"The Language of the Unheard":
Black Student Protest at Wesleyan University
1965-1995

Jerry Lawrence Barrow
Class of 1996

A thesis submitted to the
faculty of Wesleyan University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the Degree of Bachelor of Arts
with Departmental Honors
from the Departments of History and
African-American Studies

MIDDLETOWN, CONNECTICUT  APRIL, 1996
For my family,
who understood me even when I didn't
understand myself
Acknowledgments

This project was conceived in an African-American history seminar that I took in the fall of my junior year entitled, *Black Protest Movements*. At that time I was given the freedom by the professor, Jeff Kerr-Ritchie, to research any topic under that heading to meet the research requirement. As co-chair of Ujamaa I chose to study the history of Black student protest at Wesleyan. That paper has been expanded into the work you hold before you. Thus, I thank Professor Kerr-Ritchie for allowing me the opportunity to create a work that synthesizes my experiences at Wesleyan as a student, a leader, and a Black man.

It would not have occurred to me to research the history Wesleyan's Black community without the inspiration of my friend, roommate, and academic peer, Joshua Bruce Guild. I thank him for sharing his experiences in researching the Vanguard class of '69 and helping me to navigate the vast archival resources. I am truly grateful.

My eternal gratitude goes to Professor Claire Potter for her constant encouragement and help throughout this project, and my Wesleyan career. When I was willing to settle for less, you not only insisted that I do more, you helped me make it possible. Actions truly speak louder than words.

Many thanks go to Professor Ashraf Rushdy for always offering his time, resources, encouragement, and sense of humor.

I am also grateful to Professor Richard Vann for agreeing to advise me on this project at the eleventh hour and offering his unique insight on the subject matter.

I can never forget my fraternity brothers Kenny, Dorian, Dabira, and Hue for not just being kindly, amiable, and fraternal, but for always being a shrine of understanding in moments of sorrow. I hold you all deep in my heart.

To my housemates of the 29 Incorporated Roland, Al, Josh, Randy, and Jermaine, thanks for always bringing more drama than a Shakespearean soap opera. Senior year would not have been the same without you brothers.

To Mom, Dad, and Christine, for understanding when I had to leave early to finish this. I love you all, and I 'll be home soon.
# Table of Contents

Introduction .............................................................................. 1

Chapter One  
*The 1960s: Laying foundations of Protest* ..................... 6

Chapter Two  
*The 1970s: Stabilizing the Movement* ......................... 33

Chapter Three  
*The 1980s: The Politics of Protest* .............................. 44

Chapter Four  
*The 1990s: The Struggle Continues* ............................. 65

Conclusion ............................................................................... 88

Sources .................................................................................. 92
Introduction

For student movements, let us remember, are the most sincerely selfless and altruistic which the world has seen. A student is a person who, midway between childhood and maturity, is imbibing the highest ideals and hopes of the human cultural heritage; moreover, he lives in comradeship with fellow students usually the last communal fellowship he will experience. -Lewis Feuer, Conflict of Generations

Protest movements and activism are inextricable parts of life for Black students on predominantly white campuses. Wesleyan University in Middletown, Connecticut is celebrated in academic circles for having maintained a critical mass of Black students for almost thirty years. Throughout this thirty-year history Wesleyan's student body, faculty, and administration have endured the many growing pains that come with intellectual and social evolution. Strong and consistent activism has helped to establish a relationship between students and administrators that provides the opportunity for open communication and constructive criticism. But more importantly, protest activity on the part of African-American students has played an integral role in establishing many of the institutions and resources that have made Wesleyan attractive to African-American applicants.

The catalysts for protest have come from both within and outside the university. The precarious position for most universities of being both independent of the "outside world" and yet being influenced by it places almost insurmountable strains
on their structure. At Wesleyan, questions of how to proceed with changes and at what pace challenged the adaptive capabilities of the small yet growing collegiate community, especially in the late 1960s. This also holds true for many similar colleges and universities all over the country during this time period.

Confronting the reality of student turnover and the role it plays in repetitious student protest has driven me to do this work.¹ It is imperative for contemporary students and administrators to have a working knowledge of past student activism. Students should see what has been done, what were effective methods, and what were not. Administrators and faculty should analyze these occurrences and see how they were dealt with by their predecessors.

As late as 1964 Blacks were fewer than 3 percent of all college students and were concentrated in Black colleges and Universities. Black college enrollment nationwide doubled between 1964 and 1970. By 1968, 64 percent of all black college students were enrolled in historically white colleges, with Blacks accounting for 8.7 percent of all college enrollements.² Just as other institutions opened their arms to African-Americans, they too had to endure similar painful, yet necessary, adjustments. Some comparative study has revealed that in fundamental ways,

¹William H. Exum, Paradoxes of Protest, Temple University Press, 1985 p19
²ibid, Exum p7
Wesleyan's experience with the African-American population was not an abberation.

Researching the history of Black student movements yields the following conclusion; Black student protests have been motivated by a need for respect and survival. I understand protest in this context as any action, collective or individual, that aims to call attention to and/or correct a perceived injustice. For example, the student unrest upon the arrival of the vanguard class of Black students at Wesleyan in 1965 was about obtaining respect, about being treated as equals, and receiving an education that was conducive to their needs as Black students. Black students were fighting for a sense of ownership of the campus. They did not want to be viewed as invited guests. They wanted to carve out their own niche and claim ownership of the campus.

Black students at predominantly white institutions have an ever present sense of expendability. As the numbers of African-American students began to grow on college campuses in the 60s and 70s it became important to stabilize the population. Numbers had to remain consistent and resources had to be established and maintained for the Black student community. African-American undergraduates endure a great deal of anxiety over their presence in the university. This anxiety is founded in fluctuations in financial aid programs and constant changes in admissions priorities and standards. These changes impact the pool of Black students to the point where the slightest ripple
sends waves through the community. Stories of "super seniors" and financial aid "casualties" abound in Black student communities.

When your presence at a school is the result of extraordinary efforts you are given a heightened awareness of your worth to the institution. Blacks are almost too aware of their status as commodities to universities. This is true for any heavily recruited group. But Black students know that value that is applied to them rather than presumed can easily be taken away. The dilemma of the contemporary Black undergraduate is determining when you stop being a token and begin being a coveted member of the academic community. This feeling of being used by the university was evident in statements made by some of Wesleyan's earlier Black matriculates:

Because we petition for our own house, or happen to congregate around the same dining room table, or prefer our own company to others, this does not make us an adjunct body of Wesleyan...No one seems to forget our color when it comes to publishing catalogues, or when mass media request interviews or coverage. But when it comes to specific needs and desires we seem to be the result of idealistic fantasies of assimilation.³

A problem at the core of every student movement is the transient nature of the student body. The undergraduate experience is designed to be temporary. With the exception of racism, knowledge of issues is dependent solely on how effectively information is passed down from one generation of

students to the next. The use of the word "generation" in this context is applicable because the difference in mentality between incoming freshman and outgoing seniors is great.

Black student concerns have not varied a great deal in the past thirty years. Some issues are constants, like financial aid. But other issues, like faculty of color retention, need not be. Black students have been fighting for Black faculty for more than thirty years. Valuable time and energy is spent by both the student protestors and the administrators whom they meet with addressing this issue. Thirty years of protest should yield some insite on how Wesleyan can continue to meet the needs of its Black student population. I hope that this text will serve as a resource for either making Black student protest at Wesleyan more efficient or less necessary so that precious time can be spent on receiving an education.

In this essay I will address the various motivations, strategies, ideologies and outcomes of individual and collective Black student protests. My primary sources are items that the university saw fit to save in the archives of Olin Library, the Office of Public information, and the Center for African-American studies. These records consist of newspaper articles, memos, letters, index cards, and photographs. Where possible I have supplemented the primary sources with interviews of people involved in specific movements or mentioned in documents. The remaining texts have been used primarily for comparative study and statistics.
Chapter 1

The 1960s: Laying Foundations of Protest

I am not afraid of rough spots or lonely times
I do not fear the success of this endeavor. I
am Ra, in space not to be discovered, but invented.
From "Journey" by Nikki Giovanni

In the fall of 1965 Wesleyan University enrolled sixteen Black students, the largest number of simultaneous Black admits in the school’s one hundred thirty four year history. This was the result of a recruitment effort initiated the previous year by the Dean of admissions John C. Hoy and President Victor L. Butterfield. They had established a goal for the class of 1969 to be comprised of at least ten percent “disadvantaged” students. Many of these disadvantaged students would be African-American. The racial landscape of the campus did not reflect the composition of the country, and they felt that it was time for Wesleyan to begin moving forward in correcting this discrepancy. The context of this action deserves some emphasis since there were many forces working outside of Wesleyan that made this a risky but extremely necessary undertaking.

In 1965 the United States was in a state of racial and political turmoil. The Vietnam war was dividing the nation and bleeding it of its resources, especially its youth. In the Black
community the war was dividing older and younger generations of civil rights groups. Young groups such as the Congress for Racial Equality (CORE) and the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) viewed the war as closely related to the Civil Rights issue in America. This was a departure from older groups who were less critical of the United States' Vietnamese policy. This anti-war sentiment was juxtaposed against a high level of black participation in the Vietnam war. In the 1960s proportionately more blacks (30 percent) than whites (18 percent) from the group qualified for military service were drafted. At the end of December 1965, there were more than 20,000 blacks in Vietnam, including 16,531 in the army, 500 in the navy, 3,580 in the marines, and 908 in the airforce.¹

In the 1960s Blacks also experienced an increase in their political empowerment. 1965 saw the enactment of the Voting Rights Act and an increased emphasis on the responsibility of voting. In 1966 there were ninety-seven black members of the state legislatures, and sixteen were in the congress of the United States.²

In this same year the world experienced the tragedy of the assassination of Malcolm X. On February 21, 1965 the charismatic Muslim leader, who championed human as well as civil rights, was shot to death at the Audubon Ballroom in Harlem. This event

¹John Hope Franklin, From Slavery to Freedom, 1980 Random House New York, p488-503
²Ibid
would come to have a significant impact on Black student protest at Wesleyan in the years to follow.

From an academic standpoint the 1965 U.S. Higher Education Act, which included numerous financial aid programs for economically disadvantaged citizens, bore the highest significance to Wesleyan. This enabled them to provide the necessary funding that the economically disadvantaged recruits would need.

Plans were put into motion to prepare the Wesleyan faculty and administration for the arrival of the new students. Faculty workshops were created and suitable, mostly younger, faculty were chosen to be the advisors for the new Black students. Dean Hoy was in regular communication with the faculty, gathering ideas with how to make the matriculation of the Black students run as smoothly as possible.

The majority of the new students were from lower economic classes. This was a highly significant change for an institution that historically catered to upper-middle-class white men. Unfortunately, despite the preparations to accommodate the needs of the Black students once they arrived, the administration would find their efforts lacking in many areas, such as the insufficient presence of Black adults on campus. 3 Between 1951 and 1968 there was never more than one Black faculty member on staff at a time for any given year.4 Wesleyan would come to realize that as

3, Alford A. Young, Revolt of the Privileged. U.T.A.C.P.T. INC. 1988 p6
4Faculty Profile, Nov. 18. 1977
far as relating to the needs of Blacks on an academic, social, and political scale they too were at a disadvantage.

The early history of Wesleyan foreshadowed the contemporary progressive trend of its administration. Wesleyan University accepted its first Black student, Charles B. Ray, in 1832. Ray had been attending the Wesleyan Academy in Willbraham, Massachusetts studying to be a Methodist minister. The principal of the academy encouraged Ray to apply to the University when it opened in Connecticut. Ray applied and was accepted; but upon his arrival Ray suffered harassment from the White students until it became life threatening. Six weeks after his arrival on campus Charles B. Ray was forced to leave because of his race. The following year the board of trustees passed a resolution prohibiting the admission of Black students to Wesleyan. Though this resolution was rescinded in 1835, only 35 to 40 Blacks were admitted to Wesleyan between 1835 and 1965.5

Here lies an example of well-intentioned individuals being overwhelmed by an intolerant majority. Would the efforts of Hoy and Butterfield encounter a similar fate? How would Wesleyan prove itself to be different from any other historically all white insitution? The mind set of the Black students at Wesleyan was guided by their own history and experiences with racism, individually and as a race, independent of the university. It would be a difficult task to diffuse the anger and mistrust that the university, as a body, had very little to do with creating.

5 Ibid, Young,p2
Black students were admitted to Wesleyan with the expectation that they were to integrate into the White community and share their experiences as Black people with them. Assimilation was the goal as far as interracial relations were concerned. The assumptions that this expectation implies would become a point of difficulty. The implications are that there is a universal Black experience and that the Black students would want to assume the role of informant to the White population on campus which was to benefit from the knowledge of the Black experience imparted by their new classmates. The sentiment towards this expectation of the class can be summarized in a quote from Randy H. Miller '69: "Personally I don't give a damn for educating white boys about what it's like to be black."6 Subsequent statements by Black students would echo this sentiment decades later.

The Black students were spread throughout Wesleyan's living facilities because the mandate was that Blacks were to integrate with the rest of the population. It is this mandate that led to the first act of protest of the Vanguard class - rejecting assimilation. Rather than integrating with White students, Black students sought each other out and formed their own community. One of the most visible and lasting manifestations of this resolve was the creation of what has been labeled the "soul table" in the McConoughy Dining Hall. Black students would seek each other

---

out in the dining hall and sit together. White students and administrators criticized this practice as separatist. White students expressed feelings of intimidation at sitting at a table with only Blacks, but never gave thought to how one Black student would feel being seated at a table with only other whites. Black students for years to come would defend the practice. "Blacks enjoy their own social and cultural interests," Ken Samuel '78 stated, "There's a tendency for Blacks to group together, but there's nothing wrong with ethnic identification."\(^{7}\)

A Black section of a dining hall was a significant form of protest for several reasons. For one, it was an exercise in unity. The Black students considered themselves to be a family.* Meal times are times to be with family and for many students this was their first time being away from home. Secondly, students that otherwise would not have met found each other in the dining hall and the first lines of communication were established. This was important due to the efforts to separate them in living quarters. For Black students, their comfort was the priority, not anyone else's. It is a time honored tradition that has helped build the Black community at Wesleyan.

1966 was a tense year for Wesleyan. Many questions were awaiting answers. Would Blacks continue to apply to Wesleyan? Could the school really accommodate a growing Black population?

---

\(^{7}\)Wesleyan *Argus*, October 7, 1977

* The Black student union, Ujamaa, would come to refer to their membership as the Family hood.
What would these students do when they arrived? Was this gamble of theirs going to pay off?

In the fall of 1966 thirty-three Black freshmen enrolled making up nine percent of the incoming freshman class. The question of integrating the students arose again. The university housing office continued to disperse the black students to foster more integration. But it was more difficult to mix in thirty-three than sixteen. A rather humorous attempt at dispersal was made and was quickly counteracted:

The students quickly realized that upon locating the room of any black student, one had only to look above and below that room to find the rooms of the other black students in the unit. This pattern ran through all of the Foss Hill buildings. (Young:1988:20)

Attempts such as this to influence integration were laughable but nonetheless frustrating. On one hand it insulted the intelligence of the new students and on the other hand it indicated a lack of imagination on the part of the administration.

But was the point of contention between the Black students and the administration assimilation or integration? Given the movements on the part of Black leaders around the country, it only seemed logical for the administration to push for integration. Providing separate living facilities for Black students before they arrived would have had disastrous ramifications. Wesleyan would have been charged with promoting segregation. What the administration saw as a sincere adherance to demands of the civil rights movement was viewed by the students as an attempt to prevent Black student unification, or assimilation. Assimilation
implies absorption into the larger group at the expense of the minority interest. Black students in predominantly white institutions are very sensitive to maintaining their cultural identity and any perceived attempt to negate that would be (and was) met with resistance.

With the increased Black student numbers came the possibility to organize into a group on campus. The 1966-67 academic year saw the founding of the Afro-American Society, the Black Student Union (later renamed Ujamaa). The AAS served as the first structured support group for African Americans at Wesleyan. This body would serve many important functions to Black community at Wesleyan. AAS was both a political voice, a forum for sharing ideas and knowledge, planning events, and even venting frustrations. The formation of the AAS was significant because it suggested that Black students intended to be a lasting presence on campus. There were no institutions in place for Black students to follow, so they had the challenge of building without a blueprint.

The head of the AAS, Eugene Lang ’69, was a member of another newly formed organization - the Black Panther party. The Panthers were founded by Bobby Seale and Huey P. Newton in California as an organization to promote Black self defense in the face of police brutality. It is evident in future AAS activities that certain aspects of the Panther platform were embraced by the student group. There is no doubt that a mentality of resistance
developed among the students.** An Ujamaa leaflet from April of 1979 alludes to this:

In the fall of 1968 Ujamaa was founded as an organization to all Blacks in the area and served as a vehicle of Black student involvement in the local community. The revolutionary verve of the Wesleyan Black community inspired Blacks at Middletown High and Wilson High to demand Black studies taught by Black professors.

This statement also underscores the priority of the Black students to interact with the Black residents of Middletown. Interaction with the residents of Middletown is another aspect of Wesleyan life that Black students brought with them that the administration did not foresee.

By 1968 Blacks had become a significant part of the student body. With each incoming group they began to build on the community. This year saw the establishment of the Black House at 291 Washington Terrace. Lawrence Madlock '70 recalls that Black students used to also find refuge in the basement of the Eclectic house, home to a Black dining services cook named Raymond Hogland. Mr. Hogland was affectionately called "Hoagie the Wolf" by the Black students.

Relationships with the Black university staff were very important to the Black students. Members of the class of '69 created an uproar over white students addressing the dormitory maids, who were mostly elderly Black women, by their first

**Absalom Massie '93 recounts finding bullet holes in doors of the Malcolm X House attic that is used for storage. Supposedly the Panther members on campus held target practice there. I did see the holes but it wasn't evident that they were caused by gunshots.

8emphasis mine.
names. Many of the Black students had mothers who did the same kind of work and felt that it was disrespectful to assume such familiarity. After the issue was raised the Black caretakers were thereafter referred to by their last names, preceded by the title Mrs.\textsuperscript{9}

Despite these strides the students still did not feel respected as a community. In 1968 twelve Black students chose to express their discontent at not being respected by the non-Black community by burning four copies of \textit{Olla Podrilla}, the school yearbook, on the steps of Olin Library. The lack of Black representation in the yearbook was cited as the reason for the protest. Students regarded it as "an outrageous, unforgivable insult to all Black People."\textsuperscript{10} The protest was not as much about being acknowledged as individuals by the mainstream of the university as it was about being recognized as a community at Wesleyan. These students were sensitive to the fact that they were a considered a new phenomenon at the school and they took their presence seriously. They refused to be placed in the background of the campus as voiceless decorations and so they objected. "The Olla Pod seeks to project the assimilationist philosophy of the phony white liberal swine and nowhere reflects the righteous self-determining philosophy of the Black community."\textsuperscript{11}

\textsuperscript{9}ibid, Young, p20.
\textsuperscript{10} New York Times, January 18, 1970 "The Two Nations at Wesleyan University"
\textsuperscript{11}Wesleyan Argus, April 23, 1976, "Black and White at Wesleyan"
In the 1969 issue of Olla Podrida there is a noticeable effort to include pictures of Black students in either individual or group settings. The most striking photos are those from the Fisk Hall takeover in February of 1969.

This "revolutionary verve" was met with shock and resentment by members of the Wesleyan Administration. Some administrators felt that they were offering an unprecedented opportunity to these students and all they did was complain. But the students did not allow this to deter their efforts to establish resources for themselves at Wesleyan. They weren't going to teach anyone about being Black - at least not in the manner than the administration had hoped- but they were going to show them how to teach themselves.

During this period of social upheaval, scholars took the opportunity to examine the motivations of what was arguably the most rebellious generation of young people in American history. In, The Conflict of Generations, sociologist Lewis Feuer analyzes the influences and impact of student movements around the country. Feuer's thesis is that student movements are born out of an obscure, innate desire for the younger generation to rebel against an older generation that in one way or another has failed them.\textsuperscript{12} He draws parallels between student movements' and labor movements' contrasting motivations. Though he concisely identifies some characteristics of student movements, the weak point in his argument is that he assigns an idealistic mentality to

\textsuperscript{12} Lewis Feuer, The Conflict of Generations, 1969
students that implies that they are somehow detached from reality. Feuer asserts that the university provides them with the opportunity (safety) to be ideal judges of the society they are supposed to join upon graduation. Students must work to identify with the oppressed of the world. "A student movement always looks for some lowly oppressed class with which to identify psychologically. Whether it be to the peasantry, the proletariat, or the Negro, the students have a tremendous need to offer themselves in a self-sacrificial way, to seek out an exploited group on whose behalf their sacrifices will be made."

What Feuer does not account for is the rising presence of the "oppressed" within the institutions of higher learning. Do Blacks automatically become part of the privileged class once they attend college? Judging by the reponses to Black student protest the answer of some would be "yes". These particular Blacks were receiving something that wasn't available to a significant number of people of any race - a university education. But the actions of the Black students would indicate that they felt a sense of responsibility rather than privilege because of their unique position. An example of this is the insistence that Black custodial staff, most of whom were older women, be adressed in with the title Ms. or Mrs. rather than the liberal usage of first names that was practiced by the white students. The staff, for reasons unknown, did not correct the students but the Black students did not hesitate to speak on their behalf.
The Occupation of Fisk Hall

I who am one of you.
Thinks of you.
I who am you-do and fight for you.
You are me and I am you.
We are each other-therefore we must be for each other.
We must be whole-we must be humane
We must be Black...

-Anonymous, Wilbur Fisk Hall February 21, 1969

In 1965 when Wesleyan professed commitment to racial diversity they probably didn't foresee having to provide a Black house, hiring Black professors, or establishing an Afro-American cultural center. But by 1969 Wesleyan would realize that the Black presence meant having these things and being prepared to do more.

On February 21, 1969 at 4:00 am Black students and adults from the Middletown community, accompanied by Edgar Beckham '58 (one of the few Black Alumni), took over Wilbur Fisk Hall. Mr. Beckham was employed at the university as director of the language lab located in Fisk hall. A group of Black students on campus had drawn up a petition to have classes canceled on February 21st in observance of the assassination of Malcolm X. The faculty voted against it and the students were angered at their lack of compassion. They saw this request as being quite reasonable. Malcolm X was a loved member of their community and they wanted a day to observe his passing. This rejection served as a catalyst for the students to mobilize for change.
At this juncture the students could have chosen any number of methods of protest. The anger in them could have easily manifested itself in violence. But despite the growing popularity of militancy nationwide, they knew that violence would contradict their entire struggle. In *Why We Can't Wait*, Martin Luther King, Jr. summarizes his logic behind the use of non-violent protest by African-Americans:

*He* (Blacks) was unarmed, unorganized, untrained, disunited and, most important, psychologically, and morally unprepared for the deliberate spilling of blood. Although his desperation had prepared him with the courage to die for freedom if necessary, he was not willing to commit himself to racial suicide with no prospect for victory. (King:1963:24)

Though this was a college campus in New England and not the streets of Selma the potential for violent retaliation was ever present. Students had no way of knowing how the administration or local authorities would respond. With the influence of Edgar Beckham the students proceeded with caution. Angry students wanted to take over an administrative building. Beckham convinced them that an academic building would better serve their needs. Furthermore, there was a symbolism to acquiring Fisk Hall because Wilbur Fisk was the first President of Wesleyan who was responsible for allowing its first Black student, Charles B. Ray, to be run off of campus in 1832.

The protesters gave any occupants of the building the opportunity to leave if they chose not to take part in the protest. There were no weapons. In an interview with the Argus in 1987 a member of the Vanguard Class, Dr. Harold Davis, commented on
student mentality toward violence, "We were quasi-revolutionaries. We didn't have any guns, we just wanted to be heard."

It is evident that the Black community at Wesleyan did not see their struggle as isolated and saw the necessity in having outside support during the takeover. Among the participants were James Moody, a representative of Community Action of Greater Middletown, students from Middlesex Community College, and city high schools.\(^{13}\)

The following is an excerpt from the statement to the administration from the occupants of Fisk Hall.

\[
\text{In occupying Fisk Hall we seek to dramatically expose the university's infidelity to its professed goals and to question the sincerity of its commitment to meaningful change. We blaspheme and decry that education which is consonant with one cultural frame of reference to the exclusion of all others.}
\]

The statement was an articulate, thought provoking, impassioned call for recognition. The takeover was well organized and thought out. A look at some of the demands illustrates this: 1) The creation of a center of Black activity-intellectual, social, and cultural, which would also have an academic component; 2) Afro-American House be moved to the site of the old John Wesley House 3) Increase in Black admissions. 4) Classes be canceled in observance of Malcolm X's death.

These students were fighting to make their education relevant to their lives. They were fighting for choices: where to

\(^{13}\text{Middletown Press, Feb. 22, 1969.}\)
live, how to live and what to learn. They also sought to expose the inadequacy of the administration's fulfillment of its commitment to providing opportunities for the "disadvantaged."

They were also thinking about the non-academic aspects of their lives. Their goals acknowledged their identity as both African-Americans in a larger society and their identity as students in the smaller Wesleyan society while emphasizing the union of the two. W.E.B. DuBois and Ralph Ellison could not have asked for a more eloquent acting out of double consciousness, the belief that African-Americans must struggle with navigating between their identities as both Africans and Americans. DuBois coined the phrase and Ellison illustrated the concept in his novel, The Invisible Man. Self-preservation and respect should not be primary concerns while getting an education. But this is the reality of everyday existence for Blacks in general and especially Black students.

The success of most protest movements is often measured by what was gained or accomplished. By this standard, this protest could be deemed anything but a failure. At 2:00 pm President Edwin Etherington wrote a memo to the faculty urging them to cancel classes for the remainder of the day and to attend the memorial service in the chapel for Malcolm X. More significant was the agreement to move the Afro-American House to the John Wesley house. On April 10, 1969 the Afro-American Institute was formed.
The takeover did suffer some backlash. On February 28, 1969, a week after the takeover, a cross was burned in front of the Afro-American house at approximately 11:15 pm. A Middletown Press article the following day recorded some reactions. One of the residents, Kenneth E. Lillard, is quoted: "Some of the good citizens of Middletown, or somebody, saw fit to burn a cross on the front lawn of the Afro-American house at Wesleyan, 291 Washington Terrace. We just happened to look out the window. It had just been lit." Only the tip of the cross, the arms of which are five feet long, burned he said. "We put it out because we just couldn't stand for such foolishness...We just couldn't tolerate it," Lillard said. He went on to use this as an opportunity to make a statement about the future of Black activity on campus. "The people here will not be intimidated by such ridiculous actions...The cross was really an encouragement to do the things we think we ought to do."  

The takeover of Fisk Hall was a turning point in the relationship between Black students at Wesleyan and the university leaders. Agreeing to the terms of the protest was not easy. The movement for Afro-American studies in Universities was still in its infancy. The establishment of a Afro-American cultural center at Wesleyan was a move towards fulfilling its commitment to educating its students - both Black and White.

14Middletown Press, March 1, 1969
One significant fact about Black protest during this period is that it did not happen in a vacuum. Movements were occurring simultaneously on campuses across the country. Wesleyan was by no means an academic aberration. Yet, some parallels are too extraordinary to avoid mention.

In, *The Black Protest Movement as Rutgers*, Richard P. McCormick details the struggles of creating and sustaining at critical mass of Black students at the Newark branch of Rutgers University. Rutgers had implemented an identical program for recruitment of African-American students in 1963. Their program began to bear fruit at approximately the same time as Wesleyan and encountered identical obstacles.

What they shared was the sense that they were strangers in a white-controlled environment, that their numbers were too few, that there was too little in the social and academic spheres with which they could readily identify, and that changes had to be made.15

One of the most pronounced similarities is the attitude towards assimilation held by some members of the respective Black student communities at Rutgers and Wesleyan. According to McCormick the students felt that integration was not "psychologically or practically satisfying". Students at the various colleges in the Rutgers university system did not appreciate being probed for information about the "Black experience". Furthermore, Black students at Rutgers began to reject the ideals

---

15Richard P. McComick, *Black Student Protest Movement At Rutgers*, 1990, p33
of the Civil Rights movement and chose rather to embrace Black Nationalism. The Civil Rights movement was seen as too compromising and required more tolerance. Black Nationalism was viewed as a better vehicle for expressing anger.

Shortly before 6am on Monday, February 24, 1969, three days after the Fisk Hall takeover(!), members of the Black Organization of Students barricaded themselves in Conklin Hall, the main classroom building on the Newark Campus of Rutgers University. They announced their determination to hold out until the University met their demands. The impetus for the takeover was low admissions application numbers for African-Americans for the upcoming academic year.

The Rutgers counterpart to Edgar Beckham, Malcolm Talbott, had the trust of the students and advised them on how to proceed. A Black Rutgers alumnus is quoted as saying that, “We couldn’t have done what we did without Talbott. He was with us.” This illustrates the importance for Black students to have role models within the faculty and administrative staff of the institution. Adults not only provide a sense of stability but also play key roles in diffusing potentially volatile situations.

The seizure of Conklin Hall was just as organized as the Fisk takeover. Black community organizations in Newark were given advance notice. About 25 students carrying food, bedding, tools, and other equipment entered the structure. In less than four

---

16Ibid, McCormick
minutes they had secured all the entrances with heavy chains. Not until an hour later was their presence discovered.

Among their demands were: 1) removal of admissions director, Robert Swab, and his assistant; 2) that Black students be employed on a work-study basis in the admissions office and 3) the proportion of full-time Black students enrolled over the next two or three years must be commensurate with the total population of Newark and its surrounding communities. Despite the improbability of the last request, it demonstrates the emphasis placed on the connection between the Black community that surrounds the school and the Black students.

In the spirit of the takeover the occupants renamed the building Liberation Hall. After deliberation between Malcolm Talbott and the university President Gross the occupation ended at 5:45 am - 72 hours later.

* * * * * * *

The Fisk Hall takeover did not mark the end of protest in 1969. A memo from the Office of the Chancellor outlines an ongoing protest in the fall of '69 by the Ujamaa Society concerning the expulsion of a Black student, Kwasi Kikuyu (formerly known as Kerry Holman). Argus records recount an altercation between George Walker, Kikuyu and a White student, Jon Berg.

The events that led to this altercation are complex and somewhat disturbing. In a letter to the Ujamaa familyhood dated November 7, 1969 the one account is given of the events that date back to October 13 of that year.
The letter asserts that two black students, George Walker and Butch Williams, were looking for a friend in one of the dormitories. They accidentally knocked on a door to the room of a white student. The white student answered the door indignantly assuming that these students were there to burglarize his room. In a letter to the *Argus* entitled “Prejudiced decisions” Robert Alan Segal ‘70 states that the names of the residents were on their doors and that, essentially, Walker and Williams were lying. Furthermore, he asserts that one of the two men introduced the idea of the robbery by saying “We didn’t come to rob you”, before the White student made the comment about changing his locks.

The potential of robbery was based on the fact that the key to his room had been missing since the day before. The white student told them that they wouldn't be able to rob his room because he had changed the lock. Then Walker and Williams insisted that they had no intention of robbing his room. The White student rebuked their claim and eventually engaged in a fight with one of the Black students(it is not clear which). While the fight was going on three white students attempted to intervene on behalf of the white student. The other Black student brandished a knife to defend himself against them. The knife was never used, just shown to prevent an attack.

Later that night a group of white students went to the Malcolm X House demanding to see the two Black students. The group’s entry disrupted a class going on in the Marcus Garvey
lounge. The letter specifically says "The bunch of vigilantes were tramping around the Institute (AAI), contaminating our sacred temple allegedly looking for the two brothers with evil intentions. Surprised by the united show of strength at the house, they fled in disarray." The tone of the letter is extremely aggressive and laced with terms coined by the Black Panthers such as "Pig" and "Vamp".

Walker and Williams were called before the SJB and had refused to attend the hearing. They eventually did show up to "allow them to dispense their American brand of justice." The two men received strict disciplinary probation on what the letter to Ujamaa described as "hearsay evidence."

Now Jonathan Berg enters the picture. Berg wrote a letter to the Argus refering to Walker as a "punk" and Williams as a "common criminal."* It should be noted that the term "punk" at this time was a slang term for homosexual, specifically a victim of sexual assault in prison. Berg's comments were taken to be an attack on Walker's manhood. When the letter ran in the Argus Walker was out of town in New York. Several friends of Walker and Williams went to visit Berg and warned him that he could suffer physical harm if he continued to disrespect their friends. The letter notes their disgust "at this all-american individual who attempted to engage them in an intellectual discussion of his

---

17Ujamaa Statement(believed to have been written by George Walker but this seems doubtful seeing as Walker is referred to in the letter.)November 7, 1969

* I would conclude from this that Williams was the one who brandished the knife.
letter." This action was obviously taken as a threat on Berg's life and two white students, Jim Welman and John Davidson, drew up a petition to have the friends of Walker disciplined.

Upon his return from New York Walker heard of what was written about him and went to see Berg personally. Evidently Walker went to Berg's room with two of his friends, one of whom was Kwasi Kikuyu, and assaulted Berg. Walker and Kikuyu were called into the Dean's office and brought several members of Ujamaa with them.

After consulting with the SJB Dean Adamany expelled Walker from Wesleyan for use of physical force and Kikuyu was given an indefinite suspension and asked to leave campus. No mention is made of the third party with Walker and Kikuyu.

The Ujamaa society subsequently issued a memo on November 7 demanding that Kwasi Kikuyu be (1) "unilaterally reinstated"; (2) that Dean David Adamany be dismissed as Dean of the College; and (3) that the Ujamaa society be given sole jurisdiction over its members. The implication of this last demand deserves some emphasis. Some Black students saw themselves as a separate group within the university. Their request echoed several elements of the Black Panther Party's platform. For example, the Panthers called for a release of all Black men in prison because of inherent bias in the judicial system. Ujamaa did not feel that their members could receive a fair hearing under the Student Judiciary Board, so they wanted the right to govern themselves. The last line of the letter underscores this sentiment:
At this point, the fate of the two brothers still hangs in the balance. The solution lies in the hands of Ujamaa. If we can present a united front against this fascist vamp, the brothers will remain a part of the family. Otherwise, an alien force will determine their fate. The choice is ours.

The President denied all of their demands, but did say that Kikuyu's suspension would be terminated when he appeared for an SJB hearing. He also said that the administration and the SJB would be willing to discuss the possibility of a racial grievance board with equal Black and White representation.

Previous statements made by Kwasi Kikuyu in a November 7th issue of the Argus led the administration to take safety measures for homecoming weekend. Kikuyu made it quite clear that he would resort to violence if provoked. He felt that the aggressive acts that had occurred at by this point were provoked and justified. "A final word on violence. If anything of a violent nature does occur as a result of these incidents, the white people involved will be directly responsible. There is a new breed of Black man on campus and he will not allow such crimes to go unpunished."18 He signed the letter "Power at all costs."

The administration responded in this memo: "In view of statements made earlier by Ujamaa Society members that the use of force was a possibility, the administration has set into motion Friday afternoon precautions to assure the safety of all persons on campus." The administration prepared a petition for a court injunction to block potential disorders and alerted local authorities.

---

18 Wesleyan Argus, November 7, 1969, p.3
After making such inflammatory comments, why did Ujamaa support Kikuyu? Ujamaa always maintained a posture of non-violence. This was established at the Fisk take over and continued to be the guiding ideology throughout the homecoming weekend protests. Why then was Kikuyu given so much support?

Whether or not Ujamaa was aware of the precautions being taken against them is not clear. Nevertheless, they proceeded to practice non-violent forms of protest throughout the weekend. Dean Adamany was scheduled to appear at a panel discussion in the '92 theater on November 7, the Friday of Homecoming Weekend. Sixty members of Ujamaa arrived to make a statement to the audience. The majority of the group stood at the foot of the stage facing the audience, while Kikuyu and another student made a statement denouncing the disciplinary action taken against them. They indicated firmly that "until the decision was reversed further interruptions of University events could be expected." Under the advice of security officers Dean Adamany left the theater.

The Administration's response to further protest that weekend was inconsistent. On Saturday morning smaller delegations of Ujamaa members intervened in meetings of the Alumni Association which were happening concurrently in different locations across campus. No measures were taken to stop them at these meetings because "the interruptions were orderly and presented no threat." Despite this conclusion the members of Ujamaa were served with a court injunction late
Saturday morning. In addition to the injunction extra police were on standby throughout the day and a party scheduled at McConaughy Hall that evening was canceled.

A prior agreement was made with the Ujamaa society to allow a representative to voice their grievances over the public address system at the homecoming game against Williams. Bernie Freeman was selected to present the statement from Ujamaa. This proceeded without incident and the extra police left the campus. On November 9th The Student Judiciary Board met with the Administration and members of Ujamaa to discuss ways to resolve the situation. Kwasi Kikuyu had the option of either appearing before the SJB or appealing his case to the President. In an interesting turn of events, on November 10th the SJB voted to remand the case to President Etherington on the grounds that it was "unable to procure adequate evidence to hold a hearing to meet the President's mandate." Kikuyu went to the President later that day and had his suspension lifted.

The issue for the men of Ujamaa was not whether Kwasi's statements on violence were justified. The bottom line for them was that Kikuyu was suspended when he did take part in the assault with Walker. Walker was not given the same support by Ujamaa because they did not want to be associated with his behavior.

* * * * * * * *
The 60s was largely a period of trial and error for Black students, Wesleyan, and most schools with similar agendas. In order for these American institutions of higher learning to evolve they had to undergo some painful mutations. Neither the administrators of the schools nor their Black matriculants knew what to expect from themselves or each other. The irony of the situation was that by resisting the notion of teaching their white peers, Blacks nevertheless exposed them to emotions and ways of thinking that some, if not many, of their white peers had not encountered before. Blacks students exposed whites to their frustrations, their ways of interacting, and what their expectations of education were.

But if only one thing becomes clear about the protest of the 1960s at Wesleyan it is that African-Americans wanted to be at Wesleyan and were fighting for the betterment of the institution, not its downfall. If on some level Blacks did not see some benefit to being at Wesleyan they would not have fought so hard for change.
Chapter II
The 1970s: Stabilizing the Movement

"My period was the beginning of the effort to get people of certain educational backgrounds. More concerted effort to find Black students who matched the Wesleyan profile. Now people look different but have a more common educational background".

-Jay Hoggard '76

The mid 1970s marked a period of transition for both the Wesleyan community as a whole, and specifically the Black community. The formerly all-male campus was adjusting to the introduction of women in 1970, students were conducting ongoing protests on campus to force divestiture of stock in companies that did business in South Africa, and the Black student community was beginning to undergo changes in composition. Even though six Black professors were hired in 1970 there was a steady decline in Black student enrollment as compared to the late sixties. This is striking because nationally, Black enrollment was increasing as a whole. In 1975 21% of Black Americans between 18-24 were enrolled in college, compared to only 13% in 1960. In 1960 134,00 Black students between the ages of 18-24 were attending college. By 1975, the college enrollment of Black 18-24 year old had increased nearly five fold to 665,000 and Blacks represented 9.6% of college and university enrollment.¹

The were more Black matriculates from boarding and private schools in the mid-seventies and many were of higher

economic standing than their Vanguard predecessors. With these changes and the last group to have personal contact with the Vanguard class (the class of '73) graduating, the "revolutionary verve" was believed to have died. In commenting on the change in the Black student community in the early and mid seventies, University Editor John W. Paton said "Admissions began seeking students who were clearly interested in coming to Wesleyan to get an education. There was no point in giving aid to bring black students here to carry on the revolution." This statement is rather inaccurate because it assumes that a student's desire to learn is inversely proportional to their tendency to protest. The history of Black student protest from the 1970s to the early 1990s says otherwise.

In the seventies Ujamaa, the Black Student Union, became more of an active political vehicle for the Black students at Wesleyan as well as fostering ties with the Black community of Middletown. The name Ujamaa is Swahili for cooperative work and economics. Ujamaa is one of the seven principles of an African-American cultural ceremony called Kwanzaa, which was started by a cultural nationalist leader, Dr. Maulana Karenga, in 1966. Of the seven principles they could have chose from for a name it seems curious that they chose Ujamaa. Umoja(unity) or Kujichagulia(self-determination) would have seemed a more appropriate title for a student group. When asked about this Lawrence Madlock '70 insisted that it meant Familyhood and is

2 Wesleyan Argus April 30, 1976
why it was chosen. Whether this was a product of misunderstanding or a very liberal interpretation of the definition of Ujamaa is unclear. Nevertheless the name Ujamaa did hold some relevance to mission of the group. In addition to affirming their ties to the Black community outside of Wesleyan, Ujamaa represented collective responsibility. A Wesleyan magazine, *The Hermes*, ran an article on May 10, 1979 entitled "Ujamaa: United We Stand". This article contained a powerful mission statement by a member of Ujamaa.

Our education must, therefore, inculcate a sense of commitment to the total Black community, and help us to accept values appropriate to our kind of future, not those serving our colonial past. This means our education must emphasize cooperative progress, not individual advancement.

The article was filled with the refrain, "We must stand as a United Liberation Front." This is an example of the determination and focus that guided the actions of some of Wesleyan's Black students. Contrary to John Paton's assertion, there were still students at Wesleyan who intended to get an education but were no less inclined to voice their opinions about how they were being educated.

Former Dean of Admissions Jane Morrison helped to shed some light on the perceived change in admissions policies in the 1970s. She came to Wesleyan in 1974 after working in admissions at Yale University. She recalls that Wesleyan had worked diversity into its daily operations to the point where it was the norm, not an added expectation. "It was clear that Wesleyan felt institutional pride in the diversity of the student
body. [She] never felt pressured as Dean of Admissions to diversify. It was part of the fabric of the institution. Wesleyan hadn't realized what they were going to do with students once they arrived in the 1960s. Students were in the minority and Wesleyan hadn't planned well enough. But Wesleyan had learned a bit by the 1970s. Making certain that the commitment was strong."

In response to any assertions that Wesleyan was trying to screen its candidates for potential subversives Ms. Morrison simply stated that, "We never really set out to disregard students who had a potential to rebel. There was no dictum from the President's office. There was nothing to go on to judge a person at that level [high school]. We were looking for people who could use Wesleyan, well involved students. Times changed." Ms. Morrison offered an acute observation. At eighteen years old it is difficult to ascertain what a students political tendencies will be, especially through a college admissions process.

What was happening at Wesleyan can be described as a sincere adherence to affirmative action policies. The admissions office was trying to find qualified African-American students who could take advantage of what Wesleyan had to offer, not simply fill a quota. "Wesleyan stated that it should be guaranteeing equal opportunity to bright and promising people of color. This added a level of dignity to our program. People of color deserve an equal shot [at education]. This was the conceptual basis for our recruiting. We were pushing hard in people of color.
communities.” This statement serves as a challenge to the assumption that Wesleyan, and institutions like it, were simply allowing any Black person to attend, regardless of their scholastic abilities.

In the fall of 1973 affirmative action policies at Wesleyan came under attack by a white student named Allan Roy Hollander. He sent a letter to the Argus claiming that the university was racist towards whites for pulling twenty-three Blacks and no whites off of the admissions waiting list. Hollander then drew up a petition for a referendum on the issue. The referendum was defeated by a student vote of 309 to 232. This margin was slim enough to draw concern from the Ujamaa coordinating committee. The Ujamaa Co-chair that year, Jay Hoggard ’76 admitted then, "We believed he was acting as an individual and passed him off at first. But then we came to see the whole thing as a threat to our existence here at Wesleyan and to Black folks here forever." On November 5th Hoggard and other members of Ujamaa went to McConoughy Dining Hall to make students aware of the implicitly racist nature of Hollander's referendum. The presence of Ujamaa sparked dialogue around the issue throughout the dining hall. Several meetings were held between Ujamaa, CAAS and the administration to address the issue afterward.

Today Mr. Hoggard is an artist-in-residence at Wesleyan. In reflecting on the referendum Mr. Hoggard recalls not initially taking Hollander seriously because he “wasn’t in tune with the

---

3Wesleyan Argus Nov. 7, 1973

37
Wesleyan thinking.” The Wesleyan thinking being referred to is tolerance and open-mindedness toward non-mainstream cultures, modes of thought, and ways of living. This thinking is what made affirmative action “part of the fabric of the institution”, and this referendum did not reflect the standards set by Wesleyan for progressive thought.

Hoggard also recalled that while the dialogue on the referendum was taking place a Wesleyan group was attempting to invite a professor from Yale to speak at Wesleyan. This professor was noted for his work condemning African Americans as being scholastically inferior. His "findings" were an attempt to disavow the implementation of programs such as affirmative action. This action was also protested by Ujamaa and the speaker was subsequently not invited to visit. Hoggard also offered his insight on what he feels are misconceptions about the purpose of affirmative action, “Affirmative action was one method of rectifying inherent inequalities in certain institutional structures. It wasn’t an answer, it was a technique for gaining access to the pie. To think that in a thirty year period you will balance out 350 years of oppression is ludicrous.”

1975 marked the ten year anniversary of the “experiment” for Wesleyan. In this period the Afro-American Institute was changed into the Center for African American Studies. This move was made to give the center more academic stability and to formally institutionalize the African-American studies program at Wesleyan. Up to this point protests had centered around the
quality of life for the African-American community and an increased sensitivity to their needs. As the population exhibited some flux, the issue of stabilizing numbers came to the forefront. Stability meant a consistent enrollment of African-American students and maintenance of the established institutions, such as CAAS.

On May 9, 1975 one hundred fifty Black and Latino Students gathered in Downey House and later on the steps of Fisk Hall to read a list of demands and present a five-point position paper. Among their demands was 1) no decrease in the minimum percentage of minority students admitted to Wesleyan; 2) aid blind admissions (the policy that disregards financial need when considering an applicant to Wesleyan); 3) No further cuts in the CAAS budget; and 4) an increase in the number of Black and Latino faculty.

The first two demands dealt directly with sustaining the numbers of minority students on campus. The need-blind admissions policy was important because it did not remove minority applicants from the acceptance pool on the basis of their financial need. In essence it negated the need for the first demand because there has never been a shortage of qualified minority applicants to Wesleyan. It was the job of admissions to attract the talented to the campus. By removing money from the equation the admissions officers’ jobs were made that much easier.
The student unrest about financial aid may have been a little premature. In 1976 the structure of financial aid was generous compared to ten years later. In 1976 federal grants represented 80% and loans 20% of federal financial assistance to college students. But by 1984, federal grants and loan guarantees represented 50% each of federal financial aid. The amount of grants given was reduced while the amount of loans that had to be taken out more than doubled.\textsuperscript{4} In 1996 the total cost of attending Wesleyan is closing in on the $30,000 mark and the average grant award is $12,000.

The last two demands dealt directly with academic dissatisfaction with Wesleyan. Resources for African-Americans were low at Wesleyan. Faculty were needed as advisors and role models, and the Center for African-American Studies was one of the few manifestations of Black presence in the curriculum. Both of these resources feed into each other. Black faculty are attracted by a strong African-American studies program, and the more faculty that come, the stronger the program will become. But before faculty can be recruited something satisfactory has to be put in place.

Wesleyan has managed to attract quality African-American faculty over the years, the problem has became one of retention. The most recent loss to the CAAS staff was Professor of English and African-American Studies Anne DuCille to the University of California at San Diego in January 1996. In her departure

\textsuperscript{4}Nettles Ibid, p 3
Professor DuCille addressed the problem that Wesleyan, and many other schools, have with placing too many responsibilities on the few Black professors present. The limited number of Black professors available in Afam are in great demand to teach and advise students, often in two different departments. As well as serving as Chair of African-American studies Professor DuCille taught courses in both Afam and English that were often in high demand by students. She was being pulled in many different directions at once and could not provide the attention to each responsibility that they deserved.

African-American professors at Wesleyan, particularly in African-American studies, have long been devoting time to Black students outside of the classroom. Professor Jerome Long joined the religion department at Wesleyan in 1970. He was granted tenure in 1974, becoming one of the first African-Americans to be granted tenure at Wesleyan, and served as chairman of the AAI planning committee. In an interview conducted in the summer of 1995 he spoke briefly about his experiences upon arriving at Wesleyan and his interaction with Black students.

Long described the African-American students as being, “politically aware, socially active.” He believed that there were chapters of the Black Panthers on campus. This last claim may be somewhat inaccurate. In a lecture sponsored by Ujamaa on February 27, 1995 Dr. Muntu Imhotep discussed his involvement with a group of students who ran tutoring and breakfast programs for Black children in Middletown during the early 70s. Wesleyan
students had the children dressed in military garb, red berets for example, but were not officially associated with the Black Panther Party.

Long recounted his experiences interacting with Black students at Wesleyan upon his arrival: “I met with members of Ujamaa at least once a week. [They came to me with] SJB hearings, courses, complaints about Division III[the sciences]. The administrative staff was more of a resource.” As early as 1974 the importance of having an African-American faculty presence was demonstrated. Students went to Long with problems that had nothing to do with his department because there were no Black professors in the sciences to communicate with.

Long also shed some light on the motivations for changing the Afro-American Institute, which had been mostly staffed by lecturers outside of Wesleyan, into the Center for African American studies. “The AAI was urging the administration to hire more Black faculty. AAI was more of a social forum. The problem was how to establish an articulate African-American presence on campus.” The goal was to obtain more academic integrity for the AAI and this would require some degree of institutionalization.

The night before the Fisk Hall rally President of the University Colin G. Campbell, Dean of Admissions Jane Morrison, and Dean of the College Edgar Beckham attended an Ujamaa meeting at the Malcolm X House to discuss the demands to be presented. Nevertheless, the students still found it necessary to

---

5Interview with Jerome Long, August 1995
hold their protest the next day to make their points to the rest of the campus. This illustrates an effort on the part of the students to be diverse in their methods of protest. They were willing to sit down and talk with the administration when appropriate but did not abandon the traditional acts of protest.

The class of students introduced in the 1970s did not exhibit any lessened propensity for protest. They still retained much of the interest in establishing resources on African and African-American culture and were uncompromising in this resolve. Hoggard presented a simple, yet enlightening, explanation for this. “College students in the 70s were high school students in the late sixties so a lot of stuff was still fresh in their minds.” The recollection of the 60s fueled their motivation to demand the best education possible.

An Ujamaa poster from 1976 advertising Jubilee, a week long celebration of African culture, serves as a time capsule that reveals what was considered important to Black students of the period. The top of the poster read in bold letters “JUBILEE: The Movement Continues.” The graphic was of a Black woman with her hand raised holding a tambourine. Among the impressive line up of events listed were lectures by husband and wife team, Ossie Davis and Rubie Dee, and poet Haki Madhubuti. The series was an educational celebration of Black music, art, religion and thinking. Once again Black students had succumbed to Wesleyan’s request in ‘65 to educate, but this time it was on their own terms. Programs such as this were only possible because the Black
community had succeeded in establishing their niche. Resources were made available for Ujamaa to coordinate cultural events and fulfill their commitment to educating themselves and anyone who chose to take advantage of the program.

The movement was the desire to make change and the struggle that ensued to effect that change. The movement had to continue because Black students could not allow Wesleyan to grow complacent. The gains made in institutionalizing resources could be easily eroded and a great deal remained to be done. The movement had to continue because it would be a betrayal to the ideal of a movement to be stagnant. Progress was not an option, it was a mandate. The movement had to continue because Afam was not a department and Black students were still being told that they were tokens. The movement had to continue because Wesleyan had not yet divested its stock in companies that did business in South Africa. The movement had to continue because now it was part of Wesleyan, and Wesleyan could not move forward with its new composition, and be successful, without the movement to guide it through.
Chapter III
The 1980s: The Politics of Protest

Black students take politics a whole lot more seriously. It's something that's been instilled in us for a while. We've seen how the vote can make a difference through political movements in the past. The way to conduct things now is not to take over...but to take office.

- Marichal Monts 1985

This statement made by Marichal Monts '85 is indicative of the attitude most Blacks held toward student activism for most of the 1980s. It was a response to an assertion that Black students had managed to establish a strong presence in Wesleyan’s student government during this period. Traditional forms of protest such as sit-ins and rallies were still practiced, but an increased emphasis was being placed on utilizing student government to obtain political power for the growing and underrepresented student of color community. Political power meant that the administration gave students their ear instead of having to bargain for it after a sit-in.

The increased focus manifested itself in the number of students of color in leadership positions on campus. All of the senior class presidents between 1980 and 1985 were Black. All four officers of the class of 1982 were Black, and two Blacks and two Latinos held the four senior class offices (President, Vice President, Treasurer, and Secretary) in 1985. Furthermore,
Blacks, who comprised 9 percent of the 2,600 member student body, held nine of the 35 seats in the Wesleyan Student Assembly.¹ The senior class President position allowed the privilege of speaking at graduation and this was often used as a platform to express political views. For example Monts recalled that in his speech at graduation he urged for Wesleyan’s divestiture in South Africa and quipped that “That’s why I couldn’t get a job after graduation.”

A 1982 issue of the Norwich Bulletin contained an article entitled, “Gold Stars to Wesleyan: Blacks surveyed ‘comfortable’ there.” This article called attention to the Black Students Guide to Colleges praises of Wesleyan. “Tiny, selective, Wesleyan in Middletown is called ‘tops’ for Black students.” The Norwich Bulletin quoted Robert O’Meally, the director of the Center for African American Studies, attributing “the number of Blacks in decision-making roles at the university” as the reason for Wesleyan’s successful program.

All of this increased political activity on the part of Black students was inspired by racial incidents that took place at the onset of the decade. Overt racism manifested itself after a period of relative calm during the late seventies in the racial arena of campus interaction.

On November 21, 1980 Ujamaa hosted a noon-time “Rally Against Racism” in front of North College of approximately five hundred people in response to a letter containing racial slurs that

¹Thomas Frank, The Hartford Courant, 1985

45
was sent to the Malcolm X House. This came in the wake of similar occurrences at William’s, Harvard, and Cornell. Delegations of Black Students were present from Trinity, Brown, the University of Massachusetts in Boston, and Amherst.

Ujamaa had called for a moratorium on classes and circulated a petition that was signed by 1,853 students. The offensive letter was received by the director of the Center for African-American Studies, Jerome Long. The letter was an altered version of a welcoming letter from the Alpha Delta Phi fraternity to the incoming freshman class. The altered letter made derogatory references to both Blacks and Jews. The members of Alpha Delta Phi disclaimed any responsibility for the letter. Though the letter contained no explicit threats of action towards the members of the Malcolm X house, the hateful tone and content warranted a tightening of security at the residence. President Colin Campbell was quoted in the Hartford Courant as saying that the letter was a “sharp and sickening reminder that racism continues to be a serious problem.”

At the rally a member of Ujamaa, Michele Collison, articulated the Black community’s concerns about the letter. “It is not safe to dismiss this as part of a silly prank. If Wesleyan refuses to acknowledge the seriousness of what just happened, Black students will take steps to make it clear.”

Before the rally began, approximately 125 Black students

---

2Middletown Press, Nov. 22, 1980
3Gary Weiss, Hartford Courant, Saturday, November 22, 1980
arrived in front of North College in a silent march. They were greeted by sustained applause. As with past incidents, Ujamaa used this as an opportunity to address the structural problems within the university that may have allowed for racism to be tolerated. Furthermore, the rally catalyzed a lot of open discussion about racial politics on campus between students. A member of Ujamaa’s central committee, Kofi Appenteng, called for a more active role on part of the faculty. "We need more than reassurances, but changes. We need a student-faculty committee to work with the President in creating a strong minority presence on campus."4

Some of the white students in attendance used this an opportunity to criticize Blacks at Wesleyan for behavior that they felt fed into the tense racial climate on campus. "Malcolm X house has a nice sense of family to it, and it fills a need but it's propagating the problem." said Mary Harkins, a sophomore. "People say, 'I'm black, so I go to Malcolm X House.' You can't take advantage of Wesleyan's diversity that way." Jackie Graham, a Black freshman, had this response to that notion. "If you fall down and break your knee, you're not going to go crying to your neighbor. You go to your mother, who understands where you hurt."5 The fundamental flaw in Ms. Graham's thinking is that a very small percentage of the African-American population at Wesleyan resides at the Malcolm X house. The residence only

4Cornelius Foote, Jr., Wesleyan Argus, November 25, 1980
houses 32 students at full capacity, and there are upwards of 250 African-American students at Wesleyan at a given time.

A premier function of protest movements is to educate and communicate. Answers come about to questions that may not have been asked under different circumstances. An organized protest provides a forum for statements to be made that are not as effective under other circumstances. A rally or sit-in is an opportunity for those with grievances to present their views to an audience outside their peers, those who need to hear it most. Frustrations that find outlets at rallies in most cases have been echoing through the halls, lounges, and dorm rooms for months prior. Ms. Harkins probably had been feeling apprehension about Malcolm X house for some time, but either chose not to speak about it or did not find the appropriate forum. The same holds true for Ms. Graham. A rally is a free forum where it is appropriate, and probably urged, for her to vent her anger. Furthermore, neither of them would have been questioned by a school reporter about this issue under normal circumstances. The need to present anger is real. Loud voices, teary eyes, and raised fists do not find sympathetic ears at a meeting table in the Dean’s office. But they are as essential a form of communication as any memo.

In October of 1981 Ujamaa sponsored another rally against the presence of the Klu Klux Klan in Connecticut and the reappearance of racist posters on campus. Marichal Monts ‘85, who is now the pastor of his own church in Hartford and choir master
of Wesleyan’s Ebony Singers, recalls the event that sparked his activism. “Someone had put up a poster calling Black people niggers; it was devastating. That occurrence began my militancy. I was more self-centered prior to that incident. I was just in school to make money. This is when I took notice of the evil side of white people.”

Throughout the rest of his Wesleyan career Monts maintained his political involvement on campus through participation in Ujamaa, the Wesleyan Student Assembly, and several other committees. He utilized these groups as a means to address the racial tension on campus. “Racism was a really big issue (at Wesleyan). White people would call Black people niggers in the halls. There were incidents with some of the fraternities. I sat on the committee to hire Harry Kinne. I was called on to represent the African-American agenda.” Harry Kinne is currently Director of Wesleyan’s Office of Public Safety. This illustrates that on some level the administration wanted to address the concerns of African-American students and valued their input. The input of students of color in the hiring process will become major issue late in the decade when Wesleyan begins the search for a new president of the university.

When asked about the effectiveness of protest vs. political involvement Monts didn’t draw a line between aggressive protest activism and becoming active in the political structure. In response to the statement he made some eleven years ago he

---

6Interview with Marichal Monts, January 1996

49
acknowledged the marriage of more militant protest and more conservative methods, "These days taking office is taking over. If you have all of the political power you have really taken over."

Monts also attests to the presence of a strong militancy on campus that was born out of the collective experience of Blacks in the 70s. Sit-ins were practiced on campus as well as letter writing campaigns. He recalls that Black students would cut classes and pin demands to the door of the President’s office. He was sure to emphasize the fact that when students did cut class as a protest, they made sure that they were together being productive.

As far as the motivation for protest was concerned Monts observed that the tendency for activism was to be reactive more than proactive. As incidents occurred the Black community would mobilize in response. Contemporary Black Wesleyan students tend to lay heavy criticism on reactive protest. But one reality that has to be accepted is that student activists are students first. If it appears that everything is as it should be, no person who takes their education seriously is going to take out valuable time to look for problems. And it is also an unfortunate reality that problems do tend to present themselves on a fairly consistent basis, so students are almost always going to be reacting to some occurrence or phenomenon rather than addressing an unforeseen problem.

It is an enigma that in 1982 the Black Students' Guide to Colleges would rank Wesleyan as a comfortable place for Black students. In an April 24th, 1981 issue of the Argus Stephanie
Griffith interviewed some Black students on campus and they painted a very different picture from the description in the Black Students Guide. One possible reason for Wesleyan’s praises being sung, despite lowered numbers, is that relative to other institutions who were recruiting heavily for Black students, Wesleyan was a good choice.

In the *Argus* a Black freshman, Sonia Cole ’84, commented on Black student anxiety: “In elite colleges like this, the number of blacks is proportionately small, while the numbers on financial aid are high. As a result we lack the power of other groups. If the institution decides tomorrow that they don’t need blacks anymore, we can’t do anything about it.”

Cole articulates the never ending concerns of Black students at Wesleyan that Ms. Griffith poignantly chose to emphasize in the article: “1) economic threat of loss of aid-blind admissions 2) political considerations such as the loss of Black faculty 3) cultural threats like the loss of African drumming as a class, and 4) the social phenomenon of increasing alienation and polarization between racial groups.” Cole goes on to echo the sentiments of her Vanguard predecessor, Randy Miller, in regards to her education of her white peers. “My educating white people to what I’m about and what I’m doing enriches them but doesn’t in anyway benefit me.”

After the rally, workshops were held to continue the discussion of issues raised at the gathering. This is a standard conclusion to speak outs at Wesleyan, the effectiveness of which is
often questioned. In response to the effectiveness of the post rally workshops in 1980, Glen Ligon stated that, “Workshops too often serve to divert the attention from the real issues. The workshop discussions after the rallies got polarized into why Blacks weren’t incorporating more whites into their struggles.” The issue of biracial participation in protest has been in existence since the movement to abolish slavery. In the early stages of his civil rights career Malcolm X questioned the sincerity of whites who participated in demonstrations. But as did Malcolm, Black students at Wesleyan would come to understand the importance of cooperation between themselves and members of other races.

Coalition building is a central issue throughout the history of Black politics. The appearance of Black mayors in the United States is due in large part to the effectiveness of biracial coalitions. From Maynard Jackson to Andrew Young, Black political machines that could establish a strong white constituency proved to be the most successful. At Wesleyan the decision to co-organize was a consistent point of debate. This issue came to a head during the campus struggle for University divestment in companies that did business in South Africa.

Student Protests urging the University to divest in South African companies went on for more than a decade. The leading voice in the divestment protest at Wesleyan was the South African Action Group. The SAAG was predominantly made up of white Wesleyan students. Throughout the years there seemed to

7Stephanie Griffith, Wesleyan Argus, April 24th, 1981
have been a noticeable effort on the part of Ujamaa to present itself as being distinct from the SAAG in terms of protest action related to divestment. It is this decision, conscious or not, to separate themselves from the SAAG that may have catalyzed accusations that Black students at Wesleyan did not care about the plight of their brethren in South Africa.

In 1986 the Ujamaa familyhood took measures to correct both the presumption that they did not want to work with SAAG and that they did not care about Black South Africans.

On January 30th the membership of Ujamaa sent a letter to the Wesleyan Board of Trustees expressing the concerns of the black community over the upcoming decision about divestment to be made by the board. The memo stated that the board should push for total divestment. “If an immediate divestment is not possible, then we support the WSA’s [Wesleyan Student Assembly] plans for divestment, which would ultimately lead to our disassociation with South Africa.”

The tone of the memo was assertive rather than aggressive. Ujamaa took the time to acknowledge the University’s financial concerns, but appealed to its sense of morality to supersede that. “We understand that your decision is a very difficult one. We also understand that you must protect our endowment. After all, it was only a few years ago that Wesleyan experienced severe financial difficulties. But, we ask you to consider our suggestion, and the suggestions of other student

---

8 Memo from the Ujamaa Family hood to the Wesleyan Board of Trustees. January 30, 1986
groups on campus.”\textsuperscript{9} The emphasis was not placed on who was right but on what was the right thing to do.

In regards to the belief that Black students did not care about the divestment protest, the Ujamaa familyhood offered this defense, “We have always known in our hearts that total divestment was the only solution. We wanted to become thoroughly educated on the issue before attempting any forms of protest. Now that we are well versed on this issue, not only do we believe with our hearts that total divestment is important, we finally understand with our minds. All protests that Ujamaa has been involved with, has come from individuals and not as a group.”\textsuperscript{10} This last statement is critical because it addresses the function of Ujamaa as a political entity within the context of the Wesleyan campus. By definition, all Black students at Wesleyan are considered to be part of Ujamaa’s membership. This memo acknowledges the participation of individual members in past protests, but presents this as the beginning of a collective action on the part of Black students. On Saturday February 1st, 1986 Ujamaa, along with the South African Action Group, followed up on the memo and held an anti-apartheid protest outside of the Wesleyan Board of Trustees meeting presenting a united front on the issue of university divestment.

\* \* \* \* \* \* \* \* 

\textsuperscript{9}ibid
\textsuperscript{10}ibid
Protest by Black students at Wesleyan was not always limited to students enrolled at Wesleyan. As demonstrated in the Fisk Hall takeover, local residents of Middletown occasionally took part in on-campus protest. Community group leaders and high school students establish strong relationships with Black students on campus. Contacts are usually made through community service groups, churches, and tutorial programs. In times of distress both groups call on this established network for support and guidance.

In March of 1987 approximately 300 high school students from New England gathered in the Science Center to protest cuts in federal spending for TRIO educational opportunity programs. National TRIO programs include Upward Bound, Talent Search, Student Support Services, and Educational Opportunity Centers. These programs work with educationally and economically disadvantaged high school students to help them attend college. “Federal cutbacks in these programs threaten to eliminate funding for 330,00 of 500,00 students participating in these programs, according to Peter Budryk, director of Wesleyan’s Upward Bound program.”

Wesleyan is a host to its own branch of the Upward Bound Program which offers after school assistance, SAT prep, and a summer residency program where students take classes. Among the rally speakers were former mayor of Middletown, Sebastian J. Garafalo, state Commissioner of Higher Education, Norma F. Glasgow, and Wesleyan professor Robert Wood. Professor Wood

12ibid, Burnham
served as a cabinet member for the President responsible for enacting the TRIO programs, Lyndon B. Johnson. In his remarks Wood quoted the former President: "Until every boy and girl born in this land can stand on level and equal ground, our job will not be done."

The rally was followed by a march downtown to mail letters opposing cutbacks in funding for educational opportunity. Approximately 1,000 letters were hand delivered to the office of Rep. Samuel Gedjenson, D-Conn. and Rep. Bruce Morrison, D-Conn. Both pledged their support of the programs.

Wesleyan students also made their contributions to the day's events. Following the speakers Ian Friday, Delia Burns, and Waldo Williams performed excerpts from "An American Story." Williams portrayed Malcolm X in the scene and urged the audience to "See for yourselves, learn for yourselves, and think for yourselves. Only then can you come to an intelligent decision for yourselves."

Friday and Burns spoke about racism and said that encouraging education was a means to overcome the "carefully designed program of miseducation" caused by "ignorance and greed."13

This day of protest is exemplary of Lewis Feuer's statements on student protest that claim "students have a tremendous need to offer themselves in a self-sacrificial way, to seek out an exploited group on whose behalf their sacrifices will be made."

---

13ibid, Burnham

56
Helping high school students who they can identify with and helping them to achieve their level of success is one way Black students choose to give back. Many African-American collegians act under the maxim, "With privilege comes responsibility."

In the period between 1987 and 1990 Ujamaa continued to foster its strong political presence. The familyhood had a legacy of tenacious activism behind it that pushed the constituency to action. On collective and individual fronts, members of Ujamaa regularly challenged inadequacies in the daily operations of the university. The actions that Ujamaa members took during this period would have a profound effect on the future of the organization and the university.

In the 1987-88 academic year Wesleyan was mobilizing to find itself a new President. A great deal of the decision making power would be in the hands of the Presidential Search Committee. Members of Ujamaa organized to ensure that there would be qualified representation of students of color on that committee.

In January of 1988 about forty members of the black community attended a meeting of the Wesleyan Student Assembly, over twice the number of WSA representatives at the meeting. The students went to express their dissatisfaction with the slate ratified at a previous WSA meeting, which did not contain a member of the minority community, and to support the
candidacy of WSA member Alford Young '88, who was also co-chairperson of Ujamaa. Many of the blacks who came to support Young at the meeting were active members of Ujamaa.

WSA Coordinator Seth Kaplan '89 convened the special meeting of the WSA after five members of the WSA signed a petition requesting the meeting. WSA members Kaplan, Young, William Johnson '88, Laurie Harrison '90, and Alan Smith '90 signed the petition, initiated by Smith. Except for Kaplan, all the signatories of the petition were members of Ujamaa, yet the chairpersons of Ujamaa denied Ujamaa sponsorship of the petition.

Carla O’Conner '88, a member of Ujamaa, addressed the WSA concerning the absence of minority representation on the slate. "There is not a single argument, explanation, or justification," she said "that might be rendered that would not prove to be an insult to our intelligence as to why a search committee that is absent of minority representation was approved by the WSA."15

The action taken by these members of Ujamaa raised some crucial questions about group politics. If members of a particular group organized around an issue, were they automatically acting on behalf of their organization? If so many members of Ujamaa were involved in writing the petition, why did Ujamaa not formally sponsor it? The answer is that the issue was not restricted to Ujamaa, or Black students. The supporters of the petition wanted qualified student of color representation on the

---

14Joel Brown, Wesleyan Argus January 26, 1988

15ibid, Brown
committee. Eric Greene, the man whom Al Young was to replace, was a person of color but it was felt that he could not represent the concerns of the people of color on campus. Joy Challenger '90, a WSA and Ujamaa member, said, "The real truth of the matter is that blacks on this campus and also the majority of the minority community...find Al a better representative."\(^{16}\)

In denying Ujamaa sponsorship, the protesters prevented the issue from being misunderstood as a hostile takeover of the WSA by Ujamaa. The protesters sincerely felt that Young would not just have been the ideal Black representative, he would have been the ideal representative.

Financial cutbacks in the government are a source of anxiety for just about every American citizen. Concern over financial policies in higher education are never ending because nothing, especially money, is ever consistent on a year-to-year basis. But protest concerning financial aid did not always address the government's responsibility to the students. The University has also consistently come under scrutiny for how it chooses to deal with its financial aid recipients.

In March of 1988 the Ujamaa board sent a memo to Financial aid Director Edwin Below, Admissions Director Karl Furstenberg, and Treasurer Robert Taylor protesting systemic problems within the Financial Aid office. This memo came in the wake of a proposed increase in tuition and fees. The memo

\(^{16}\)ibid Brown
explained what they felt were three major problems with the structure of the financial aid office that fed student anxiety:

1) The financial aid office does not effectively communicate to students how information is processed to determine family and student responsibility;
2) The impersonal manner in which the Financial Aid Office interacts with students (e.g. lack of a closed office setting for preliminary discussions of personal financial matters and limited office hours) prevents students from comfortably approaching the office to address their concerns;
3) The Financial Aid Office has not issued a comprehensive statement regarding the new federal tax laws and their effect on student summer earnings and loan acquisitions.\(^{17}\)

Emphasis was placed on the stress that was induced by having to cope with financial situations and the negative impact this had on a student's ability to perform academically.

One of the targets of the protest, Karl Furstenberg, said that he perceived the students' sentiment as "a convergence of frustration and some [financial] hardship." He was also quoted as saying that students may be frustrated from an overall "lack of input into the finances of the institution."\(^{18}\)

Ujamaa Co-Chair Alford Young '88 expressed concern with structural rather than personnel problems. In an interview with the Argus he explained that students conduct much of their business through a glass reception window in the waiting room.

\(^{17}\)Memo from the Ujamaa Familyhood to the Financial Aid office. March 2, 1988
\(^{18}\)Joel Brown, Wesleyan Argus March 1988
Students are forced to divulge “an awful lot of information that [they] would like to talk about behind closed doors”\(^{19}\)

A key fact about this protest is that it was targeted at an area completely within Wesleyan’s control. As mentioned in the previous chapter, federal financial aid was on the decline in the mid-eighties. But the concerns expressed in these demands dealt specifically with the structure of the Wesleyan financial aid office.

Ujamaa representatives personally delivered a copy of this list of grievances to North College. The Board of Trustees was scheduled to vote on the tuition increase in three days. The group of students from Ujamaa had to present their demands to secretaries and associate deans because the three administrators were out to lunch when they arrived. The protesters finished delivering their letters at about 12:30 pm. With their task completed they left North College.

Though today the arrangement during registration still allows very little privacy, the set-up in the financial aid office is very different. The financial aid personnel have their own offices and individual appointments can be made to discuss your personal finances behind closed doors.

\[\text{* * * * * * * * * *}
\]

\(^{19}\text{ibid}\)
The 1989-1990 academic year was another period of transition for Wesleyan. William Chace began working as the new President of Wesleyan University on October 26, 1988, a year before his actual inauguration. African-American students made a concerted effort to make the new President aware of the myriad of problems that had been festering unchecked in years leading up to his arrival. Students wanted to establish lines of communication with the President from the onset. A series of meetings was held between President Chace and Ujamaa during the fall of 1988 and early in the spring of '89 semester to address campus racism, financial aid policies, hiring more Black professors in math, science, and English, and selling all stock the university holds in firms doing business in South Africa. Avis P. Terell '90, Co-chair of Ujamaa that year, is quoted saying that "the lines of communication have been broadened and that's the first step to everything."

A silent demonstration was held outside the President's South College office while one of the meetings began. About 40 students stood outside and held hands in a circle to show their support for Ujamaa and to express their disagreement with the decision to deny tenure to Jerry Watts, a popular African-American professor.

This meeting came in the wake of Ujamaa's commemoration of the twentieth anniversary of the Fisk Hall takeover on Tuesday February 21, 1989. Approximately one hundred people

gathered on the steps of Fisk Hall after marching from Malcolm X House around the rest of campus. Here the member of Ujamaa took the opportunity to read aloud the list of demands that they submitted to President Chace's office on January 20. The presentation of these demands led to the meetings held in March. Ujamaa co-chair, Avis Terrel expressed some enthusiasm, "From what I've heard, he's [President Chace] really thinking about the letter. We have to hope for the best." 22

Unfortunately, this feeling of goodwill did not last. Members of the African-American community would come to question the sincerity of President Chace in addressing their concerns. Satisfactory progress was not being made and patience was growing thin. By the end of the 88-89 school year President Chace had managed to make more than a few students angry.

During the inauguration ceremonies of President Chace in 1989 six African-American students dressed in black walked to the front of the podium where Chace was giving his inaugural address and stood with their fists raised in the air for the duration of the ceremony, protesting racism and insensitivity on campus. 23 This was partially in response to the failed attempts during the 1988-89 school year to address issues of campus dissatisfaction. But the startling reality was that the majority of demonstrators were freshman who had only been at Wesleyan for little more than a month. Matthew Nelson '93, one of the participants, recollected the different reasons for his involvement. "On one

---

22 ibid
23 Booth, Cathy *Unity Day: Silencing of Conflict* December 1, 1992
occasion we had flash lights shone in our faces by Public Safety officers asking us if we had identification. We were upset because Afam was a program, not a department. We didn’t care for any of that and we wanted action.”

It does not take long for students to pin-point the shortcomings of an institution, and in this case, it didn’t take long for them to react.

The 1980s came to a close with many issues from the start of the decade still unresolved. Wesleyan had yet to divest in South Africa and racial tensions on campus were as high, if not higher, than in 1980. The Black leadership was strong and outspoken, but a great amount of work still had to be done. The incoming frosh class had been exposed to the shanty town protests in the spring of ‘89 as visiting prefrosh and had a working knowledge of Wesleyan’s tendency for protest. Fueled by this knowledge and their own dissatisfaction, the 90’s generation of Black students were prepared to make a headlong dive into the new decade.

---

24 Interview with Matthew Nelson, February 1996
Chapter IV
The 1990s: The Struggle Continues

God of our weary years
God of our silent tears
Thou who has brought us thus far on the way
Thou who has by thy might, led us into the light
Keep us forever in the path we pray....

Negro National Anthem  James Weldon Johnson,

The protest movements of the 1990s were primarily about gaining respect for the rights of African-American students and people of color as a whole. All of the protests to date in this decade confront some form of overt racism, as opposed to covert institutional racism. The university eventually divested its interest in South Africa and the financial aid office has made sincere efforts to work closely with students on that issue. The number of tenure track African-American faculty on staff has steadily increased in the 1990s from 3.4 percent in 1990 to 5.3 percent in 1995. The percentage of African-American adjunct faculty has risen from 3.1 percent in 1990 to 9.4 percent in 1995.1 Outside of some expected flux, the student of color population numbers are relatively steady.

This decade did suffer from a very shaky start. The campus was still reeling from the onslaught of the late 80s. The events of Spring 1990 at Wesleyan have earned themselves a separate file

---

1 Memo from Billy Weitz, Associate Provost, to Ad Hoc Committee on Recruitment and Retention of Faculty of Color: November 17, 1994.
in the university's special records and archives. The media coverage of campus events was, to say the least, extensive. A Wesleyan student, Kathy Booth '92 has devoted an essay to the events of that semester alone. All of the events of Spring '90 were a result of student tension that had been growing since the fall of 1988, when President William M. Chace began his tenure.

There was little hesitation in the hearts of Black students as they opened the decade with a sit-in on January 26, 1990. Just several days after returning from Christmas break approximately fifty Black students held a sit-in at North College as a "last peaceful protest". Among other unresolved issues addressed that day, students were growing fearful of potentially losing the need blind-admissions policy. According to Booth an attempt to present demands at a private board meeting failed and students threatened to burn new application files.

This protest was a clear manifestation of student frustration. Occupation of administrative buildings was not something done on a whim, neither was threatening to destroy administrative records. It took planning and commitment on the part of the participants. Unfortunately, the only concessions granted that day were promises of yet more meetings with the President.

This particular protest came and went, as had the others, but was given even more significance by the event that would occur later in that semester. On April 7, 1990 President Chace's office was firebombed. Given the labeling of the January protest
as "the last peaceful protest", rumors spread throughout the student body that Ujamaa was behind the bombing. Though investigators of the bombing, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms, attempted to implicate the participants in the January protest, President Chace did not link the bombing to any student group. "We regard this as a wholly criminal act. I associate it with no existing or known political campaign or group or cause on this campus." 2 Despite this statement by President Chace there were still members of the Wesleyan community who insisted upon Ujamaa's guilt in the firebombing. The board retaliated with this angry statement in the Argus of April 13, 1990:

We the members of Ujamaa are appalled and outraged at the unsubstantiated assumptions isolating the Black community, insinuating its connection with the firebombing of President Chace's office on April 7, 1990. The atmosphere surrounding the WSA's proposed resolution denouncing "violent protests," and the candle light vigil against "violent protest" has all but implicated Ujamaa. Also, biased media coverage and prejudiced statements made by members of the Wesleyan community indicate suspicions towards the Black Community. Furthermore, the organization of Ujamaa has had no part in the firebombing of President Chace's office and resents any implications otherwise. 3

One student, Kofi Taha, was charged with the firebombing by investigators and was subsequently placed on trial. As a result of this Taha was expelled from Wesleyan by the Student Judiciary Board. Taha was found not guilty in a court of law in 1993.

The methods of investigation implemented by the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms solicited a strong outcry from the

---

2 Middletown Press, April 10, 1990
3 Wesleyan Argus April 13, 1990

67
Black community, both at Wesleyan and in Middletown. Black students filed complaints with the administration for not monitoring police investigations. They suffered from surprise visits in their rooms by police officers seeking information. Matthew Nelson '93 recalls being brought down to the Middletown Police station for questioning in the middle of the night by members of the Federal Bureau of Investigation. Students solicited support from the Middletown chapter of the NAACP and they advised the students on their civil rights in regards to police procedure.

Student response to the bombing itself was ambiguous. Some statements made by students didn't wholly denounce or advocate the bombing. It seemed that most would not condone the violence but could empathize with the anger behind the act. Julius Ford '90, one of the participants in the January protest, made this comment to the Argus, "The sad thing is that whoever it was would come to this level. One would hope that in 1990 we could get beyond terrorist acts to get our point across in America, but apparently that's not the case." 4

The firebombing did more damage to the racial climate on campus than it did to President Chace's office. Black students were simultaneously being victimized while suffering accusations of being terrorists. But before the university could even begin to put the pieces back together another act of vandalism would send shock waves through the campus. On May 5, 1990 Malcolm X

4Wesleyan Argus April 8, 1990
House basement was defaced with racist graffiti. This incident, along with the harassment that was endured during the investigation of the firebombing, only brought tension to a fever pitch.

On the night that the graffiti was found students, faculty, and administrators held a vigil at Malcolm X House in protest. Two days later a forum was held to discuss the graffiti. Here the students vented their frustrations to President Chace about the racial incidents of the last few months. The students led a march that ended in a speak-out that drew several hundred students. A moratorium was held on classes for a series of programs that Cathy Booth outlines in her essay, *Unity Day: Silencing of Conflict*. In addition to the programs, Ujamaa initiated a letter writing campaign to the news media to inform them of the vandalism at Malcolm X, Wesleyan's investment in South Africa, and the racist investigation proceedings in the aftermath of the firebombing.\(^5\)

At this same time eleven students, some of whom were not Black, began a hunger strike in the basement of South College.\(^6\) Julius Ford, Kofi Taha, Miriam Schacht, David Payne, Laurie Harrison, Shawn Difioire, and Philippa Rizopulos were among the group. The strike went on for eight days and ended on May 15 when administrators agreed to meet with student leaders.

The only thing that saved the emotionally drained Wesleyan community was the fast-approaching end to the school year. The

---

\(^5\)Ujamaa memo May 7, 1990
\(^6\)Wesleyan *Argus*, April 17, 1990

69
tension had far too much momentum to be quelled, so it was allowed to burn itself out.

* * * * * *

"If you cannot understand my silence you will not understand my words."
- Jesus Christ

"A riot is the language of the unheard"
-Martin Luther King, Jr.

On April 7, 1992 America sat patiently for the verdict in one of the most widely publicized cases of police brutality in history, which came to be known as the Rodney King trial. On March 3, 1991 a highway chase of King by the LAPD ended with the brutal beating and arrest of Rodney King. This title was indeed a misnomer because Rodney King was not the person on trial. King was the victim. The four police officers video taped beating him mercilessly were on trial.

With the taping of the beating stained in the minds of almost every America within reach of a television, it was a shock to the African-American community when on April 7, 1992 the Simi Valley jury acquitted the four officers. Questions arose about the fairness of the trial; why was the trial moved to Simi Valley, a white suburb of California with a large population of police officers, when the crime took place in Los Angeles? Why wasn’t Rodney King called to the stand to testify? Why did a seemingly open and shut trial go on for so long?

The response to the verdict was tragic. Riots (or Rebellions depending on which end of the political spectrum you are on)
erupted all over the country. The most destructive and highly televised disturbances took place in Los Angeles.

Anger and resentment were the dominant feelings towards the verdict in the Black community nationwide, and Wesleyan University was no exception. But the Black community here took a different approach to venting their anger about the trial.

A silent demonstration was orchestrated to disrupt the year-end celebration on campus, Spring Fling. This day of relaxation is traditionally held immediately after the last day of classes. Several groups and bands are booked and hundreds of students converge on Foss Hill to soak up sun (weather permitting), listen to music, and forget about work. The demonstrators knew that this would be the one place where they could get most of the school's attention.

A small group of Black, Latino, and Asian students gathered in the basement of Malcolm X House dressed in black. Knowledge of the protest was intentionally spread only by word of mouth. The small group formed a human chain holding hands and silently began their march around campus. Beginning at the front of Malcolm X house, they went down Washington street and made their way to Fisk Hall. They went through the building and people joined the chain as they moved. None of the original members explained why they were doing what they were doing. The demonstrators maintained complete silence throughout the protest.

---

7Interview with Kenneth Clark '95, March 1996
The group proceeded to North College, the Campus Center, Olin Library, and Judd Hall. By this time the chain had grown exponentially. The human chain was now large enough to wrap itself around Foss Hill beginning and ending at the stage where the Red Hot Chili Peppers were in the middle of a number. "The guy from the Red Hot Chili Peppers was like 'I know that you guys are demonstrating and I'm all for it, but, ah, we're tryin to do a show.' We ignored him and went on with what we had to do." 8

One student broke away from the crowd and approached the microphone. This person proceeded to silently thump the microphone continuously for sixty seconds. When they had finished all that was said was "A defenseless man was hit this many times in one minute. Not guilty." There was a moment of silence and the chain of students departed as quietly as they had arrived and convened back at the Malcolm X house. Back at the house one of the organizers said "Those of you who know why you're here, please stay. If you have no idea why you're here, please leave." The remaining students spent the rest of the afternoon discussing their encounters with racism and their frustration with the verdict. The verdict in the trial essentially meant that they were not safe from anyone in America. All of the evidence in the world could not secure justice for the oppressed.

This demonstration addressed the hurt that Blacks, and other oppressed people in America, feel at being mistreated and being the sole heirs to an indescribable anger. There are no

8ibid, Clark.
words to describe the fear, the frustration, and sense of betrayal that occurrences like the beating of Rodney King evoke. The protesters rebuked those who had didn’t know what the protest was about because their presence was an insult. They did not want to have to tell anyone about their pain any more. They did not want to tell them about the numerous beatings by police that are not video taped. At this point, if you did not know it or did not feel it, you weren’t going to ever understand it.

The protest was conducted in complete silence because cries of injustice have often fallen on deaf ears. They sought to disturb the peace because the peace disturbed them. The vision of carefree apathy that Spring Fling embodies is what needed to be disrupted. The most vociferous event of the year could only be interrupted with a deafening silence.

* * * * * * *

"Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere"

Martin Luther King, Jr.

In the fall of 1994 the members of the Black and Latino Brotherhood chose to come to the defense of two victims of racial aggression who were neither Black or Latino. On homecoming weekend a fight took place between two pledges of the Psi Upsilon Fraternity and party-goers at the Delta Kappa Epsilon Fraternity House. The two pledges, of Middle Eastern ethnicity, gave a sketchy account of a fight between themselves and a drunken party attender. At the center of the incident was the racial epithet that was used in referring to the pledges. The reference to
“Sand Niggers” by one of the men involved in the fight brought the attention of certain members of the Black and Latino Brotherhood.

The details of the incident were suppressed by the Office of Public Safety due to impending Student Judiciary Board hearings. But as far as the BLB was concerned they had heard enough. This incident came in the wake of other suspicious comments rumored to have come out of the DKE residence. With the two young men silenced by Public Safety the members of the BLB decided that confronting DKE was their only course of action.

In a meeting of the general body one Thursday night it was decided that a meeting between DKE and the BLB would be arranged and certain unanswered questions would be asked. Certain members were agitated and did not want to wait for a response from DKE, potentially dragging the situation out longer. Former BLB co-chair Javaid Khan ‘96 recalled that night in an interview. “The meeting in Nicholson lounge was really charged. A lot of the brothers in the room facetiously said that we should take over DKE’s house and turn it into BLB house. We didn’t know that DKE owned their property. There were a lot of questions about DKE’s independence in that room.”

The members of the BLB were concerned about the autonomy that DKE, and other fraternities with houses on campus, seemed to enjoy. The feeling in the room was that the members of DKE felt that they were somehow above the law of Wesleyan and it was the responsibility

---

9Interview with Javaid Khan, March 1996
74
of the BLB not to let the incident get swept under the rug. The board of Ujamaa decided not to act on this particular occasion because they felt that there was insufficient evidence to draw any conclusions.

It was decided that on that night the members in attendance would go to the DKE house, express their concerns, and arrange the meeting all at once. The men in the room were particularly sensitive about the criticism that Black and Latino on campus were apathetic and unwilling to act. Constant comparisons by alumni to days of old when Wesleyan was “active” rang in their heads as they pressed each other to motivate. Khan had this to say about the motivations of the men: “I remember that it was cold, but everyone was fired up to do something. We needed to do something right now. Seniors were upset because things like this were always being swept under the rug.”

The first step was to go to the Office of Public Safety and attempt to obtain an accurate account of what happened from them. But Public Safety could not divulge any information about the case. Public safety suggested an officer escort the group to DKE and the co-chairs agreed to show that they had not ill intentions.

While the two co-chairs, Javaid Khan ‘96 and Chris Avery ‘96, went downstairs into the Public Safety office, the remaining members stood in a line outside facing the building until they returned. After about twenty-five minutes Khan and Avery returned with a representative from Public Safety. The officer
took notice of the line of men and informed them that he would provide an escort and the dean of student life, Denise Darrigrand, was also notified.

Upon arrival at the DKE house the group once again positioned themselves across the street, but in clear view of any occupants. Javaid Khan and Chris Avery went to the front door requested to speak to the President of the house. Members sat on the grass or stood patiently for their representatives to be acknowledged. When the door opened the member of DKE first took notice of the group across the street and then the men standing in front of him. He invited them in and they met for about twenty minutes. Khan provided a brief summary of the meeting. "We asked for the President of DKE. We sat and met with him and three other members. We asked questions, not making accusations, you know. They put the blame on an ex-DKE member. They denied hearing racial slurs. We weren't sure what to believe. So we arranged a meeting so people could hear first hand for themselves what was said."

On the outside the BLB members were met by Dean Darrigrand and the Public Safety escort. Passing motorists slowed to observe the men, but there was little to observe. They stood talking quietly amongst themselves allowing their presence to speak for itself.

What is interesting about the BLB's tactics is that they were aware of the public perception of Black and Latino men as aggressive and strategically manipulated it. They knew that their
reasonably large gathering, at night, visibly agitated, could evoke images of a “mob” turning the focus onto them and placing DKE on the defensive. This reasoning guided their decision to involve Public Safety. But in order to ensure that they would be taken seriously they maintained a solemn collective posture. They could have only sent the two representatives to DKE to schedule the meeting but they knew that the presence of the group would let them know that they meant business.

The ensuing meeting the following week did not present any new or relevant information. The members of DKE reiterated for the collective what they told Khan and Avery. This response did not come as a surprise to the members of the BLB but they still were not satisfied with the lack of information surrounding the case. All involved parties were maintaining silence. The members of the BLB resolved that until some clear answers were offered about the events of that night they would boycott the Stonehaven cafe, an eatery housed in the basement of the DKE Fraternity house, though not owned by DKE. Many students of color were patronizing the establishment and a boycott would send a message that they were not satisfied with what was being allowed to happen on their premises.

In a matter of days word of the boycott spread and their was a noticeable drop in attendance at the Stonehaven Cafe. Eventually the Stonehaven cafe did close down later that semester. Whether this can be attributed to the boycott is unclear. General patronage had fallen off and this was attributed
by most to poor management. Nevertheless, the BLB sent a message to the members of DKE that they were not going to tolerate racial aggression in any form towards any person.

* * * * * * *

In the Spring of 1995 allegations of racist comments surfaced on campus once again. Assistant Men’s Basketball coach, Ed Quick, was overheard making derogatory comments about African-American women by a member of the women’s basketball team on a bus returning from a tournament. One of the White members of the men’s team attested to having a Black girlfriend. Quick made lude sexual comments related to her ethnicity that were overheard by a Black member of the women’s team, Cynthia Brown ’95. Upon return to campus Brown reported what she heard to members of the Black community and soon the entire campus caught wind of it. Two former co-chairs of Ujamaa, Donaldine Temple ’95 and Patricia Charlemagne ’95, led the campaign to inform the campus of what had taken place and what measures should be taken. They created leaflets explaining what happened and hung them up all over campus. Ujamaa Co-chair Jerry Barrow ’96, and Ujamaa Treasurer Christina Sharpe ’96 arranged meetings with the girlfriend of the Basketball player to discuss the situation.

This incident confirmed what many Black students thought was a pervading racism in the athletic department. For years Black men complained of encountering covert racism in the men’s Basketball program. They were either overlooked for the squad
or, once on the squad, were not given any playing time. This phenomenon is alluded to in an article on Wesleyan trustee, Ted Shaw ’76, in the alumni magazine. “Shaw also became one of the first black students to play varsity basketball after a hiatus of several years during which black athletes avoided the team.”¹⁰

After a meeting between heads of student of color groups on campus and members of the dean’s office, a meeting was subsequently scheduled with the head of the athletic department, John Biddiscomb. The main points of concern at the meeting were with the protocol followed by the members of the athletic department and why Ed Quick was not fired immediately after he admitted making the comments. Black students felt that undue leniency was being offered in this case, given the seriousness of the situation, and that there was intentional hesitancy on the part of the in bringing the events to the attention of the student body. Biddiscomb insisted that there weren’t any attempts to cover up what had happened and that proper procedure had been followed. In subsequent days, Ed Quick handed in his resignation and the issue was laid to rest. Students had voiced their concerns and the offending person was no longer in the employ of the university. Though some students were angered at the fact that this would not become part of his job record, due to his resigning as opposed to being fired, there was little left to do but go on with their lives.

* * * * * * * *

W.E.B. Dubois was prophetic when he acknowledged that race would be at the center of many of America’s problems in the twentieth century. All of the protests by Black students in the 1990s at Wesleyan to date have centered around some form of racial injustice. Racism is more covert now than thirty years ago, so when it manifests itself overtly, it is that much more painful. The incident with Edward Quick only served as a reminder of the continued existence of racism and quell the hope that progress is actually being made in society.

At the beginning of the 1995-96 school year the incidents of the past spring were a mere memory. The major voices in the spring protest had graduated and the girlfriend of the basketball player seemed all too glad to go on with her life. The head men’s basketball coach, Herb Kenny, who had been suspected of being racist by Black athletes for many years had retired, and two African-Americans were hired as coaches in track and football. The campus was eagerly awaiting the inauguration of the new President, Douglas Bennet, whose presence seemed to breath new life into Wesleyan and brought the much needed stability that had been lacking since the departure of William Chace over a year ago. The campus was by no means a Utopia, but there was a pervading feeling of optimism. But this feeling would soon come to pass.

On October 31, 1995 at approximately 1:15 am four African-American students, Umibem Niilampti ‘99, Bishara Wilson ‘98, Tarik Holder ‘98, and Markell Parker ‘98 were unlawfully handcuffed and detained by Middletown Police officer, David
Godwin, after repeatedly refusing requests to show identification to the officer.\footnote{Wesleyan Argus, Friday Nov. 3, 1995} The four men were walking in the vicinity of Mocon and the Foss 9 dormitory when officer Godwin stopped them and ordered them to present IDs to verify that they were students at Wesleyan. The students knew that they were not obligated to do so and refused. The officer had no probable cause but persisted with his request.

Officer Godwin radioed for backup and a police dispatcher radioed Wesleyan Public Safety to go to the scene as well. Two more Middletown Police officers confronted the students at Mocon Circle and repeated the request for ID. The four students identified themselves as Wesleyan students, showed their keys, and pointed their dorm out to the police officers. Public Safety officers arrived and repeated the request for ID. A Wesleyan SafetyShuttle bus arrived and the driver, Bob Dudley, told the officers that he knew the students from riding the shuttle, but then went on his way. The Police officers handcuffed the students, did not read them their rights or tell them why they were being detained, and brought them down to the police station. They were not placed under arrest, but had to suffer the indignities of someone who had been. A person who is detained, but not arrested is technically free to leave the situation at any time. Persons under arrest are supposed to be read their rights, may be handcuffed, and are prevented from leaving the scene.
At the police station the four men were hand cuffed to metal pipes in the wall and had their pockets searched without a warrant, which is also illegal. Upon discovery of a Wesleyan ID in one of the student’s wallets the officers hastily released them.

When the men returned to campus they sent out a voice mail to everyone they knew detailing what had happened. One of their close friends, Marinieves Malba ‘98 added a plea to the message to call the police station and complain before forwarding it. The police station was flooded with calls from angry students well into the early morning.

Police Lieutenant Christopher Barrow went to the students rooms in Nicolson dormitory at 2:30 am to apologize. This was viewed with skepticism by most students because Lieutenant Barrow was not the offending officer and was known to have a working relationship with African-American students in the past.

The next day the Office of Public Information released a memo giving one version of what had happened. This memo was met with contempt by the men involved because it did not include any statements by them and was solely based on the Police Department’s report. Tarik Holder sent out a voice mail saying, “People of the Wesleyan community, do not be fooled by the information you’ve received in the news release.” Several students of color organized an emergency meeting in the Malcolm X house on the night of the incident at 11:30 p.m. so that the four men would be given an opportunity to give their account of what happened. Over 150 people crammed into the basement lounge
of the house to offer support. The majority of students in attendance were African-American, but there was a strong showing of support from other ethnicities as well. President Douglas Bennet and several members of the NAACP were also in attendance.

The men made many comments expressing their frustration and anger about the incident. Niilampti fumed “We were violated to the fullest extreme, it wasn’t justified, it was awful.” Holder did not express any surprise at the incident, “This isn’t the first time this has happened to me. It probably won’t be the last. This is Wesleyan, but we’re still in America.”

Friends and peers also offered words of support. “The tone of the meeting was family oriented,” commented Kiera Lapsley ’98, “We were there to support the men and try to prevent things like this from happening in the future.” Like Holder, Kem Poston ’97 related the campus occurrence to the outside world. “This is not just about Wesleyan students. This kind of thing happens all around the country to people of color with disturbing regularity. We know that Middletown residents are subjected to this kind of treatment all the time.” Ali Sadiq ’96 summed up all of the concerns in one brief sentence, “It makes me fear for my own safety.”

Questions arose as to the role of public safety throughout the ordeal. Students asked why Public Safety did not intervene on their behalf. Chief of Public Safety, Harry Kinne, had this to say in

---

12 Notes from meeting. Oct 31, 1995
13 Ibid, Argus 11/3/95
Public Safety’s defense. “We have no authority dealing with Middletown Police on campus. In the situation that occurred, we tried to have the students identify themselves to the police and bring the situation to a close. They refused and I understand that. When the police are engaged in police activity we are basically observers.”

The bottom line is that officer Godwin had no right to ask these men to justify their presence on campus. It comes back to the issue of respect. To a student the campus is their home. They are the residents of a self-contained community. After spending inordinate sums of money to attend a university such as Wesleyan, you do not deserve to be questioned on your right to be there. Yes, they could have just shown their IDs and been on their way, but there was a principle at stake. Providing their student IDs would have set a precedent for this kind of behavior. What if they did not have their student ID’s with them? There is no stipulation in the rule book that mandates having your ID on your person at all times.

At the center of the incident is the question of race. Had they been four white men would the officer have taken the same action? What was it about these four men that made them appear suspicious while walking down the street of their own campus? It is questions like these that came up in an on-campus forum entitled “Where do we go from here?” sponsored by the Student of Color Council and the Office of Residential Life.

14Ibid, Argus 11/3/95
Over 425 students, administrators, faculty, and Middletown residents met in Science Center 150 the following week to discuss police misconduct in Middletown.\textsuperscript{15} It was described by facilitator Josh Guild ‘96 as “the start of a long-term look at race and class and Wesleyan’s role in Middletown.”

Middletown residents charged that corruption existed in the Middletown Police department and that this was not an isolated incident. Some residents expressed resentment because they felt this occurrence would not be receiving this much attention had Wesleyan students not been involved. Though there may be some element of truth to this assertion, the deciding factor in why this case of harassment became public is that the victims chose to speak out and inform the community.

The forum brought about emotional commentary from students as well. The discussion centered around the issue of racism and its role in phenomena like police harassment. Some students urged everyone to address their prejudices and work to remove them. One white student made a plea to students of color to “enlighten” him and help him to overcome the preconceived notions he held as a white male. This brings the notion of “educating their peers” full circle once again, and students of color offered the same response as their predecessors. One Black woman retorted, “I have been teaching for seventeen years, and I am tired of it.” She continued that she could speak for herself as an individual but not as a representative of her race.

\textsuperscript{15}Wesleyan Argus, Nov. 7, 1995
The burden of education cannot fall on the victim of the ignorance. Those who want to learn more about Black people need to question their own systems of education and how they came to the conclusions about people of other races. Black students do not have to inquire about the “white experience” because American society has made it normative. Blacks have been exposed to Anglo and European history and culture throughout their education. If white students are sincere in their desire to learn about the Black experience they should attend the lectures they sponsor, read Black student publications, and stop questioning why Blacks eat with their friends.

A subsequent forum was held at the Shilo Baptist Church in Middletown on Nov. 15 to continue the discussion began on the 7th. Members of the Middletown Police Department were present at this meeting to defend themselves, but remained in a line on the periphery of the room. This defensive posture only exacerbated the already tense situation and at times shouting matches ensued. It was clear that a sore had been opened it would take some time for the community to heal.

One battle was won when on December 14th officer Godwin was fired. Inconsistencies in his account to the department on the events of Oct. 31st are cited as the reasons for his dismissal. The department maintains that alleged racism was not an issue in his being fired, rather that it was he persisted in the detention though a witness attested to them being students and subsequently filed a false report.
But for the four young men involved this issue is still unresolved. On January 10, 1996 they filed a lawsuit at the U.S. district court in Hartford against the Middletown Police and Wesleyan. Though the conflict with the Police Department is obvious the charges against the school came as a surprise. The suit charges that the two public safety officers on the scene did not intervene on behalf of the student when they could have.¹⁶ No further information about the case has been made available because litigation is still pending.

The events of fall 1995 are the most recent example of the ordeals that plague the education process for African-Americans in colleges and Universities. Thirty years after the arrival of the Vanguard class Blacks are still struggling for acceptance at Wesleyan. The community must still navigate the issues of race, class, and gender that may filter in through the invisible walls of the campus or emanate from the very center of the institution—the hearts and minds of its population.

¹⁶Wesleyan Argus, January 24, 1996
Conclusion

In the past thirty years Black student protest has become part of the "Wesleyan way of the thinking", and "the fabric of institution." In commenting on his activism Matthew Nelson said, "I always saw Wesleyan a place for protest. I came as a pre-frosh and I saw the Shanty towns. I thought it[protest] was normal." The desire to protest is directly related to the desire to improve the university. So as long as students care about their quality of education there will be protest. But what should not be a constant is the specific issues that are the targets of protest. There are small threads of past issues believed to have been patched away that have the potential to unravel.

For example, the discipline of African-American studies still does not have the respect that it deserves, at Wesleyan and beyond. Students are advised not to "only major in Afam" because it is only a "program" and there is still doubt as to how it will be perceived in the world beyond Wesleyan as a single discipline. Why has CAAS celebrated its 25th anniversary and not gained departmental status despite the protestations of students? The move to create CAAS was indeed innovative for the early 1970s, but no further movement has been made in all of this time. Wesleyan needs to complete what it began decades ago. The more institutions that departmentalize African American studies, the

17 The Shanty Towns referred to were replicas of shacks lived in by Black South Africans erected around campus to protest investment in South Africa.
more students will see it as a stable discipline. This will create more demand for post-graduate study and strengthen the pool of available Phds. to teach in the Universities. When I asked Professor Long what he would like to see in the future for Wesleyan he responded that he would like to see a percentage of Black faculty equal to the percentage of Black students.

The move to departmentalize will take the same courage that it took to create the program in the first place, but Wesleyan has proved that it is up to the challenge. A rededication to the ideal of diversity is in order. In, Black Students in Higher Education, C. Scully Stikes addresses the issue of institutional dedication to diversity:

Institutional policies, practices, and procedures must move toward cultural diversity, shared power, an equitable distribution of resources, and flexibility in order to build a humane organization and a just society. They[universities]must employ minorities at all hiring levels, provide in-service training on culture related experiences to all persons, and utilize minority community resources for both the benefit of the students and the institution.18 Wesleyan has made a strong vocal commitment to diversity and has backed it up with the implementation of racism awareness workshops, minority teaching fellowships such as the Mellon and McNair programs, and new positions like an administrative liaison to students of color. The Malcolm X house received long overdue renovations in 1994 after meetings between residents of the house and dean of student life Denise Darrigrand. These are all great accomplishments, but students of color need and are asking for more. There are movements growing for a multicultural center and the hiring of an affirmative action officer. These issues

---

18 Stikes, C. Scully Black Students in Higher Education p123
should be addressed in their infancy before they become the subject of a mass demonstration in months or years to come.

African-American students should also take heed to what they decide to protest about. For example, demonstrations about financial aid are only going to yield a meeting with financial aid officers that can be obtained by simply asking. When changes are sought, issues should focus on things that are within the university’s control and be addressed to the individuals that can make the changes, such as the board of trustees.

Students must also resist the urge to keep up with romanticized memories of Wesleyan as a bastion of protest. Earlier protest movements were relatively more successful because there was more room for progress on the part of the institution. As we move into the next century persistence will be the deciding factor in what changes are made at Wesleyan. This is why it is so important for the upperclassmen to impart their knowledge to the incoming classes. Work for change should be continued rather than restarted every five years. Issues linked to money, such as renovations to Malcolm X House and divestment in South Africa, did and will take years of persistent outcry from students before they are resolved. The class of 2000 should be informed of what progress has been made in the movement for a multicultural center so they are not repeating the steps that have been taken by the class of 1995.

Black students must utilize the written word and their positions in various student groups to vocalize their concerns.
Petitions, letters, and memos were some of Ujamaa’s most effective means of protest. Publications like the Ankh, the Argus, and the Hermes provide forums for voicing concerns. We are some of the most articulate voices of our generation and our predecessors fought to establish the existing channels of communication, so we should utilize them.

Today students of all races at Wesleyan are planning a rally to show support for Mumia Abu-Jamal, an African-American journalist and former Black Panther who is on death row for the murder of a Philadelphia state trooper. Thousands of people all over the country believe that he was unjustly sentenced to death and have been rallying support for a re-trial. He has received several stays of execution but his supporters fear that time is running short for Abu-Jamal. The all New-England rally is scheduled for Saturday April 13, 1996. The struggle continues.

Sing a song full of the faith that the
dark past has taught us,
Sing a song full of the hope that the present
has taught us.
Facing the rising sun of our new day
begun
Let us march on, ‘til victory is won!
Sources

Books
Exum, William H.
Paradoxes of Protest: Black Student Activism in a White University
Temple University Press, 1985, p7-19

Feuer, Lewis

Franklin, John Hope
From Slavery to Freedom Random House New York, 1980, p488-503

King, Martin Luther.
Why We Can't Wait, p23.

McCormick, Richard P.
The Black Student Protest Movement at Rutgers Rutgers University Press 1990, p33-43.

Nettles, Micheal T.

Orum, Anthony
Black Students In Protest, University of Illinois, Published by the Arnold M. and Caroline Rose Monograph Series, American Sociological Association, 1968, p76-83.

Stikes, C. Sculley
Black Students in Higher Education Southern Illinois University Press, 1984, p122-158

Young, Alford
Periodicals

Wesleyan *Argus*


*The Middletown Press*

*The Hermes* May 10, 1979 “Ujamaa: United We Stand”

*The Harford Courant* Thomas Frank, 1985*;* Gary Weiss, November 22, 1980


Interviews

-Absalom Massie ‘93: November 1994
-Lawrence Madlock ‘71: June 1995
-Jane Morrison: July 1995
-Jerome Long: August 1995
-Marichal Monts ‘85: January 1996
-Jay Hoggard ‘74: February 1996
-Kenneth Clark ‘95: March 1996
-Matthew Nelson ‘93: March 1996
Documents & Records

-Chancellor's Office Memo: November 1969
-Letter to Ujamaa familyhood: November 7, 1969
-Memo from Ujamaa Familyhood to the Wesleyan Board of Trustees: January 30, 1986
-Ujamaa memo, May 7, 1990.
-Memo from Billy Weitze, Associate Provost, to Ad Hoc Committee on Recruitment and Retention of Faculty of Color. November 17 994.