

ERASURE OF BLACK VOICES

RECOVERING THE STORIES HISTORY LEAVES BEHIND

**THE STORY DOESN'T END
WHEN SOMEONE IS FORGOTTEN.**

HISTORY IS NOT ONLY WHAT IS PRESERVED.
IT IS ALSO WHAT WE CHOOSE TO RECOVER.

OUR PLACES.
OUR STORIES.
OUR RESPONSIBILITY.

*A Stronger
Indianapolis.
A More Equitable
Tomorrow.*

Herbert Grigsby Hawkins
A LIFE. A LEGACY. A PLACE IN HISTORY.

REMEMBER. | RECOVER. | RESTORE.
PEOPLE. HISTORY. PLACE. ALL MATTER.

Thank You.

DR. MICHELLE D. DARTIS

AUTHOR | RESEARCHER | PUBLIC HISTORIAN



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Erasure of Black Voices: Recovering the Stories History Leaves Behind
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Leave A Mark. Change A Life.

Written and developed by Dr. Michelle D. Dartis

This publication explores historical erasure, recovery, preservation, and community memory through the story of Herbert Grigsby Hawkins and other historical and contemporary examples.

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FOLLOWING THE TRACES

This guide follows the same intellectual journey as Erasure of Black Voices: from one family story, to the mechanics of historical erasure, to the choices we can make to remember, recover, and restore what might otherwise disappear.

TRACE 1	Understanding Historical Erasure
TRACE 2	Meet Herbert Grigsby Hawkins
TRACE 3	Why I Went Looking
TRACE 4	From Family Fragments to Historical Evidence
TRACE 5	A Fuller Picture Emerges
TRACE 6	How Erasure Happens
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TRACE 11	Archives as Acts of Resistance
TRACE 12	Carry It Forward
SOURCES	Following the Record
IMAGE CREDITS	Visual Record

This publication is designed to stand on its own as a Leave A Mark Press resource for learning, reflection, family-history research, and community preservation.

Welcome to Erasure of Black Voices

History is more than the stories preserved in textbooks, monuments, museums, and official archives. It also lives in family photographs tucked inside old albums, names printed in aging newspapers, neighborhood memories, church records, oral histories, and the lives of everyday people whose contributions have too often gone unrecognized.

I know this because one of those people was my maternal grandfather, Herbert Grigsby Hawkins. Herbert built businesses, raised a family, participated in community organizations, and advocated for transportation access in Black Indianapolis. Yet decades after his death, much of the fuller story of his life had faded from family and public memory.

I did not begin this journey as a historian searching for Herbert. I began as MiMi to Trinity, responding to five words from my six-year-old granddaughter that stopped me in my tracks: "I wish I was white." Those five words sent me backward through my own family history and eventually into newspapers, public records, photographs, libraries, cemeteries, and historical collections.

What began as a grandmother's effort to affirm her granddaughter became something much larger: an effort to understand how a life can remain in the historical record while its story disappears - and what it takes to bring that story back.

How many other stories are waiting to be recovered?

What We'll Explore Together

1. Recognize how historical erasure can happen even when evidence survives.
2. Use Herbert Hawkins as a case study in reconstructing an overlooked life from scattered records.
3. Examine the relationship among memory, power, visibility, place, and historical interpretation.
4. Identify practical places to search for family and community history.
5. Consider your own role in remembering, recovering, and restoring stories for future generations.

UNDERSTANDING HISTORICAL ERASURE

Erasure does not always mean the record is gone.

PEOPLE. HISTORY. PLACE. ALL MATTER.

Historical erasure occurs when people, communities, experiences, achievements, or perspectives become omitted, minimized, silenced, forgotten, disconnected from their context, or otherwise difficult to see within the stories we inherit about the past.

Sometimes erasure is deliberate. Sometimes stories disappear because they were never formally documented. Sometimes trauma, migration, death, displacement, or family silence interrupts what one generation passes to the next. And sometimes the records survive - but no one connects them into a larger story.

Sometimes the record survives, but the story no longer does.

Why It Matters

IDENTITY

Connections to ancestry, family, place, and community can weaken when stories disappear.

REPRESENTATION

Future generations may inherit a narrower picture of Black life, achievement, leadership, and possibility.

UNDERSTANDING

Places, institutions, and events cannot be fully understood when Black experiences are absent or disconnected.

COLLECTIVE MEMORY

Communities and the nation inherit an incomplete - and sometimes distorted - understanding of their own past.

WHEN BLACK HISTORY IS MISSING, AMERICAN HISTORY IS INCOMPLETE.

MEET HERBERT GRIGSBY HAWKINS

1910-1957 | A life rooted in family, entrepreneurship, and community

PEOPLE. HISTORY. PLACE. ALL MATTER.



Herbert Grigsby Hawkins

Born March 4, 1910 - Columbus, Ohio

Settled in Indianapolis - 1937

Married Adeline Hardy - April 13, 1938

Father of Velma, Evelyn, and Audrey

Filling station proprietor, taxicab operator, truck operator

Trinity Lodge No. 18 | Socialite Club | Laborers Local 120

Died August 20, 1957 - age 47

Herbert was not a nationally famous figure. He was a husband, father, businessman, neighbor, organization member, and community advocate - one of the many people whose work helped sustain a community while they were simply living their lives within it.

A timeline can tell us when someone lived. It cannot necessarily tell us who they were - or what they meant to their community.

WHY I WENT LOOKING

Five words from a six-year-old girl changed the direction of my work.

PEOPLE. HISTORY. PLACE. ALL MATTER.



"I wish I was white."

Trinity was six years old when she said those five words after a grocery-shopping trip. I wanted to understand what she was seeing, hearing, and absorbing - and how I could help her understand the beauty and value of who she was and where she came from.

I began writing *I Wish I Was White: Racial Identity and Self-Esteem* and incorporated members of our family and their accomplishments. In doing that work, I realized that telling Trinity to be proud of who she was was not enough. I wanted to show her where she came from.

I went looking for something to give Trinity. Her question gave me a reason to recover what had been lost.

FROM FAMILY FRAGMENTS TO HISTORICAL EVIDENCE

The facts I inherited were true. They simply were not the whole story.

PEOPLE. HISTORY. PLACE. ALL MATTER.

The First Fragment: A Gas Station

Growing up, I knew that Herbert had operated a gas station. Research gave that family memory an address: 614 Indiana Avenue, directly across from the Madam Walker Building. A 1956 map and surviving photographs allowed me to place the story physically on Indiana Avenue.



Surviving photographs of the filling station associated with Herbert Hawkins at 614 Indiana Avenue.

The Second Fragment: A Taxicab Service

I also knew that Herbert had been involved in the taxicab business. The historical record revealed that this was not merely a business story. During segregation, Black residents could not always depend on white-owned cabs to serve Black passengers or enter Black neighborhoods, while Black taxi operators faced limited access to the licenses required to operate legally.

Recorder coverage from January 1955 showed Herbert publicly criticizing the distribution of taxi licenses and arguing that the city did not have enough licensed Black-owned cabs to meet the transportation needs of Black Indianapolis. He connected the public issue to his own family's experience of being refused cab service.

WHAT THE RECORD REVEALED

PRIMARY SOURCES TELL A DEEPER STORY

The Indianapolis Recorder, Jan. 8, 1955—3

Alleged Bootleg Cab Kingpin Calls City Officials "Unjust"

By JIM CUMMINGS

Herbert G. Hawkins, 44-year-old filling station operator who police charge is the kingpin in the city's million-dollar-a-year bootleg cab business, feels city officials are being totally unjust and are doing local citizens a great disservice in trying to stamp out illegal taxis.

"Bootleg cabs are a definite necessity and Indianapolis Negroes depend a great deal on them," the smooth-talking businessman declared in an exclusive interview with The Recorder recently.

Mr. Hawkins, who operates the Standard Service Station in his name at 614 Indiana avenue, owned several licensed cabs at various times in the 1940's.

Today he does not own a cab license and denies reports that his filling station serves as a stand for a large number of "boots."

"I applied for some cab licenses several months ago but was not able to get them," he stated. "My application was for part of the 25

And the white cabs are not dependable when hailed by Negroes or called into Negro neighborhoods. I have stood with my wife and three children in the rain downtown and asked as many as seven cabs for service only to be refused by each."

"The whole thing boils down to the fact that the number of taxi licenses set up by the City Council cannot possibly provide enough cab service for the people, especially Negroes."

"The only way city officials are going to eliminate illegal taxis is to license enough cabs to meet the transportation needs of citizens. Once there is an adequate number of licensed cabs on the streets, the bootleg business will disappear because people will have no further need for them."

"I have stood with my wife and three children in the rain downtown and asked as many as seven cabs for service only to be refused by each."

— HERBERT G. HAWKINS

Indianapolis Recorder, January 8, 1955



He wasn't only operating cabs. He was challenging a system that denied Black Indianapolis equitable access to transportation and opportunity.

PEOPLE • PLACES • POSSIBILITIES

Herbert Grigsby Hawkins | Erasure of Black Voices

Indianapolis Recorder coverage helped reveal that Herbert's taxicab story was also a story about discrimination, access, and advocacy.

The fragments were not wrong. They were clues.

A FULLER PICTURE EMERGES

One record can help us understand another.

PEOPLE. HISTORY. PLACE. ALL MATTER.

As I continued searching, Herbert began appearing outside business records. His name surfaced in material connected to Trinity Lodge No. 18, Prince Hall Freemasonry, the Socialite Club, labor, family, and community life. Those records changed the scale of the story I had inherited.

Community Connections

- Trinity Lodge No. 18 documented Herbert receiving the degree of Master Mason in 1945.
- The Socialite Club placed his name within Indianapolis social and community networks.
- Labor references, business records, family materials, photographs, and newspaper coverage added still more context.

The Headstone Was Also a Record



Herbert and Adeline's shared headstone includes the Masonic Square and Compasses beside Herbert's name and the Order of the Eastern Star emblem beside Adeline's. I cannot know exactly what Adeline was thinking when those symbols were chosen, but to me their permanent placement suggests that these affiliations mattered enough to become part of how they would be remembered.

Trinity was standing on a piece of our family history before either one of us fully understood what it was telling us.

HOW ERASURE HAPPENS

Erasure does not happen in just one way.

PEOPLE. HISTORY. PLACE. ALL MATTER.

WHEN STORIES AREN'T PASSED DOWN

Family loss, trauma, migration, silence, and changing relationships can interrupt what one generation passes to the next.

WHEN SOME LIVES ARE TREATED AS MORE "IMPORTANT" THAN OTHERS

Everyday people who built and sustained families and communities can remain outside the histories that are collected, studied, taught, or commemorated.

WHEN RECORDS REMAIN DISCONNECTED

Documents can survive in newspapers, archives, cemeteries, public records, and family collections without anyone connecting them into a larger story.

WHEN PLACES AND COMMUNITIES CHANGE

Businesses close, neighborhoods change, buildings disappear, people move, and stories attached to those places can fade with them.

Erasure can also occur through institutional choices about what is collected, preserved, funded, exhibited, taught, published, interpreted, or made visible. Sometimes it is deliberate. Sometimes it is gradual. Often several processes overlap.

ERASURE DOES NOT ALWAYS HAPPEN AT ONCE. SOMETIMES IT HAPPENS ONE FORGOTTEN STORY AT A TIME.

OMITTED. MINIMIZED. SILENCED. FORGOTTEN.

Four forms can help us recognize what erasure looks like.

PEOPLE. HISTORY. PLACE. ALL MATTER.

OMITTED

The story is excluded from the larger historical narrative altogether.

MINIMIZED

The story is included, but its importance, impact, or context is diminished.

SILENCED

The person or community is represented without their own voice, perspective, or fuller experience - often because the surviving records were created about them rather than by them.

FORGOTTEN

The story once existed in public or community memory but gradually disappeared, even though evidence may still survive.

These forms can overlap. A person can be extensively documented and still have their own voice missing. A story can be preserved in an archive yet forgotten within a family. Someone can appear in the record while the significance of what they did is minimized.

Herbert was not absent from the historical record. What disappeared was the fuller understanding of who he was and why his life mattered.

WHO GETS REMEMBERED - AND WHO GETS TO DECIDE?

Historical memory is shaped by choices.

PEOPLE. HISTORY. PLACE. ALL MATTER.

History does not preserve itself. People and institutions make decisions about what gets collected, placed in an archive, exhibited in a museum, included in a textbook, taught in a classroom, commemorated in public space, or recognized as historically significant.

- Whose stories are preserved?
- Whose stories are taught?
- Whose stories become what we simply call history?
- Whose voice are we hearing - and whose is missing?
- Who has the authority and resources to decide what remains visible?

Archives are not the enemy. Archives, newspapers, libraries, museums, cemeteries, and historical collections are among the reasons Herbert's story could be recovered. The larger question is how people decide what is worth saving, studying, interpreting, and remembering - and how power shapes those decisions.

The power to preserve is also, in many ways, the power to shape what future generations will know.

ERASURE IS NOT JUST HISTORY

The struggle over visibility, interpretation, and commemoration is happening now.

PEOPLE. HISTORY. PLACE. ALL MATTER.

Historical erasure is not only a question about the distant past. Contemporary disputes over public history show that preservation can remain vulnerable even after a story has been documented, recognized, or commemorated.

When Black History Is Removed

In 2025, a broad Department of Defense review of DEI-related content swept up historical material documenting Black military service and achievement. Material concerning Jackie Robinson's Army service and Medal of Honor recipient Maj. Gen. Charles C. Rogers was removed and later restored, while Tuskegee Airmen training material was temporarily affected. The Pentagon said some removals were errors. The historical facts had not changed; what changed, even temporarily, was whether portions of that history remained visible and accessible.

Whose Name Gets to Remain?

Doris "Dorie" Miller served aboard the USS West Virginia during the attack on Pearl Harbor and became the first Black American awarded the Navy Cross. In 2020, the Navy announced that the future aircraft carrier CVN-81 would bear his name. In 2026, reporting indicated that Navy officials were considering renaming the carrier; at the time this guide was prepared, no final public decision had been announced.

If commemoration tells us whose lives a nation has chosen to remember, what does de-commemoration tell us?

Who Gets to Tell America's Story?

The Smithsonian has faced federal pressure over how it interprets and presents American history. Executive actions and reviews beginning in 2025 challenged language, exhibits, educational materials, and institutional approaches to American history. The controversy raises a larger question: how much authority should political leaders have over the way historians, curators, and museums interpret the nation's past?

Lonnie G. Bunch III, founding director of the National Museum of African American History and Culture and later the first Black person and first historian to lead the Smithsonian, represents another side of this story: the work of building institutions that place African American history within the national narrative. In September 2026, he announced that he would retire at the end of the year; he stated that political pressure was not the reason for his retirement.

AFRICAN AMERICAN HISTORY IS AMERICAN HISTORY.

Erasure Close to Home: Martin University

Martin University was founded in Indianapolis in 1977 and became Indiana's only Predominantly Black Institution. After decades of serving students, the university ceased operations at the end of 2025 amid enrollment and financial challenges. In 2026, the campus changed hands, and historic-preservation concerns emerged around buildings on the former property.

Martin's closure was not itself evidence of a deliberate attempt to erase a Black institution. The lesson is different: an institution can close, a building can change hands, records can scatter, memories can fade - and decades later, someone may ask, "What used to be here?"

**WHEN A BLACK INSTITUTION DISAPPEARS, WHO PRESERVES THE
HISTORY IT LEAVES BEHIND?**

REMEMBER. RECOVER. RESTORE.

Different actions. A stronger tomorrow.

PEOPLE. HISTORY. PLACE. ALL MATTER.



REMEMBER

Acknowledge that the person lived, the place existed, the organization mattered, or the story happened - even when all that remains are fragments.

RECOVER

Refuse to assume that the fragments are all there is. Become curious about what is missing. Search for what has been overlooked, forgotten, scattered, or disconnected.

RESTORE

Return the story to the family, community, and historical record. Recovery becomes restoration when knowledge is shared, published, taught, preserved, or passed forward.

Herbert's story did not end with me discovering it. I shared it with my family and with Trinity. I wrote about it. The Indianapolis Recorder brought it back before readers. My biographical entry for the Encyclopedia of Indianapolis formally returned Herbert to a major public-history resource. And now his story continues to travel.

On April 6, 2026, the Encyclopedia of Indianapolis published my biographical entry on Herbert Grigsby Hawkins, returning his life to a major public-history resource.

ARCHIVES AS ACTS OF RESISTANCE

Everyday sources. Extraordinary stories.

PEOPLE. HISTORY. PLACE. ALL MATTER.

When people and communities have been omitted, minimized, silenced, or forgotten, preserving the evidence of their lives pushes back against disappearance. An archive can be a major institution - but it can also be a family Bible, a labeled photograph, a funeral program, a church anniversary booklet, a box of letters, an obituary, a cemetery marker, or the memory of an elder who still knows the story.

Where Might You Look?

NEWSPAPERS

Local and national coverage, obituaries, announcements, advertisements, and community reporting.

FAMILY RECORDS

Photographs, letters, Bibles, recipes, certificates, oral histories, and memories.

PUBLIC RECORDS

Census records, marriage and death records, property documents, court files, and directories.

ONLINE COLLECTIONS

Digitized newspapers, databases, institutional collections, and searchable historical resources.

LIBRARIES & ARCHIVES

Collections, databases, vertical files, maps, city directories, manuscripts, and special collections.

CHURCH & ORGANIZATIONAL RECORDS

Membership lists, programs, newsletters, minutes, lodge records, and anniversary publications.

CEMETERIES & MEMORIALS

Headstones, burial records, symbols, inscriptions, and cemetery archives.

COMMUNITY ARCHIVES

Local-history projects, neighborhood collections, family-held materials, and people like you.

Sometimes Resistance Is Remarkably Simple

- Write the name and date on the back of the photograph.
- Ask the elder the question while they are still here to answer it.
- Save the funeral program.
- Record the family story.
- Search the newspaper.
- Preserve the document instead of assuming nobody will ever care about it.

NO SINGLE SOURCE GAVE ME HERBERT HAWKINS. TOGETHER, THE SOURCES HELPED ME RECOVER A LIFE.

CARRY IT FORWARD

A story does not have to be famous to be worth preserving.

PEOPLE. HISTORY. PLACE. ALL MATTER.



The Akan concept of Sankofa teaches the importance of returning to the past to retrieve knowledge and wisdom that can help guide the present and future. Historical preservation does not always begin in an archive. Sometimes it begins at the kitchen table, on a front porch, during a car ride, at a family gathering, or in a conversation with an elder who begins telling you about a life you never knew they lived.

Preserve the Voices While You Can

My grandmother Adeline loved talking about growing up in Greenwood, Mississippi. I listened. She also talked about Herbert, their shared headstone, and the Masonic and Eastern Star emblems represented there. But I never thought to record those conversations. No audio. No video. No oral-history interview. At the time, I was simply listening to my Granny. Today, I wish I could hear her voice telling those stories again.

DON'T WAIT UNTIL SOMEONE'S VOICE BECOMES A MEMORY.

Questions Worth Asking

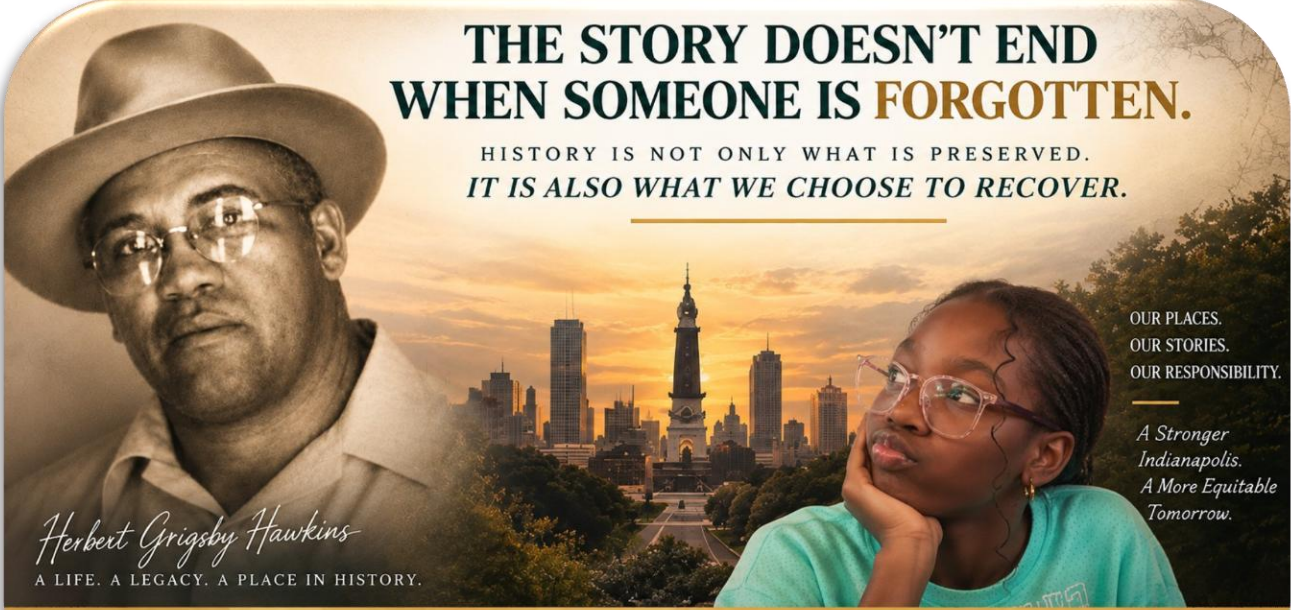
- What was your childhood like?
- What do you remember about your parents and grandparents?
- Where did our family come from?
- What was the neighborhood like when you were growing up?
- What family stories should never be forgotten?
- What do you want future generations to know about you?

The Story Comes Full Circle

Herbert died in 1957, long before Trinity was born. They never met. Yet the five words Trinity spoke at age six helped set in motion the search that brought more of Herbert back into our family's memory. She will never meet him, but she can know him.

History is not only what is preserved. It is also what we choose to recover.

We cannot recover every story that has been lost. But we can pay attention to the stories that are still within our reach. We can remember. We can recover. We can restore. And every time we do, we make our understanding of our families, our communities, and our shared history a little more complete.



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Thank You.

WHOSE STORY IS WAITING FOR YOU TO GO LOOKING?

SOURCES & FURTHER READING

FOLLOWING THE RECORD

Bruns, E. (2024). "Archival silences and avenues to address them: A literature review." *The Serials Librarian*, 85, 11-18.

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Godfrey, B. J. (2024). "The color of preservation: Black historic placemaking in New York City." *Journal of Historical Geography*, 83, 128-141.

Sdunzik, J. (2023). *The Geography of Hate: The Great Migration Through Small-Town America*. University of Illinois Press.

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Indiana State Library. African American/Black history and genealogy resources; historical newspaper holdings and Indiana collections.

Indiana Historical Society. African American history materials and Indianapolis collections.

IU Indianapolis University Library. Indianapolis Recorder Digital Collection.

Indiana Historical Bureau. Indiana historical markers and resources related to Black Indianapolis history.

Encyclopedia of Indianapolis. Herbert Grigsby Hawkins, biographical entry by Dr. Michelle D. Dartis, published April 6, 2026.

U.S. Department of Defense / U.S. Navy materials and public reporting, 2025-2026. Used for the contemporary examples involving military-history content, Jackie Robinson, Maj. Gen. Charles C. Rogers, the Tuskegee Airmen, and the proposed USS Doris Miller.

White House and Smithsonian materials, 2025-2026. Executive actions, reviews, reports, and public statements concerning historical interpretation at the Smithsonian; Smithsonian biographical and leadership materials concerning Lonnie G. Bunch III.

Martin University and Indianapolis preservation reporting, 2025-2026. Used for the discussion of Martin University's closure, the former campus, and preservation concerns surrounding the property.

Hawkins/Dartis family materials. Photographs, oral histories, marriage record, cemetery evidence, recollections, and privately held family materials.

IMAGE CREDITS

Cover / Remember-Recover-Restore / Closing graphics: Original presentation graphics created for Erasure of Black Voices under the direction of Dr. Michelle D. Dartis; family photographs from the Hawkins/Dartis family collection.

Herbert G. Hawkins portrait: Hawkins/Dartis family collection.

Trinity photographs: Personal collection of Dr. Michelle D. Dartis.

Hawkins filling station photographs: Historical photographs used in Dr. Dartis's research collection; provenance under continued review.

Indianapolis Recorder images: Archival newspaper images reproduced as historical research material.

Herbert and Adeline Hawkins shared headstone: Crown Hill Cemetery, Indianapolis. Photograph by Dr. Michelle D. Dartis.

Marriage certificate: Herbert G. Hawkins and Adeline Hardy Hawkins, April 13, 1938. Personal collection of Dr. Michelle D. Dartis; gifted by Evelyn V. Dartis.

Sankofa bird illustration: Original illustration created using OpenAI image-generation tools under the direction of Dr. Michelle D. Dartis, 2026.

Encyclopedia of Indianapolis display graphic: Based on the Herbert G. Hawkins biographical entry by Dr. Michelle D. Dartis; portrait from Hawkins/Dartis family collection.

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