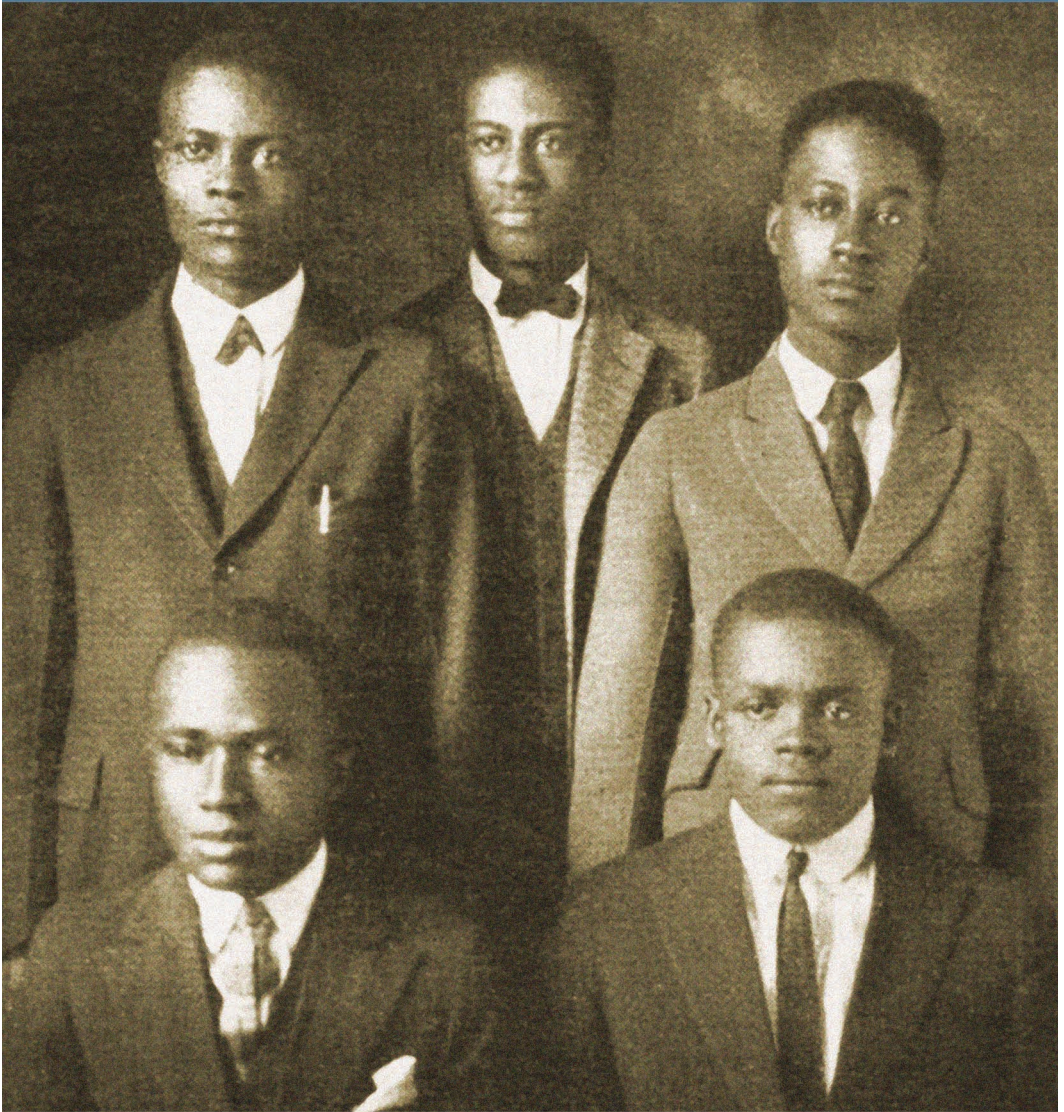




Wiley College stars on the silver screen and in real life



Melvin B. Tolson (center) led the fledgling Wiley College debate team to a U.S. championship in 1935 with a win over a big-name university. The story is depicted in the movie “The Great Debaters,” scheduled for release Dec. 25.





**“I love it here!
Everyone knows who you are.”**

Wiley College sophomore Natasha Lawton

United Methodist school benefits from Black College Fund gifts

A little-known “David and Goliath” story is coming to life on the silver screen in the Christmas 2007-release “The Great Debaters,” produced by Oprah Winfrey and directed by and starring Denzel Washington.

Washington portrays Melvin B. Tolson, a Wiley College professor who in 1935 inspired students to form the school’s first debate team and challenge the University of Southern California in a national championship. Despite incredible odds, including great racial tension, Wiley beat Southern California (shown as Harvard in the film)—and a score of other oratorical powerhouses.

While most reviewers describe the film setting as a “small, modest college in an east Texas town,” United Methodists note that Wiley, located in Marshall, Texas, is one of the denomination’s 11 historically Black colleges and universities supported by the Black College Fund.

The first historically African-American college west of the Mississippi River, Wiley College opened its doors in 1873, just eight years after the Civil War ended. Today its slogan is “The Place to Be,” and Natasha Lawton and her classmates agree wholeheartedly it is.

Sophomore Lawton, a business administration major, exclaims, “I love it here! Everyone knows who you are.” Ms. Lawton visited several schools but decided the closest one to her hometown of Dallas was her college of choice. Active in Hamilton Park United Methodist Church, she appreciates Wiley’s church connection: “It’s important to get an excellent education and maintain a relationship with God.”

For more than a century, United Methodism’s historically Black colleges and universities have enriched minds and led the way in education, medicine, politics, religion and science. At these institutions of higher learning, thousands of promising students are nurtured to realize their full potential.

You can support leadership for life by encouraging your congregation to pay its Black College Fund asking 100 percent. When you support the Black College Fund, you help Wiley College and other historically Black institutions to meet the challenges of the 21st century. Please give generously. Thank you!

United Methodist historically Black colleges and universities include: Bennett College for Women, Greensboro, N.C.; Bethune-Cookman College, Daytona Beach, Fla.; Claflin University, Orangeburg, S.C.; Clark Atlanta University, Atlanta; Dillard University, New Orleans; Huston-Tillotson University, Austin, Texas; Meharry Medical College, Nashville, Tenn.; Paine College, Augusta, Ga.; Philander Smith College, Little Rock, Ark.; Rust College, Holly Springs, Miss.; and Wiley College, Marshall, Texas.

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The Black College Fund



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