - 583 minority students recruited in approximately 90 days, thanks to the effort of former students like Chicago's Bill Savage and Dan Dixon.

Of these 583 Project 500 students, four - Carol Pearson, Vickie Bastic, Roy Haynes and former BSA President Albert Moore - understood the role recreation could play as a retention tool.

Partnering with UIUC staff members Robert Ray (School of Music) and Dan Perrino (Student Activities), the Black Chorus held its debut concert in Florida Avenue resident hall on May 26, 1969.

For the 40th anniversary of Project 500, UIUC administrators should organize an all-generation Black Chorus reunion (No one is talking about celebrating Project 500's birthday) and appropriately recognize my classmates - the founders of the Black Chorus.

*Terry Townsend  
Network of alumni,  
retirees and parents*

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