JAMES SIDNEY HINTON
1834-1892

Throughout his life, James Sidney Hinton dedicated himself to achieving equal rights for African Americans in Indiana and the country.

Hinton was born into a free family in North Carolina in 1834. He moved with his family to Terre Haute, Indiana during the 1850s. Hinton pursued his education at schools in Terre Haute and Ohio before making his living as a teacher and barber. He settled in Indianapolis and became known as a forceful advocate for civil rights and stirring public speaker.

During the Civil War, Hinton recruited black men to serve in the United States Colored Troops. In 1880, Marion County voters elected Republican James Hinton to Indiana’s House of Representatives. He was the first African American to serve in the State House. After his term in the legislature, Hinton traveled throughout the country as he campaigned for civil rights.

Hinton died on November 6, 1892.

LEGAL BARRIERS

The forces of truth and the principles of liberty, born in the days of the revolution, and proclaimed in the Declaration of 1776 have placed the negro for the first time in his history on this continent in a position to realize that he is a man and an American citizen.

-James S. Hinton, 1876

Speech delivered at Woods Hill in Vigo County, Indiana on July 4, 1876. Image courtesy of the Indiana State Library, Division of Manuscripts and Rare Books

THE RIGHT TO VOTE:

Indiana’s 1816 and 1851 Constitutions declared: “No Negro or Mulatto shall have the right of suffrage.” Indiana’s 1869 School Law permitted, but did not require, racial segregation of the schools. Crispus Attucks High School, pictured here in 1948, was built for African American students.

THE RIGHT TO SETTLE IN INDIANA:

Before the Civil War, Indiana legislators passed numerous laws which restricted or banned African Americans from moving to the state.

THE RIGHT TO ATTEND PUBLIC SCHOOLS:

Before the 1860s, African American children could not attend public schools. The 1869 School Law allowed black children to attend public school but also permitted racial segregation.

**Indiana’s laws and customs discriminated against African Americans in many ways. These are some of the legal barriers to African Americans which were in effect while James Hinton was growing up.**

THE RIGHT TO SIT IN THE STATE MILITIA:

The 1865 Indiana Constitution stated that only “white bodied white male persons” could serve in the militia. Although African Americans served in the armed forces from the Civil War, this language was not removed from the state constitution until 1936.

**African Americans and their allies fought against these and other forms of racial discrimination.**

CIVIL WAR TO CIVIL RIGHTS

For many African Americans, achieving full civil rights was the ultimate goal of the Civil War. The right to vote was an essential part of citizenship.

The image from Harper’s Magazine depicts southern African American men voting for the first time in 1867. After the ratification of the Fifteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution in 1870, African American men in Indiana finally had the right to vote.

After his death in 1892, the (Indianapolis) Freeman, an influential African American newspaper, described Hinton as:

“... an alert and fearless advocate of right against wrong, and a prominent member of that heroic and consecrated band of souls that forty years ago were the marked and distinguished foes of the slave power, that then reigned in unquestioned authority over every foot of Indiana soil.”

EDUCATION

James Hinton was a lifelong advocate for African American education.

When he was a boy, public schools were closed to blacks, so he attended a private “subscription school” in Vigo County. He also studied at a Quaker school and Ohio’s Wilberforce University, a historically black institution in Ohio. Indiana’s 1869 School Law permitted, but did not require, racial segregation of the schools. Crispus Attucks High School, pictured here in 1948, was built to accommodate Indianapolis’ segregated school system.

**James Hinton was a lifelong advocate for African American education.**

In the image below, Marion County citizens registered to vote in 1963. During the civil rights movement, the freedom to vote remained a national issue.