



A Brief Representative History of African American Studies at Wesleyan

On December 4, 2018, Wesleyan faculty voted to grant department status to African American Studies. To provide context, we offer this timeline, with additional material online. By **Jocelyn Maeyama '22**, with assistance from **Jesse Nasta '07**, visiting assistant professor of African American Studies.

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1832: First Black student arrives at Wesleyan:

The year after Wesleyan's founding in 1831, Charles B. Ray became the first Black student to attend the University, with plans to become a Methodist minister. Upon his arrival, Ray faced racism from both Southern students and some New England students. Sons of wealthy Southern plantation owners went to President Willbur Fisk, demanding Ray be dismissed. In response, Fisk passed the issue to the Board of Trustees, and students presented a resolution against Ray to the Board. Before the official decision was made, Ray left campus, and on October 10 the Board of Trustees voted that "none but male white persons shall be admitted as students of this institution." Ray went on to become an agent in the Underground Railroad in New York City and edited one of the first Black newspapers in the U.S., *The Colored American*.

1860: First Black student graduates: Wilbur Fisk Burns, Class of 1860, arrived at Wesleyan in 1856 from Liberia. His father was a bishop of the Black Methodist Church in Liberia and part of a small minority of African Americans who signed onto the colonization movement that advocated for abolition,

then the subsequent relocation of free Black people to Africa. President Fisk formed the American Colonization Society in Middletown, and Burns was named after Fisk.

After graduating from Wesleyan, Burns returned to Liberia and became a government official and practiced law.

1862: First African American student graduates: Thomas F. Barnswell, Class of 1862, from Brooklyn, N.Y.

1905–1906: Racism in sports: In 1905 and 1906, Princeton refused to play the Wesleyan baseball team unless their Black players—John Smith and Thomas Taylor—were removed from the lineup. Wesleyan's captain persuaded the Princeton team that Smith was Armenian, not Black, and removed Taylor from his position as catcher while the team played Princeton. With Princeton denying Black students admission and Black players being forced out of national professional teams, in 1905 a college body vote prohibited Black students from participation in intercollegiate athletics.

1950–1961: Ending formal discrimination in fraternities: Eclectic initiated its first Black student, Terry Hatter Jr. '54, despite alumni objections in 1950. This marked the beginning of a 10-year period in which fraternity chapters at Wesleyan began challenging their national organizations' discriminatory policies against Black and Jewish students. In 1952, Delta Upsilon and Gamma Psi followed suit, initiating Edgar F. Beckham '58 and David C. Morris '55, respectively. After alumni members of these chapters protested initiating Black students, both chapters resigned from their national organizations and changed their names; Delta Upsilon became Delta Sigma, and Gamma Psi became Phi Sigma Kappa.

In 1955 the College Senate resolved that houses with discriminatory national organization policies needed to either get these policies changed or disaffiliate with their national organizations. Fraternities challenged national constitutions on clauses discriminating against minorities with varying levels of success. Three houses severed their affiliations in 1959, and by 1961 formal discrimination was ended among the houses.

1965: Vanguard Class enters, Malcolm X assassinated: Upon his appointment as dean of admission, John C. Hoy '55 began diversifying Wesleyan's recruitment to include urban areas. In 1965, 30 Black students were offered admission with scholarship support, and 13 Black students enrolled, a significant increase from the previous year's two. This class came to be known as the Vanguard Class of 1969, the first class of actively recruited Black students.

Earlier that year, Malcolm X was assassinated while speaking at a rally in New York City. His assertive message of Black power and his assassination shaped Black student protest and the politics of the Vanguard Class.

1969: Fisk Hall Takeover: In collaboration with the Educational Policy Committee (EPC), Black students put forth a motion in front of the faculty on February 20 to cancel classes in honor of the fourth anniversary of Malcolm X's assassination. The motion was defeated, and instead the faculty adopted a statement that acknowledged the intention of the motion and reminded faculty they could cancel classes if they chose to do so. In response, Black members of the campus community entered Fisk Hall the morning of February 21 and shut down the building. They occupied the building for 12 hours, handing out literature declaring that day Malcolm X Day, broadcasting Malcolm X's speeches, and issuing a list of 13 demands. These demands included cancelling classes, increasing Black admissions, moving the Afro-American House to the John Wesley House, and creating a center of Black activity.

Later that year, Malcolm X House and the African-American Institute (AAI)—predecessor to the Center for African American Studies—replaced the John Wesley House. In the AAI, faculty were hired on a year-to-year basis and could not serve on the EPC, creating demand for reform of the AAI later on. The following year, six new Black faculty members were hired and 15.3 percent of the incoming class was Black. The class of '74 entered as coeducational.

1971: Highlight from the Annual Report: Fay D. Boulware, director of the African-American Institute, quotes from the AAI brochure: "The Institute will . . . seek to foster analysis and understanding of the particular relationships of Blacks to white educational society. It will examine the inner motivating forces of the Black student community in an

effort to effect and institutionalize enduring (not evanescent) self-determination—the acquisition of the means of control over the crucial issues of our existence, again embracing the social, economic, and political arenas."

1973: First Black dean of college appointed:

Edgar F. Beckham '58, after whom Beckham Hall is named, became the first Black professor in 1961 as a professor in German. He then was offered the position of assistant provost. Before accepting the offer, he sought the endorsement of the chairman of Ujamaa, the Black student group, declaring he would not accept the offer without the group's endorsement. Ujamaa granted Beckham its support, and he then went on to be promoted to dean of college in 1973. He also assisted Black students in the Fisk Hall Takeover, giving them the keys to enter the building, and went on to improve Wesleyan's diversity and inclusion in myriad ways.

1974: First Black faculty member awarded tenure:

Jerome Long, who specialized in Black and African religion, became the first Black faculty member to be awarded tenure. In 1971 he became the second Black faculty member to be hired on a tenure track, following the appointment of Beckham.

1974: Center for Afro-American Studies (CAAS) replaces African-American Institute:

The African-American Institute Planning Committee, chaired by Jerome Long and comprised of 16 students and faculty, presented a recommendation for establishing a Center for Afro-American Studies. The Committee, formed after the acknowledgment of the inadequacies of the African-American Institute, called for the development of a major program; four seminars dealing with Afro-American perspective in the arts, philosophy and religion, the behavioral sciences, and social studies; at least one fellow per year; increased departmental offerings taught by Black faculty; aggressive efforts to strengthen the Affirmative Action Program to increase the number of Black faculty; and the appointment of a search committee for a director of CAAS. In addition to the EPC endorsement, the faculty passed the recommendation unanimously.

1976–1977: Highlights from the Annual Report:

African Studies Chair Richard Elphick and Director

of the Center for Afro-American Studies Oliver W. Holmes: "Mora L. McLean '77 was awarded the Afro-American Studies Prize, the fund of which was established in 1977, as the graduating senior who had exemplified best academic excellence in Afro-American Studies and the qualities of character and leadership in the Wesleyan community."

1983: Commencement Speaker: Terry J. Hatter Jr. '54, P '92, LLD, Federal Court Judge

1985: Highlights from the Annual Report:

African Studies Chair Jeffrey Butler: "This graduating class included the first Afro-American Studies majors in Wesleyan's history . . . In honor of John G. Monroe, the AFAM professor who died last summer we (with the generous help of the Theater Department) established this year the Monroe Prize, awarded to the sophomore or junior who submits the best essay in Afro-American Studies. The two winners, Heather Hathaway '86 and Miranda Hope '87, wrote superb essays.

"AFAM is attracting good students in high numbers. I dare say our ability to draw students is unmatched by any AFAM program or department in the country."

1985: Honorary Degree: Max Roach P'93, DFA, Musician

1988: Reminiscing—Alford Young Jr. '88, Arthur F. Thurnau Professor, Departments of Sociology and Afroamerican and African Studies at the University of Michigan: "As a student in CAAS I learned to regard the study of African Americans as key grounding for understanding the American experience. It allowed me to envision and explore the intellectual breadth and depth of the liberal arts through its focus on the unique history and culture of African Americans and the African American social condition."

1989: The Mellon Program begins at Wesleyan:

From the Wesleyan website: "In 1988 the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation . . . launched a program designed to increase the number of African American, Latino/a, and American Indian faculty members at U.S. colleges and universities. The goal was to identify academically promising college students . . . and provide them with mentoring, extensive experience with conducting independent research,



1860



1905



1954



1969



1970



1973

skills development, and insight into the rewards of an academic career."

1989: Highlights from the Annual Report:

Center for Afro-American Studies Director Marshall Hyatt: "Lecture series theme: 'Race and Politics: The Impact of Jesse Jackson's Campaign and the Rainbow Coalition.'"

1990: Highlights from the Annual Report:

Afro-American Studies Chair Erness Bright Brody: "[The] program faculty redesigned its interdisciplinary AFAM major requirements for the class of 1993. . . . The new interdisciplinary requirements continue to focus on experiences of peoples of African descent in North America and the Caribbean from both humanistic and social science perspectives."

1990: Commencement Speaker: Bishop

Desmond Tutu, DD, Archbishop, Nobel Peace Prize winner

1993: Professor of German Language and

Literature Krishna Winston (now Marcus L. Taft Professor of German Language and Literature) begins a 23-year tenure as coordinator of Wesleyan's Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellowship.

1994: Highlights from the Annual Report:

African American Studies Chair Ann duCille: "We began the year by changing the names of the Program and the Center [from 'Afro-American' to 'African American']."

1995: Highlights from the Annual Report:

AFAM Chair Gayle Pemberton joins faculty in the 1994-1995 academic year; Center for African American Studies Director Kate Rushin writes: "My priorities this year were to host artists and writers with a broad view of African American art, culture, scholarship, and politics; and also to work in collaboration with various campus programs and student groups with the dual purpose of increasing the visibility of The Center on campus and, perhaps, more significantly, to highlight and complement the interdisciplinary nature and philosophy of the African American Studies Program."

1996: Reminiscing—Joshua Guild '96, associate

professor of history and African American Studies at Princeton University: "As a faculty member now working in the field, I have an even greater appreciation for the outsize contributions of African American Studies at Wesleyan. Hazel Carby, one of the most important Black feminist theorists and cultural critics of the past 40 years, began her teaching career at Wesleyan. Professors like Ashraf Rushdy, who was my mentor, Jeff Kerr-Ritchie, Cynthia Horan, and Gayle Pemberton opened up new worlds of critical inquiry, pushed me to be a better thinker and writer, and ultimately inspired me to pursue an academic career."

1999: Reminiscing—Leander A. Dolphin '99,

partner, Shipman & Goodwin LLP, reflects: "CAAS and the AFAM department were instrumental in the lives of students of color for years before I arrived at Wesleyan (in 1995) and for years after I graduated (in 1999). I vividly recall the challenge and passion in each of my AFAM courses, with extraordinary professors, like Gayle Pemberton, Ashraf Rushdy, Kate Rushin, and Jeff Kerr-Ritchie. The AFAM studies program offered fertile opportunities to study race, culture, history, literature, politics, and even advocacy. I graduated with a triple major in English, AFAM, and women's studies, but it was AFAM studies that was the centerpiece of my education and which prepared me to be a social engineer."

1999: Reminiscing—Bozoma Saint John '99,

chief marketing officer, Endeavor: "I entered Wesleyan as a premed student, but quickly realized that I wanted to major in African American studies because of the AFAM 101 class. At the time (fall of 1995), the O.J. Simpson trial was being decided, Rodney King's assault and the subsequent L.A. Riots were still fresh on our minds, and Tupac Shakur had been murdered. It was in the AFAM classrooms that I was able to make sense of present circumstances by reading the work of Audre Lorde, James Baldwin, Toni Morrison, and Nikki Giovanni (among many others)."

1999: Vanguard Prize initiated in honor of the 30th Reunion Class.

2000: Honorary Degree: Rosa Parks, LHD, Civil Rights Pioneer

2003: Reminiscing—Mayuran Tiruchelvam '03,

a screenwriter and producer of film and television, writes: "The importance of African American Studies at Wesleyan extends far beyond the curriculum. The Vanguard Class of 1969 provided a model to generations of activists, using nonviolent action to win concrete changes. My education in AFAM Studies now informs every facet of my work as a filmmaker, educator, and community organizer. The story of the Americas is a multiracial, and centrally Black, story. As a department, AFAM will hopefully gain resources to impart this vital knowledge and empathy to students at a critical moment in the struggle against institutional racism and state violence."

2006: The Civil Rights Movement in American Memory (University of Georgia Press) is published,

co-edited by Renee C. Romano, then-chair of African American Studies and CAAS, and Leigh Raiford '94, now associate professor of African American Studies at UC Berkeley.

2007: Reminiscing—Portia R. Hemphill '07,

PhD, founder and CEO, Scientists for Social Progress: "Humbly recognized as the first African American woman to receive honors in both AFAM and government, I was nurtured by AFAM in my development as a scholar of Black politics and other marginalized groups. As a discipline, AFAM brought to light interconnections between marginalized groups across space and time, a skill crucial to my development as a political scientist and policy analyst. It brings me delight that my dear alma mater has found within its vision the courage to institutionalize the discipline, thereby cementing its impact in perpetuity."

2008 Commencement Speaker: Senator Barack

Obama, LLD, United States Senator, Democratic Presidential Nominee

2011: Highlights from the Annual Report:

CAAS Chair Peter Mark; African American Studies Program Chair Alex Dupuy: "We participated in the Social Justice Leadership Conference along with Ted Shaw '76."

2012 Honorary Degree: Glenn Ligon '82,

DFA, Artist



1988



1990



1994



1995



1996



1999

2013: Highlights from the Annual Report: Center for African American Studies Chair Gina Ulysse; African American Studies Program Chair Ashraf Rushdy: "Lois Brown joined us in the fall as a visiting professor, was tenured and appointed as the Class of 1958 Distinguished Professor in African American Studies and English in January 2013." Ashraf Rushdy published *American Lynching* (Yale University Press, 2012).

2013 Honorary Degree: Majora Carter '88, LHD, Urban Revitalization Strategist; 2005 MacArthur Fellow

2014: #AFAMisWhy campaign: In response to African American Studies faculty departures and perceived lack of institutional support for AFAM, students launched the #AFAMisWhy campaign calling for the prioritization of AFAM faculty hires and re-prioritization of African American Studies at Wesleyan. The campaign consisted of a petition initiated by the Wesleyan Student Assembly, a campus march on campus, and #AFAMisWhy on social media. Elana Baurer '09 wrote for the *Argus*: "My sole memory of my first week . . . at Wesleyan is when I miraculously ended up in Prof. Ann duCille's 'Introduction to African-American Literature'—I remember thinking, 'Oh. Yes. This is It.' In that first AFAM course I found intellectual stimulation. I found deep meaning and a paradigmatic shift in the seminal American texts we read and in the complex lectures and conversations led by Prof. duCille. And I found a mentor and advisor who became an integral part of my entire Wesleyan experience."

2014: Highlights from the Annual Report: Center for African American Studies Chair Lois Brown; African American Studies Program Chair Ashraf Rushdy: "We very much look forward to crafting and submitting a request to institute a minor in African American Studies. . . . Savannah Turner '16 and Armani White '15 resurrected *The Ankh*, the student-of-color publication that had ceased publication for a number of years."

2014 Commencement Speaker: Theodore M. Shaw '76, LLD, Advocate for Equity and Inclusion

2015 Honorary Degree: Beverly Daniel Tatum '75, P'04, LHD, President Emerita, Spelman College

2015–2016 Highlights from the Annual Report: Center for African American Studies Chair and African American Studies Program Chair Lois Brown: Faculty achievements: Jay Hoggard '76, MA '91 released *Harlem Hieroglyphs*, a gorgeous, haunting, and powerful two-disc recording. Lois Brown collaborated with colleagues statewide on screenings of the newly remastered James Baldwin documentary, *The Price of the Ticket*. Liza McAlister was a featured consultant on the CNN program *Believer*.

2016: Mellon Mays Co-Coordinator: Professor Demetrius L. Eudell and Teshia Levy-Grant '00

2016: Khalil A. Johnson Jr. hired as the first professor on the tenure track solely in African American Studies. Coming from a PhD at Yale, Johnson works to bridge Native Studies and Black Studies.

2017: Highlights from the Annual Report: Center for African American Studies Chair and African American Studies Program Chair Lois Brown: "Dr. Gretchen Long '89 . . . who teaches at Williams and is the daughter of Professor Emeritus Jerome Long of the Religion Department . . . delivered an absorbing lecture on African American physicians and Civil War-era politics . . . in the Vanguard Lounge."

2017: *Because When God Is Too Busy: Haiti, Me & The World*, by Gina Athena Ulysse (Wesleyan University Press, 2017) is published. Edwige Danticat lauded Ulysse as "a force of nature . . . and after reading her poignant and powerful book, she becomes as indispensable to us as her amazing work." Winner of the 2018 CT Humanities Poetry Prize.

2018: African American Studies departmentalizes.

2019 Reunion & Commencement: 50th Reunion for the Vanguard Class. Saidiya Hartman '84 will deliver this year's Commencement address. Hazel Carby and Edwin Sanders '69 will be honored.

2019: Reminiscing—Professor Ann duCille: "It is, of course, very good news that African American Studies at Wesleyan is about to become

a department. First brought to campus through the courageous actions of the Vanguard Class of 1969 with the support of dedicated faculty and staff, Black Studies (by whatever name) has been a cornerstone of the curriculum for five decades, during which the program has trained and graduated scores of students who have gone on to make major contributions to the field and beyond. Departmental status has been a long time coming for the discipline, but, with the rise of white nationalism, it arrives at a moment when the interdisciplinary study of race, culture, ethnicity, difference, and social justice, to which AFAM is committed, could not be more important. With voting rights under assault, brown people demonized as mass hordes of 'invaders,' and brown children ripped from their parents' arms as in slavery, the critical thinking and multifaceted critique of 'American Civilization' at the heart of Wesleyan's newest department may provide the best route to our better selves."

2019: Reminiscing—Professor Gayle Pember-ton: "While the field of African American Studies should be traced back to W. E. B. Du Bois, finding a home in colleges and universities across the country has been a fitful journey. The fundamental interdisciplinary nature of the field is its intellectual strength, but institutional nightmare. In the last few decades, a number of fine departments have been created, but Wesleyan lagged behind.

"As one who worked with others for the creation of the department for 14 years, without success, I'm delighted to see it finally happen. Without the autonomy departments have in hiring, our choices for new colleagues often were overruled by departments in joint searches. We lost some good people along the way. As the field continues to mature—although it has long since passed its infancy—I would hope that African American Studies at Wesleyan can return to a place of vibrant teaching and scholarship. Our students and our alums deserve it."

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