

Diversity at Jesuit: A Look Back



Arthur Allen's senior photo in 1959.

Guided by the Jesuit commitment to human dignity and rights, Jesuit High School's president and principal, Fathers Shields and Kammer, decided to open the school's doors to students of African descent. **Arthur Allen '59**—the son of a prominent business leader—was the first applicant. Although he would eventually come to appreciate his Jesuit experience, Arthur was not happy about his family's decision to send him to Jesuit. He recalls, "I didn't want to attend. I didn't know anyone at Jesuit and it wasn't near my neighborhood." Recognizing the potential difficulties of a single black student, the administration selected another student with excellent academic credentials, **Charles Edmond '58**. His greatest apprehension was that he would let people down. He reminisces, "I envisioned something similar to Jackie Robinson—what happened when he integrated the major leagues, the harassment he got. But

at Jesuit there was no racial backlash, no bullying. Jesuit grew on me, and I enjoyed it."

When the two young men joined the student body on September 1, 1955, Jesuit High School eliminated the remnants of Jim Crow laws on campus. The world outside

took longer to change. Edmond describes sitting next to classmates at school but having to sit at the back of the city bus holding the same students on his way to and from campus. In a 1955 letter to the Provincial, Father Shields describes the difficulty of integrating black students into Jesuit life in a segregated world. He describes both Charles and Arthur going out for football and being "fully accepted by teammates; again no problem whatever. Both were told, however, that in the event we are playing a school which refuses to play against a team with a Negro on it, they will not be on the bench or in the game. Both boys fully understood." While he may have understood, Allen remembers the pain of being called

to the principal's office the morning of football games, knowing that he would be told the opponent refused to play if he suited up. Similar concessions were made for off-campus social events.

Edmond, the first black man to graduate from Jesuit High School, graduated cum laude from Grambling State University with a degree in math. He devoted his career to secondary education, where he taught math and served as dean of students before retiring as an assistant principal. Allen graduated from Marquette University and built a successful business. He was honored by Jesuit as the Distinguished Alumnus in 1994. To read more about their experiences, please visit www.jesuitroundup.org for a three-part series about the history of racial integration at Jesuit written by Payton Maher '13.



Charles Edmond's senior photo in 1958.



Arthur Allen lettered in both track and football. Captain of the track team, he was named Best Athlete in 1959.



Charles Edmond was a drummer in the marching band.