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[Ivy Celebrates Black History Month 2006](#)

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The Ivy League begins its celebration of Black History Month today with the unveiling of the refurbished Ivy Black History website, designed to commemorate the accomplishments of black Ivy Leaguers, both on the field and off.

This year's celebration features six stories, most of which involved crossing the racial divide, bridging the gap of understanding between cultures and communities.

For 2006, those new feature stories include two white men who played key roles in the movement for equality, two black coaches who have become pioneers in their respective sports, a long-forgotten sprinter and a basketball player who found the ultimate way to give back to his community.

Moreover, the Black History Timeline has been updated and now spans from the 1800s to 2005, cataloguing the rich history of African-Americans in the Ivy League. The updated timeline contains more than 120 links to stories, features and websites regarding the honored athletes and coaches.

The 2006 features begin with former Dartmouth rower **David Dawley**. A 5-foot-6 wisp of a white Peace Corps volunteer and equal rights crusader, Dawley went to Chicago in 1967 and moved in with the Conservative Vice Lords, who at the time were known as the most violent gang in the Windy City. Dawley helped convert the Vice Lords into a community organization.

Former Princeton basketball player **John Doar** became a champion for civil rights as the Justice Department's most important figure in the South. He was on hand at most of the pivotal moments of the Civil Rights Movement, escorting James Meredith into Ole Miss, stopping a near-riot after Medgar Evers' funeral and winning federal convictions in the Mississippi Burning case.

In coaching circles, two of the stars of 2005 were Cornell volleyball coach **Deitre Collins** and Columbia football coach **Norries Wilson**. Collins led her team to the 2005 Ivy title and was honored by the NCAA as one of the six best volleyball players of the last 25 years. Wilson, meanwhile, made



Clockwise from upper left: Phalen, Doar, Johnson, Wilson, Dawley, Collins.

headlines with his hiring. Tabbed by Columbia in December to be its new football coach, he became the first black head football coach in the 50-year history of the Ivy League.

Still, perhaps no one bridged the racial divide quite like former Yale basketball player **Earl Martin Phalen**. A foster child adopted by a white family, Phalen used his experience at Yale and at Harvard Law School to launch BELL, a non-profit foundation that steers thousands of students onto path of success each year by improving their academic abilities.

And, finally, there is the story of **Ben Johnson**, better known as “The Columbia Comet.” A contemporary of Jesse Owens, Johnson was known as the “fastest man alive” in the late 1930s.

Those and about 60 other features from the last seven years of the Ivy Black History Month celebration are available at www.IvyBlackHistory.com.



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David Dawley: 'The Only White Vice Lord'

Fires raced along the sidewalks and twisted from the skyline, tempers flaring as predominantly white National Guard troops moved into the predominantly poor, black section of West Side Chicago.

It was April 5, 1968. The Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. had been assassinated in Memphis, Tenn., a day earlier and now the Conservative Vice Lords, the gang commonly referred to as the “baddest” gang in Chicago and once dubbed as the “notorious Vice Lords” by the *Chicago Daily News*, were in full rage.

Through the middle of the tumult, 5-foot-6, 135-pound David Dawley marched through the streets untouched, recording the violent images and the flames that leapt from building to building.

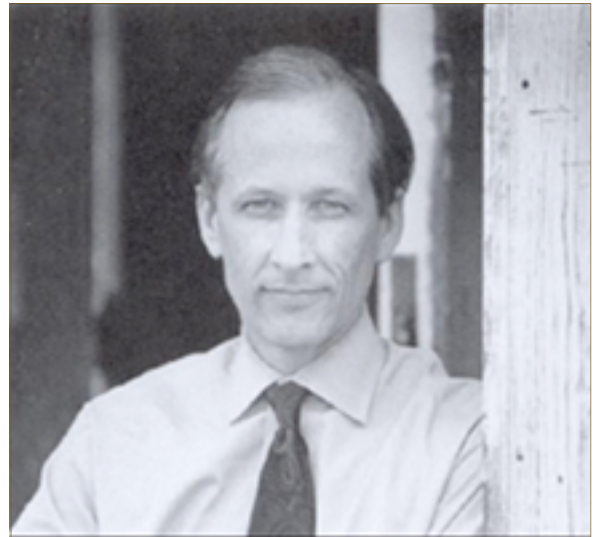
A Dartmouth rower, skier and graduate, Peace Corps volunteer and the man recognized as “the only white Vice Lord,” Dawley came to Chicago in the summer of 1967 to complete a survey for the TransCentury Corporation, a Washington, D.C.-based non-profit organization that hired young, socially conscious workers to canvas poor areas around the country to measure their attitudes toward federally funded programs.

Determined to get to the root of poverty in Chicago, Dawley sought out the Conservative Vice Lords, known in the mid-1960s as the most violent gang in a city filled with violent gangs, to secure their cooperation with his work.

Confounding expectations, he stayed for nearly two years.

“The people coming out of the Peace Corps were exceptional to begin with, and highly motivated and individualistic,” says Warren Wiggins, the former head of TransCentury. “But David stood out from that group. That group was truly unique in our society, but Dawley was the unquiest of the unique.”

Spurred by his post-college experience in Honduras with the Peace Corps, Dawley decided to



Dawley in 1991 from his autobiographical book, 'A Nation of Lords'

move in with the Vice Lords, becoming the only white man in the Lawndale section of Chicago. He became a guiding voice and presence for the Lords, who, by the late 1960s, were looking to shed their “gang” label.

During Dawley’s two-year stay, he helped the Vice Lords clean up the Lawndale neighborhood. The Lords started businesses, campaigned for rights for the poor, black and disaffected, and received grants and praise from Chicago to D.C. for their good deeds. In turn, Dawley earned the respect and friendship of the Vice Lords, became an official member and was protected from harm — even in the violent days and rioting that followed Rev. King’s murder.

“You have to go through these layers of trust and experience, which takes time, and I went through those layers,” Dawley says. “So by the time Martin Luther King was assassinated and the West Side went up in flames, I was a Vice Lord. I walked down the middle of the street with a tape recorder and a camera with flames on both sides and trash barrels going through windows.”



The riots following Rev. King's murder.

Now 64, Dawley recalls the events of the late 1960s a world away — 37 years later and sitting outside a French bistro in Bethesda, Md., just a 10-minute drive from D.C., where he has an international consulting practice geared toward corporate and nonprofit clients.

Dawley displays documents and memoranda from his days with the Vice Lords and breaks out a photo album of, as he puts it, “the old neighborhood.” That is Lawndale, where Dawley lived on 16th Street in what the *Sun-Times* called “the bloodiest corner in Chicago,” alongside former gang members with the names of Little Fool, Dope Fiend and Fast, who once held a gun to Dawley’s head for no apparent reason.

Suddenly, Dawley, distracted, sees a woman running by in a Dartmouth T-shirt and yells out, “Go Green.”

It is an odd scene: This social advocate dressed in jeans, a polo shirt and sneakers cheering for his alma mater in front of a French bistro just minutes before recounting what passed for street justice in a 1968 Chicago ghetto.

That Dawley walks so seamlessly between these two worlds — the 1960s Chicago ghetto and a modern-day Washington, D.C., suburb — is a tribute to his aptitude for understanding social issues and his skill as an advocate. And it shows that Dawley has not forgotten any part of his varied past.

He was born in Westminster, Mass., to a Mayflower father and a Scottish-born mother, and attended a grade school of all-white students. There were two black students in his graduating class at Dartmouth; one on the crew team where he served as a coxswain and later as coach of the lightweight team; and none in the outing club where he served as a ski instructor (Dawley would later be honored as one of the Wearers of the Green, Dartmouth’s Athletic Hall of Fame, after winning two over-40 lightweight national crowns in tae kwon do).

After graduating from Dartmouth in 1963, Dawley signed up for the Peace Corps as one of the organization’s early volunteers. He went to Honduras, where he lived for two years and learned to assimilate to a new culture and organize community projects.

From there he went on to study Applied Sociology at Michigan, where he learned about remedying delinquency with opportunity and refined the skills that would prove vital on the West Side of Chicago.

“Dave was a superb Peace Corps volunteer and an outstanding community development guy,” says Dick Irish, the primary recruiter at TransCentury and the former director of Talent Search at the Peace Corps. “He really understood the psychology of gangs and how you could channel that organizational skill they had: How they connect with each other for productive ends that are greater than just the gangs’ individual prosperity.”

And those skills won Dawley much individual acclaim. In 1968 *Esquire Magazine* named Dawley as one of the “Twenty-Seven People Worth Saving,” and a few years later Dawley authored a book on the Vice Lords, entitled, “A Nation of Lords.” A movie about Dawley, based on the book, is in the works.

Ben Goldhirsh, a Brown graduate and the founder and CEO of Reason Pictures, says he is contacting major studios to produce the movie and is positive it will get made.

“It’s just the most fascinating reality and such a heroic narrative, both on his part and on the part of the Vice Lords,” Goldhirsh says from his office in Los Angeles. “It’s very tangible, what he did. That’s what is

so cool about it. It's not theorizing about affecting change from an office in Massachusetts, it's going in and creating a structure to handle the human capital of this huge gang and having significant results."



CVL-built Teen Town on Chicago's West Side

If there is credit to be given for bringing Dawley to Chicago and paving his path to the Vice Lords, it belongs to jazz legend John Coltrane.

When he was 24, Dawley visited his cousin, Ed Hull, a senior executive of a Fortune 500 company in Chicago. Together the two men toured the city, including its many jazz clubs. It was on a Friday night at a particular club, the Plugged Nickel, that Dawley fell in love with Chicago while listening to Coltrane perform. Dawley said he was transfixed by the passion of Coltrane's tenor saxophone, that he could feel the music and the energy throughout his body.

"It seared something in my soul about Chicago," Dawley says, "and I knew I wanted to go back."

He got his chance in the summer of 1967. After his stint in the Peace Corps, where he was recognized for his outstanding service, Dawley signed on with TransCentury in an attempt to create social change and make some money along the way.

TransCentury hired primarily young adults fresh from service to go to 11 cities around the country and prepare a report for the President's Council on Youth Opportunity, chaired by then-Vice President Hubert Humphrey. Dawley drew East St. Louis but worked a

trade for Chicago and headed on his way.

Upon his arrival, Dawley found a Chicago largely closed off to the disaffected blacks of the poor West Side. He thought approaching the West Side through government channels would only put up more walls and decided to approach the Vice Lords directly.

"It started with a Peace Corps volunteer that has a certain skepticism of government and government programs," Dawley says. "And so you want to know what's going on from another perspective, from the people they say they're reaching, the most neglected and the most hard-core. And who are these people? Here they're called Vice Lords, and they really do run the streets, so I want to meet these people and I want to do that myself rather than through some bureaucracy."

At that time the Lords had a ghastly reputation, one started in the late 1950s and continued through the 60s. The vast majority of the Lords had spent time in prison, and murders and beatings were as common as the poverty in which they lived.

"It was a war zone," says Mike Coffield, a Dartmouth fraternity brother and Chicago lawyer who Dawley recruited to work with the Vice Lords in the late 1960s. "The area was not only poverty stricken, but it had broken-down buildings all over it. It was as bad as you could imagine."

The Reverend William Robinson, who was one of Dawley's bodyguards as a 16-year-old Vice Lord in 1967, calls 1960s Lawndale "the most dangerous area in Chicago."

"There was a lot of violence and a lot of killing going on," says Robinson, then known as Little Billy.

Nonetheless, Dawley knew that if he wanted to canvas the West Side of Chicago he would need the assistance and permission of the Vice Lords. So, just days after arriving in Chicago and with full support of TransCentury chief Warren Wiggins, Dawley put out word that he wanted to meet with the group.

Soon thereafter, Dawley heard back from a black street worker with the local YMCA who gave him these instructions: "Go to the Senate Theater on the West Side of Chicago and someone will contact you."

Dawley's response to this cryptic message? "I didn't have a second thought. I just headed out there."

The event at the Senate Theater turned out to be a black power rally mounted to collect food and supplies to send to Mississippi, the center of the black rights movement and the place where Willie Ricks, with Dawley in attendance, had first coined the term "Black Power" a year earlier. Dawley was the only white person at the Senate Theater.

About halfway through the rally, Dawley was tapped on the shoulder and escorted from the theater by two members of the Vice Lords, Bobby Gore, the former spokesman for the Vice Lords and a friend of Dawley's to this day, and Eddie Perry, better known as Pep and the founder of what was then the Vice Lords club in 1958. They told Dawley he could meet the Vice Lords' chief, Alfonso Alford, that following Sunday at the local pool hall.

"Pep said, 'We'll make sure you get out safely,'" Dawley recalls. "I hadn't been thinking about that until then. Of course, he didn't say how I'd get in safely."

Dawley took the local train, the "El", to Lawndale and got to the pool hall with relative ease. At one point he was stopped by four men who asked where he was going. "I told them I was going to meet Alfonso and they parted like the Red Sea," Dawley says. "I thought, 'Apparently I have the right name.'"

Dawley attributes his success with Alford to good timing and good fortune. First, Alford and a number of the other Vice Lords were approaching their 30s and had started considering their prospects. By the mid 1960s they knew there was no future in being street thugs and wanted to create a positive legacy for the next generation; this made them more accepting of Dawley and his message than they might have otherwise been.

Second, Dawley offered the Vice Lords a fair wage to conduct the survey (the Lords were typically low-balled for any real work they attempted) and he did not make any unrealistic promises about what they could achieve or how they would be received by the federal government.



The Lawndale Pool Hall

"It was very unusual," Robinson says of Dawley's approach, "but he came in such a way that it was acceptable. He came to help us and we were in a position where we needed his help."

A number of the younger Lords went to work with Dawley canvassing the neighborhood, including Gore, who, like many of the Lords, was skeptical.

"At first we didn't know if he was an FBI plant or what, and we told him we didn't know if he was for real or not," says Gore, one of the few Vice Lords still alive. "And if you're not, you're going to get hurt real bad. You might even get killed."

"But he took it all with a grain of salt. He groomed

us and put us in the know and we started moving on it. We were doing some things we never knew we could do. We had a voice in what was being said and what was being done. And we were thinking, 'rather than being gang bangers maybe this was the thing to do.'"

Dawley's initial work gave him credibility with the Vice Lords, but he knew he had to go deeper. So with his agenda set and his protection secured by the Vice Lords, Dawley went about finding an apartment.

Upon his initial move to Chicago, Dawley took up with a group of white friends who lived a few miles from Lawndale. They urged him to take an apartment in central Chicago and commute to the West Side, but Dawley thought differently. In order to do his work the way he wanted, and with assurances from the Vice Lords that he would be kept safe, Dawley took a room at the YMCA in Lawndale and hit the streets.

"It was a very scary area. It was not an area I would have visited at the time," says Bob Rosen, a close friend who met Dawley in Chicago through a mutual acquaintance. "We didn't understand it. It didn't make sense. But it was the 60s and there was a very liberal ethic among our group."

Says Gore: "I wouldn't use the word crazy. It was more of a nervy thing, him being so small. He's a little guy. But he didn't care what happened, he was there to do a job."

Eventually, Dawley moved into an apartment on 16th Street in what the Chicago Sun-Times called "the bloodiest corner in Chicago." He says he learned in the Peace Corps that you have to be around to earn the respect and trust of the people you're working with, and that moving to Lawndale was the only way he could accomplish his goals.

"David is truly one of my heroes," says Coffield. "There were very few guys who would do what he did."

Dawley is careful not to sensationalize his time in Chicago. He turned down numerous interview

requests in the late 1960s because he wanted to keep the focus on the Vice Lords, not on himself, and says even today that the situation was not as dire — and he was not as crazy — as most might think.

Still, he experienced his share of chilling moments. Dawley witnessed the brand of street justice where an indiscretion was greeted with a beer bottle to the back of the head, and learned how the most talented of the violent gang members could



Four members of the Vice Lords stand outside the CVL, Inc., main office.

whip a straight razor or a jackknife out of his sleeve and cut a man across his face.

Two young girls once doused his apartment door on 16th Street with kerosene and lit Dawley's building on fire. Dawley was not inside and no one was hurt. The sisters' brother, however, was warned by the Vice Lord leaders that he would be held responsible for any further action by his sisters against Dawley.

There was never another incident.

"Everybody in the community knew not to mess with Dave," Robinson says. "They knew that was a fact."

Dawley's most terrifying moment, however, came late in his tenure. He was working late into the night

at the CVL, Inc. main office with a number of the Vice Lords when Fast, whose real name was Percy Williams, suddenly jumped from his seat, pointed a gun at Dawley's head and demanded an apology for an unspecified offense.

"I just kept typing," says Dawley, who was filling out a government form at the time, "just putting letters on the page while the other guys in the office tried to reason with him. Finally, I just said, 'Listen, I don't know what I did but I'm very sorry if I offended you.' He took the gun and shot it at the ground near my desk. They were blanks. He wasn't going to kill me, though if he had fired he would've blinded me."

Dawley recalls the incident in vivid fashion, standing up from the table at the Bethesda restaurant to mimic Fast's actions, somewhat alarming the customers nearby.

But for the almost absurd nature of the story, Dawley allows that it speaks to the greater truth of what he achieved. A black former gang member stood ready to shoot him, the only white man in Lawndale, and the other black men weren't trying to help Fast. They were trying to help Dawley.

"We made friends right away; you could see the sincerity in the guy," Gore says. "After a couple of weeks of training us to do the survey we kind of fell in love with him and he became a part of us." In the end, Gore adds, "Dave turned out to be somewhat of a leader of the Vice Lords. We made the decisions and whatnot but he advised us on everything and told us what we could do."

By October 1967, Dawley's work with TransCentury was largely complete and he needed to return to Washington, DC, to file his report. He had already begun working with Alford and Gore on community organizing and urban renewal, and from that CVL, Inc., was born.

As Dawley packed up to leave he told Alfonso, Bobby and the others that he'd be back. No one really believed him. The civil rights organizations that came to Chicago largely ignored the Vice Lords because of their violent past, but Dawley believed he



Vice Lords spokesman Bobby Gore (center) at a 1960s press conference.

could help his friends.

"I didn't think I could walk away without leaving a lot of myself behind," Dawley says. "I couldn't walk away without trying to help them do what nobody else was doing, which was to convert their aspirations into some realities. And they had two big things working for them: They had control of the streets in a large urban ghetto and a desire to make some meaningful changes."

Dawley's finished his work in Washington by December, secured a loan, borrowed some money, gassed up his Volkswagen Beetle and drove straight from D.C. to the main pool room in Lawndale, arriving at 2 a.m.

"I walked in and told them, 'I'm back,'" Dawley says. "They were shocked."

Dawley stayed and worked for two more years. During that time he helped the Vice Lords apply for and receive a \$15,000 Rockefeller Grant, along with a matching fund of \$15,000 from a coalition of businesses called Operation Bootstrap (by Dawley's estimate, the \$30,000 in grants is equivalent to \$175,000 today). He lived alongside the Vice Lords and their families, prepared the Lords to meet with the media and helped transform them from the most "notorious" gang in Chicago into a virtual fairy tale of civic pride.

"He showed us that there was a life worth living," Robinson says. "He talked to us in such a way that it made it clear he was more concerned about the peo-

ple than the buildings or a territory. He was trying to show us that there was a better life.”

Dawley left Lawndale for good in the fall of 1969, returning to Washington and later Boston to work on his book, the profits from which he shared with the Vice Lords. Dawley says he left because he accomplished what he set out to do: To build an infrastructure for change and, as he writes in his book, “to start a process by which a few people could begin to shape a new future.”

Dawley was also becoming frustrated with the Vice Lords’ progress. He wanted them to move faster and more aggressively, but knew this was their project and they would adhere to their own timetable.

Reflecting on his experience now, Dawley still speaks with a hint of wonder at the times and place in which he lived.

“From time to time I’m reminded that I did something unusual, which, of course, I know, but am still tongue-tied when trying to explain,” Dawley writes in an e-mail message, his sentence trailing off behind a series of ellipses, indicating that he truly doesn’t possess the words.

Jean Halberstam, another of Dawley’s friends from Chicago and the wife of renowned journalist David Halberstam, has no such problem.

“We had great admiration for what he was doing, but we also thought it was a Don Quixote-like move,” Halberstam says. “I think what was always so amazing was the sheer physical bravery of this very slight person. But he devoted his life to them; he had no life other than that. He wasn’t interested in dinner dates or movies. Even in those times when we all thought of ourselves as so politically radical, he had a very focused vision of what he could do and he was going to spend all of his waking hours accomplishing that.”

It is only when focusing on what he was able to accomplish that Dawley seems to capture moments of total understanding. He says that what was happening in Lawndale was too powerful and honest to leave



Dawley flanked by the CVL’s president, Alford (left), and its founder, Pep (right).

behind — and also something too intriguing and perhaps even historic.

“I invested myself in the West Side,” Dawley says. “This was looking down into the live volcano. What was the country worried about? It was worried about a black explosion in the city. I was just looking at where the real action might be.”

And he was in the middle of it all. The Vice Lords became a truly legitimate organization during Dawley’s time in Chicago. They opened a business office, an art studio, an Afro-American boutique, a recreation and training center and a restaurant called “Teen Town.” They even started a tenants’ rights program and were leaders in a city-wide protest that resulted in more jobs for blacks in trade unions. Newspapers from the Chicago Tribune to the Chicago Defender ran accounts of the turnaround, and Alford, Gore and Dawley all gained a certain glint of notoriety.

But sadly, the results did not last. In February 1969 Alford suffered a debilitating stroke, leaving a leadership vacuum in his wake. A year later Gore was jailed for a murder he adamantly maintains, to this day, he did not commit.

The private philanthropy that drove the resurgence slowly dried up as concerns shifted from urban renewal to the Vietnam War and, slowly, the Vice Lords group fractured, the younger generation grow-

ing up with too much temptation and too little guidance. Many of the Lords went to jail and came back increasingly violent, bringing that violence once more to the streets.

By the mid-1970s the area was overrun by drugs and crime, decaying to the point that most of the good works done by the Lords were beaten and forgotten, falling back into the cycle of poverty that Alford, Gore and the others fought so hard to break.

“I can’t describe the hurt and the pain,” Gore says of witnessing his neighborhood’s decline. “When I came back to Lawndale after being incarcerated for 11 years I just sat up on the corner and cried. For the younger generation that fast dollar just took over. They never considered that they were killing our people.”

Still, both Gore and Dawley refuse to view their venture as a failure. Dawley points out that the work of the Vice Lords crated a template for current community organizing exercises, and provides a glimmer of hope that such a radical transformation truly can be accomplished, if only for a brief period of time.

“If you go back, Lawndale is a soul-less landscape, an urban cemetery to short-lived hope,” Dawley says. “But with passing time you see that a lot of what we tried were successful strategies and have been tried again — giving people a sense of ownership and hope and respect.

“We showed, at least for a few minutes, that we could change the world.”



- All photos courtesy of David Dawley

- Photos of the riot and assorted photos of Lawndale by David Dawley

- Photo of Dawley in 1991 by Stuart Bratesman for Dawley’s 1973 book, ‘A Nation of Lords’

The title of this story, ‘The Only White Vice Lord’ is taken from Bobby Gore’s final chapter to David Dawley’s 1973 book, ‘A Nation of Lords.’

Newspaper accounts in this story courtesy ‘A Nation of Lords.’
