

One of two white students at Morehouse completes freshman year

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

INDIANAPOLIS — Barry Wittman brings a different perspective to Morehouse College than the average student who attends the school in Atlanta. He's white.

This month, the 18-year-old National Merit Scholar finished his freshman year as one of two white, full-time students at the historically black, all-male, small liberal arts college.

"It felt to me like I fit in better at Morehouse than any other

place I've been," Wittman said.

Enrollment of white students at Morehouse, founded in 1867, varies from none some years to two or three in a year, said a spokesman. But the school historically has welcomed all students while serving its predominantly black target audience.

"Morehouse has always had a diverse, international faculty and staff," college president Walter E. Massey. "For years ... the school maintained an interracial vision and hosted interracial conferences in defiance of Georgia's Jim

Crow laws."

Wittman grew up in a predominantly white neighborhood in northeast Indianapolis, so attending Morehouse was a new experience for him.

Wittman was raised in the Bahai faith, in which unity among all people and improving understanding and relations are central tenets. Wittman said he had thought about attending a predominately black school for years.

"It just seemed like an interesting opportunity to work on my

own prejudices and to work on race relations," he said.

The key was finding an academic program that matched his interests and goals. When Morehouse offered that — and a full scholarship — Wittman chose it over other colleges, including Purdue University and the University of Illinois.

A black classmate at Lawrence Central High School took him aside to make sure he knew what he was getting into, but other than that, few people have questioned his decision, Wittman said.

His father initially wanted reassurance about academic quality, but that concern was answered. Neither of his parents had reservations related to the school's racial makeup, he said.

Wittman won't know until next year whether he'll be the only Caucasian full-time student at Morehouse. The other student from the last academic year graduated.

Generally quiet and a self-described shy person who likes techno music and computers, Wittman enjoys classroom discus-

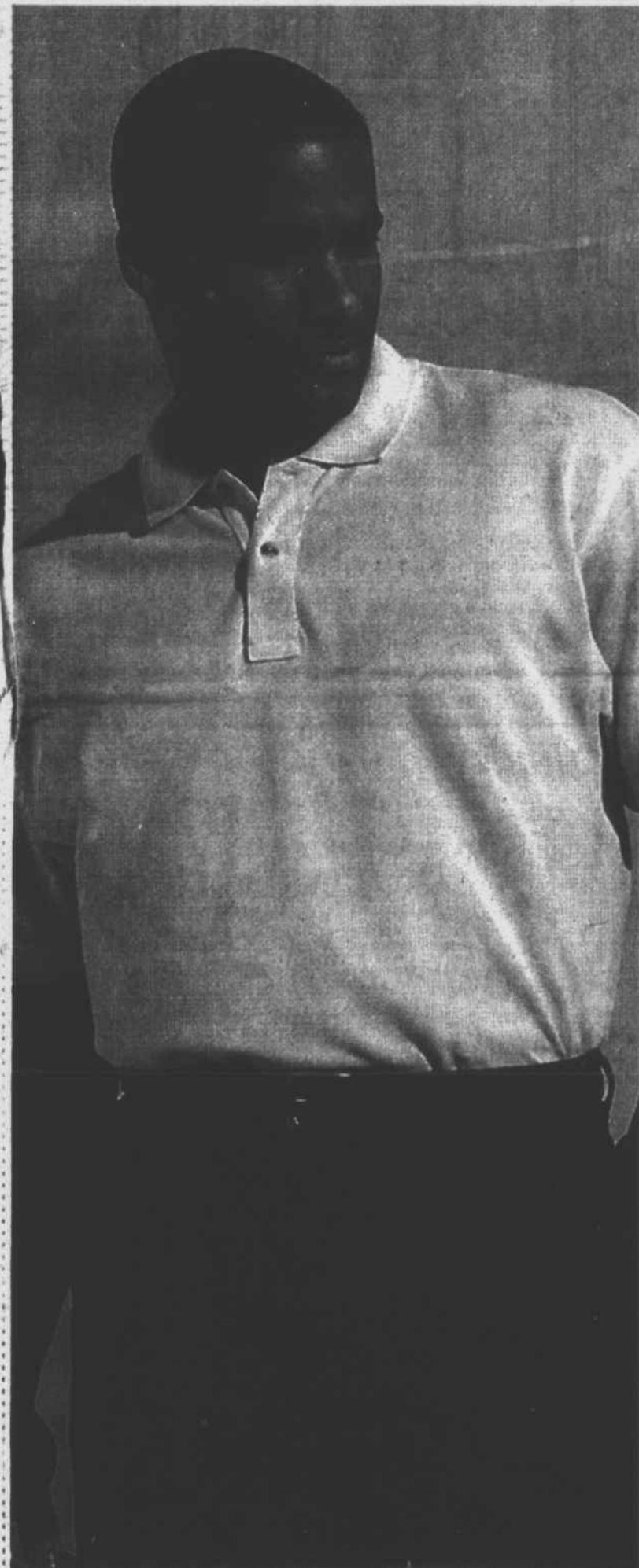
sions as well as informal gatherings with classmates. Racism is a topic that comes up frequently, he said.

Among the things he has found is that there's a significant difference in the perceptions of that issue.

"A lot of white people aren't too terribly aware that racism still exists as an issue," Wittman said. "On a personal level, skin color basically makes no difference. It's cultural differences that separate people, and to a deeper level, there really are no differences."

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