

**An Adversarial Place:**  
The 1989-1990 Academic Year at Wesleyan University

by

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## INTRODUCTION

During the 1989-1990 academic year, Wesleyan University experienced a nearly unprecedented eruption of student protest on its small Connecticut campus. Like most small, liberal arts institutions in the Northeast, Wesleyan had seen its share of marches, rallies, and occupations over the years. Students had acted to support the Civil Rights Movement and to protest the Vietnam War, they had sought efforts to pursue racial justice on campus, and had fought for coeducation, for women's rights, for gay rights, and for queer visibility. For many years, they protested Wesleyan's investments in South Africa.

But in the 1989-1990 academic year, the tradition of student protest turned into something more extreme and violent than it had been before, and student relations with the Wesleyan administration became more divisive and destructive than they had ever been in the past.

The year's activities began on September 23<sup>rd</sup> with a protest at the new president's inaugural address. Later that fall, on October 10<sup>th</sup>, a large group of students protested the visit of an esteemed South African parliamentarian. Students interrupted a November 18<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Board of Trustees. They took over Wesleyan's admissions office on January 26<sup>th</sup> and threatened to burn application files. The students were primarily concerned – according to list after list of demands they handed to administrators – about Wesleyan's investments in South Africa, its recruitment and retention of faculty of color, its financial aid policies, and its treatment of students of color.

These actions, however, merely prepared the ground for events that turned out to be far more extreme. The president's office was firebombed on April 7, 1990. On April 25<sup>th</sup>, four shots were fired off of Foss Hill towards an administrative building, and two days later an attempt was made to firebomb the Wesleyan boathouse. Racist graffiti was found painted in the basement of the Malcolm X House on May 4<sup>th</sup>, and several public events were held in the effort to express and heal the resulting anger and hurt. All of these events were capped by a nine-day hunger strike that began on May 9<sup>th</sup>.

By commencement that year, it seemed that the most contentious issues of the spring had been at least temporarily resolved. But they were followed by one more violent event. On July 6, 1990, Nicholas Haddad, one of the leading figures in campus politics that year, was shot dead in a Hartford park by an associate he had recruited to deal drugs. Haddad had reportedly been hoping to sell the drugs to finance the purchase of weapons to support a coming "revolution."

In the view of one faculty member, this year was the "last gasp" in a long history of student protest at Wesleyan. But to Wesleyan's current students, 1989-1990 is largely a forgotten year. The window in the President's Office through which 2 or 3 Molotov cocktails were thrown has been repaired and Foss Hill has been cleared of shell casings. The student protestors, the last of whom graduated 19 years ago, seem very far away.

Wesleyan University as an institution does not sustain many effects of that year. Students continue to protest, to chalk the pathways with "Bank of America Kills

Communities” and to camp out on Foss Hill or in front of the new Admissions Office building with signs. There are still speak-outs. The effects of the 1989-1990 academic year lie almost exclusively with those who were participants in or witness to it.

## CHAPTER ONE

Richard Elphick, Professor of History, maintains that 1989-1990 was the worst year Wesleyan ever had and that it had all started with a visit from Helen Suzman in October.

Helen Suzman (née Gavronsky) (1917-2009) was a white South African parliamentarian, the only English-speaking, Jewish female among the otherwise Afrikaans-speaking, Calvinist males in Parliament, and for thirteen years the only voice in Parliament unequivocally opposed to the apartheid system.

“She was famous and *revered* throughout North America, but she was ultimately on her way to England where the Queen knighted her so she became *Dame Suzman*,” explains Professor Elphick twenty years later, recalling her visit to campus, sitting in the same office in the Public Affairs Center (PAC) at Wesleyan he occupied 20 years ago, but now with white hair and orthopedic loafers. “She very *kindly* agreed to come to Wesleyan. I don’t think it was chiefly because she knew me – she didn’t know me *terribly* well but she met me several times – but because she knew Colin Campbell, who had been the president of Wesleyan up until 1989.”

Colin Campbell was the 13<sup>th</sup> president of Wesleyan and he held office for 18 years, from 1970 until 1988. He wasn’t an academic – he’d previously been Vice President of the Planning and Government Affairs Division of the American Stock Exchange – but he was a successful administrator and conscious of the University’s greater social responsibility. For many years, he had been especially interested in what was happening in South Africa, which is where he met Helen Suzman in 1986.

On November 6, 1962, eight years before Colin Campbell assumed the presidency of Wesleyan, the United Nations General Assembly passed “Resolution 1761,” condemning the existing system of apartheid as a violation of South Africa’s obligations under the UN Charter and a threat to international peace and security. The UN Special Committee on Apartheid proposed the imposition of economic sanctions in South Africa in order to isolate the apartheid state. Although President Carter’s administration – and subsequently, President Reagan’s – boycotted the sanctions, the anti-apartheid movement in the United States responded by lobbying individual businesses and institutional investors to withdraw investments – to *disinvest* or *divest* – from South Africa as a matter of corporate social responsibility. The divestment debate extended onto the campuses of American universities in the late 1970s (and was renewed and intensified in the mid-1980s), prompting university trustees to reconsider their institutions’ holdings in companies with contracts in South Africa.

Campaigns for full divestment were launched by students at Columbia University, Dartmouth, and Hampshire, among others. Students built shantytowns to imitate those in the slums of Johannesburg and Cape Town and carried black balloons at graduations. In 1986, more than 200 divestment activists at Harvard University erected a 16-foot “ivory tower” in front of University Hall to protest the University’s investment in companies doing business in South Africa. The same year, 300 students at the University of Illinois staged a mock riot in which some dressed as the South African police and others as “the oppressed.”



Wesleyan, too, became involved in the divestment debate. Under President Campbell's leadership, Wesleyan founded the South African Research Consortium, an association of 50 universities and colleges that studied the role of American corporations in South Africa. Over the 1970s and 80s, Wesleyan withdrew investments from over 60 companies, but chose not to divest entirely. The policy was meant to be one of "constructive engagement" and also featured a commitment to education and exchange. The University invited many prominent South African academics, politicians, and activists to speak on campus and funded, too, an exchange of black South African students to Wesleyan from the University of Cape Town.

The investment policy Campbell established increasingly came into conflict with the demands of Wesleyan students to divest entirely. "I remember this silly phrase, 'Apartheid kills, Wesleyan pays the Bills,'" recites Professor Elphick, looking annoyed. "So Wesleyan, because it invested in General Motors, was responsible for apartheid."

If anything, according to Professor Elphick, the University was hoping to use their investments in South Africa as points of leverage. "We wanted," he explains, "to put pressure on the corporations to take an active role." From 1987 on, Wesleyan only invested in companies that adhered to the "Sullivan Principles," a recommended set of practices corporations should follow if they wished to do business ethically in South Africa.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The Rev. Leon Sullivan was the first African-American board member of General Motors. He introduced the six Sullivan Principles in 1977 and added another one in 1984. The principles acted as requirements a corporation was to demand of its employees as a condition for doing business. They were primarily to do with equal treatment of employees, black and white, but also necessitated the installation of developmental programs for black employees.

As Wesleyan maintained its policy of constructive engagement, students became more militant in their demonstrations. They built their own South African shantytown outside of the administrative offices and in front of Olin Library in 1986, and for fifteen days in 1988 – from April 18<sup>th</sup> until May 3<sup>rd</sup> – over one hundred students occupied the anteroom to President Campbell’s office in protest of the University’s investments in South Africa. They, too, carried black balloons at graduation, and also coffins. “There was a lot of anger,” recalls Professor Elphick, “but Colin was really on top of it.”

Campbell’s successor was less prepared for the student anger he inherited from his predecessor. Bill Chace, president of Wesleyan from 1988 to 1994, was an expert on James Joyce. He came to Wesleyan from the Provost’s office at Stanford University. Wesleyan was his second choice. Chace had really wanted to be the president of Haverford, a Quaker college and his alma mater, but, according to his 2006 memoir, *100 Semesters: My Adventures as Student, Professor, and University President, and What I Learned Along the Way*, was passed over for the position when he applied in 1987. He had hoped that Wesleyan would be like Haverford because it, too, was a small liberal arts institution, with a history rooted in early-nineteenth century religious enthusiasm. In hindsight, he says, “I certainly did not understand the degree to which [Wesleyan’s] ideological history and its general sensibility were very different from Haverford’s. I believe it still *is* a more *adversarial* place, a contentious place.”

Bill Chace is now retired from academic administration. After his six-year tenure at Wesleyan, an unhappy time for him and for many Wesleyan students and faculty, he went on to Emory University, where he served as president for nine years. He returned to Stanford a decade ago to teach Joyce, Irish Fiction, and Poetry to graduate students. Chace and his wife, Joann, returned to the brown, shingled house in Palo Alto they had rented out while they were in Middletown and Atlanta. “I’ve thought about this a lot,” he tells me as we sit down to his wife’s zucchini bread, “Why the heck didn’t I just stay here?” He gestures around the room. It is a big, tall-ceilinged room, recently renovated but filled with old clocks and art. Bill Chace is over seventy years old now.

When Helen Suzman came to visit, Chace had been in office for thirteen months. He had arrived on campus in the fall of 1988. His first year was uneventful – “my ‘honeymoon’ period” he calls it in his book – yet faculty and administrators alike persistently reminded him that Wesleyan University was “different.” President Chace had been first forewarned about how “different” Wesleyan was by the Chair of the Board of Trustees during his interviews for the presidency, but Chace had been a graduate student at Berkley during the Free Speech movement – had seen the takeover of Sproul Hall and had heard Mario Savio speak – and so he remained unfazed by word of Wesleyan’s culture of student protest. The red “blood money” pennies and artificial cobwebs he saw strewn and strung on the campus pathways and trees during his first visit to campus did not concern him. His memoir also suggests that he considered the Chair of the Board both pompous and condescending.

President Chace's official inauguration on September 23, 1989 took place a full year after he had arrived on campus. "It's going to be a lot of fun," he told *The Wesleyan Argus* a week before the festivities, which included an all-campus picnic and a symposium, the theme of which was "Chaos and Continuity." The symposium went well but Chace's inaugural address – both its surrounding circumstances and its content – was unanimously considered catastrophic.

The day began with terrible weather that forced a late change in plans. Hurricane Hugo (Category 4), which had already caused \$7 billion in damages in Puerto Rico and the Carolinas and the Mid-Atlantic Coast, arrived in central Connecticut on the morning of Chace's inauguration, forcing the ceremony's participants to travel by tunnels – in full academic regalia – to the old gym for the ceremony. Professor of Music and experimental composer Alvin Lucier had created special music for the occasion, a composition of antique sirens and woodblocks he called "Clackers and Swoopers," the wails of which prompted the Middletown Fire Marshall to make an emergency inquiry at the gym shortly after they started up.

President Chace's comments themselves were considered contentious at best. Even he now concedes that they may have been impolitic. "The address was given too late," he explains by way of justification, "and by that I mean if I'd given it earlier I wouldn't have *known* enough to say some of the things I said. I could've just said, 'It's great to be here, welcome to all of you and let's work together . . . now let's go have tea.'" Instead, Chace saw his role at Wesleyan as a "teacher" – so he writes in his memoir – and his speech as a chance to address issues he already saw in his "class." There was an imbalance on the University's books that needed to be

remedied – a \$3.5 million deficit – and that problem was compounded, in Chace’s view, by what he refers to in his book as “the costs of diversity.” As he saw it, Wesleyan’s “preoccupation to encompass the widest possible variety of interests, to encompass the widest possible population of students and faculty, to reach out into the world and so forth” instead of focusing on strictly intellectual issues had “in effect, partially paralyzed this school, had *impeded* its growth.”

Chace addressed these issues in his speech – phrasing them as “questions” – but the faculty members in the audience responded most forcefully to a third challenge the president raised. Chace’s speech suggested that Wesleyan had overreached its proper position in calling itself a “university” and in encouraging its faculty to think of themselves as researchers as well as teachers. “We are,” Chace told the crowd, “instead of being a ‘little university,’ preeminently a collegiate institution . . . the term [‘University’] can only bewilder us, can only blur our vision.” Chace meant to de-emphasize research at Wesleyan and to focus more exclusively on the classroom teaching of undergraduates.

Vice President of Academic Affairs Nathanael Greene, whom Chace claims to have consulted on the speech and whom he would ultimately dismiss from the administration in 1990, recalls that Chace’s comments did not sit well with the faculty, that the speech may have even been “threatening” to those in the science faculties. Chuckling, Chace tells me that Professor of Molecular Biology and Biochemistry Bill Firshein – a “very incitable figure” – went so far as to come out of his chair in the middle of the inaugural address to announce: “*This is war.*” Professor

Firshein disputes this recollection. “However,” he writes to me in an email, “[Chace] is right in that I did not like what he said.”

The speech was followed by organizing among the faculty and by the circulation of anonymous letters that not only criticized but also ridiculed the new president.

Richard Slotkin, Olin Professor of English, Emeritus, has since confirmed that he authored one such letter. Professor Slotkin was away on sabbatical when President Chace gave his inaugural address, but was given an extensive account by colleagues who were on campus for the event. “The speech was offensive in a number of respects,” he explains in an email. “It was disrespectful to outgoing President Campbell, who had devoted his career to the ‘Little University’ idea; it told the faculty to forget the ambitions and styles of intellectual work which were the core of their professional lives.” Professor Slotkin, the author of some eight books and a nationally esteemed scholar in the field of American Studies, composed a satire in response – a parody of Kafka’s *Metamorphosis* in which a university professor wakes up one morning to discover that he has been transformed into a college teacher. “I am glad to say,” says Professor Slotkin in his email, “that it went ‘viral’ . . . at least in 1980’s terms.”

“No president can really be friends with many people,” insists President Chace now. His understanding, as he explains it to me, is that, either because of the faculty’s perceptions of presidential power – which are largely exaggerated – or simply because the faculty find the president’s day to day tasks boring to talk about over dinner, the university president is usually on his own. “I’ve got to go to New

York because we're discussing a bond issue at this lawyers office," he says, imitating himself, "'I've got to travel to Chicago to meet the alumni and things . . . ' They would've *yawned*." Whatever the reason, and the faculty and administrators present for the Chace era at Wesleyan gave many, Bill Chace was unpopular from the start. "I think he's a *wonderfully* intelligent and funny man," says Nat Greene, who has since returned to the Department of History, "But a lot of people didn't like him. He just didn't have a lot of faculty support." Greene pauses, briefly. "That would have been crucial in these circumstances."

Two minutes into Chace's inaugural address – after the rain but before any substantive or contentious comments had been made on the part of the president – six African-American students, dressed entirely in black and two handcuffed to one another, silently interrupted President Chace to present him with a list of five demands, one of which was the University's full divestment from South Africa. The six students remained in front of the president's podium in silence with their fists raised in the Black Power sign for several minutes more. Chace, scanning the letter, went on with his prepared address. President Chace's daughter Katie told him later that she noticed the students quickly grew tired of holding their fists up. "The arms kept coming down a bit," she told him after it was over, "I knew they couldn't keep that up much longer."

Kofi Taha was one of the six inaugural protestors. Mr. Taha, who would become a controversial student activist on campus that year, was then a sophomore. He now lives and works in Cambridge, Massachusetts at MIT's "D-Lab," an

international development program, the mission of which is to improve the quality of life of low-income households in the developing world through the creation and implementation of low cost technologies. I speak with him at the D-Lab offices, sitting across from him at a large table that overwhelms a small conference room. Kofi Taha is not so different from the pictures in the newspapers from 1989 and '90 and '91 and '92, but he wears glasses now, and his hair is gray.

“I’m alone in my room on the day of inauguration,” he recalls, “trying to do some reading, in fact, for upcoming courses, and two women come knocking on my door” – he knocks on the table – “and they say, ‘Could you please come and talk to these students upstairs? They’re about to do something crazy, and they might listen to you.’”

The five students upstairs – Sean Sharp '92, David Payne '92, Matt Nelson '93, Chris Doyle '93 and Conrad Powell '93 – had been planning the inaugural protest since the summertime, and they had discussed kidnapping President Chace or handcuffing President Chace or knocking President Chace aside and handcuffing themselves to the podium. But on September 23<sup>rd</sup> it was raining and they needed a new plan entirely.

Bobby Donaldson '93 helped to formulate and organize the protest during his first couple weeks at Wesleyan. Donaldson is now a Professor of History and African American Studies at the University of South Carolina and a trustee of Wesleyan. I spoke to him during a break from Wesleyan board meetings. As Professor Donaldson recalls, he had invited himself to a preliminary meeting in September at the Malcolm X House – the Center for African American Studies and a residential dormitory –



with a number of other young, black men. “All I remember was that there was this kind of *consensus* that the inauguration was this pivotal moment. *How* the details came together I don’t remember, but I do remember this sense that if there’s a moment to push the political questions forward, the inauguration would be it.” However, the knot of students was without a concrete list of concerns or demands on the morning of the inauguration.

Enter Kofi Taha. “It was clear to me that this was a perfect example of how message was going to be overshadowed by method,” recalls Taha. “I said, ‘Why don’t we write down what it is we want? What is it that we feel like the president is coming here to do?’”

Beyond divestment, the protestors ultimately demanded that the University upgrade the African-American Studies Program to a Department, increase the number of faculty members of color on campus, provide sensitivity training on issues of race for Public Safety officers, and complete a comprehensive study of race relations on campus. All of this was in the hastily composed letter they handed to the president only a few hours later in the midst of his inaugural address.

The protestors wanted, says Taha, to stir up interest. They wanted the audience to wonder: “Why the hell are these students standing over here? What is *that* about? This is ‘Diversity University’ . . . Why are black students standing over there in the corner and then they leave in a couple of minutes? What did they give Chace?”

Faculty and administrators were nonplussed. “I thought it was particularly foolish,” recalls Nat Greene. “I saw no reason for it whatsoever. That’s how I felt at the time and I still do. It was *theatre*,” he says, leaning back in his chair.

Fellow students had mixed reactions to the protest that Taha, Donaldson, and their peers organized. Freshman Absolom Massie, who called himself a “concerned activist on racial issues,” wrote a letter to the editor of the *Argus* – a “Wespeak” – applauding the six protestors. Their chosen method, he wrote, was appropriate and acceptable, “done to remind the king that the kingdom which he has inherited is not without spot or wrinkle.”

Printed below Massie’s letter was one from freshman William Howell, who took an opposed stance. He entitled it “Stop Everything! I have something to say...I think.” Howell felt the protesters were ill-informed – three of them, he noted, were freshmen like him and so had only been on campus a few short weeks – and ill-prepared. “Instead of raising their left fists wearing a black glove as was done in the 1968 Olympics, they rose their right arms,” Howell noted, a mistake he felt was representative of the greater “carelessness” they exhibited and which undermined their protest. William Howell is now the Sydney Stein Professor in American Politics and the Co-Director of the Program on Political Institutions at the Harris School of Public Policy at the University of Chicago. He wasn’t actually *there*, at the inauguration, he admits to me over the telephone, but remembers seeing pictures in the *Argus* that prompted his letter. “To have your first move be one of protest and not engagement struck me as misguided,” he explains.

The six protestors responded to Howell in an angry letter published in the next edition of the campus paper, giving definitive responses to each of his criticisms. “It is clear that Tommie Smith the gold medalist, raised his right fist [during the 1968 Olympics],” they wrote, “while John Carlos, the bronze medalist, raised his left.” “In

their egotism,” wrote the protestors, “many white males tend to believe it’s their divine right to understand and evaluate any political action, that somehow their opinion can validate or invalidate that action.”

I read the protestors’ response letter aloud to Professor Howell over the telephone, and he becomes momentarily quiet. “I’m struck by that,” he says, “If someone were to say that to me now, I would be really offended.” He considers the response “deeply anti-intellectual.”

With the exception of Taha, all of the inaugural protestors would graduate from Wesleyan. Chris Doyle is currently a project manager at an environmental consulting firm in New York and “respectfully declines at this time to provide any information” about what happened at Wesleyan that year. David Payne did not return my messages. Matt Nelson is an orthopedic surgeon in Beckley, West Virginia, and according to his secretary is “pretty much always” in surgery and so unavailable to answer questions about the inaugural protest. Conrad Powell lives in Jamaica, where he has established a law practice. Sean Sharp is a DJ at Webster Hall in New York and agreed to speak with me by phone.

There was “some quality of life stuff,” that incited the activist spirit in Mr. Sharp that fall, he tells me. “Like, being black students . . . when we were going to the gym we would get carded twice, and white students could just walk in.” He tells me that he and Matt Nelson had been pulled over and questioned by a Public Safety officer in the summer before the protest, while they were driving around campus to find their new dorm assignments. (Ultimately, both Sharp and Nelson filed

complaints against the officer, William Petras III. Petras was cleared after an internal investigation. Head of Public Safety Harry Kinne found that while Petras “did not follow protocol in confronting the students, his actions and statements during the incident were not racially motivated.”)

As for divestment, Mr. Sharp felt it just didn’t make sense that the University – often referred to by students and members of the press alike as “Diversity University” – wouldn’t divest completely. “Wesleyan was supposed to be the place where, you know, everybody sort of got along, where they respected, you know, African Americans, they respected black people globally.”

Kofi Taha echoes this sentiment. “I thought that [full divestment] was a responsible thing for Wesleyan to do if it was going to continue to purport the values that it purports and to invite students from diverse backgrounds to be a part of that community,” says Taha, and he shrugs.

\* \* \*

By October of 1989, when Helen Suzman came to speak, Wesleyan’s investments in companies doing business in South Africa had been reduced to one firm.

“Johnson and Johnson,” says Matt Reed ’91. He turns to his wife, Amy Randall ’89, and taps his forehead, smirking. “You see this? Twenty years . . .” We are sitting in their living room in Santa Clara late at night. Their two children and black cat, Malcolm, are asleep. Amy is a Professor of History and Gender Studies at

UCSC – on whose campus the Randall-Reeds reside – and Matt evaluates nonprofit social programs in Oakland. Twenty years ago Matt Reed had long, blonde hair and was regularly mistaken for a woman. He was the leader – “on paper,” he insists – of DivestNow and the South African Action Group in 1989-1990, and he knew the address of the Johnson and Johnson clinic in Elizabethtown by heart. He denies the assumptions of professors like Richard Elphick that Wesleyan students were simply misinformed and often confused about the nuances of the University’s divestment policy, as does his wife. “I would say that that was their excuse,” says Amy. She turns to Matt, “Don’t you think that was just an excuse not to listen?”

Matt and Amy and students like them had done extensive research in 1989, and they felt that Wesleyan’s “constructive” or “productive” engagement with the apartheid state missed the point entirely. Their problem with Helen Suzman, explains Matt Reed, was very simple. “We felt very strongly that the University did not need to bring in, you know, what we would’ve called an ‘accommodationist’ speaker.”

Despite her staunch opposition to the apartheid system and despite her friendship with Nelson Mandela, Helen Suzman was a figure of some controversy in the 1980s, particularly among pro-divestment activists. Not only had she long worked within a parliamentary system that many like Matt Reed considered “untenable and illegitimate,” but she had consistently stressed the potential effectiveness of that system over what she called the “folly” of economic sanctions.

In a 1989 interview with PBS NewsHour given shortly before her trip to Wesleyan, Helen Suzman explained to anchor Robert MacNeil her view that economic sanctions on South Africa were “counterproductive.” “I don’t believe that

reducing the economy to a wasteland and causing massive unemployment in South Africa is a positive step,” she said. The sanctions would undermine trade unions – which she considered the “strongest weapon that black people, presently anyway, can use” – and would be, she repeated, “counterproductive.”

Because Helen Suzman’s opinions on divestment were analogous to those of the Wesleyan Board of Trustees, students considered her visit to campus in the fall of 1989 suspect. “Suzman’s *presence* was not an accident,” asserts Kofi Taha, raising his eyebrows. “We felt she was being brought specifically to counter this dialogue for this movement.”

“There was no strategy,” maintains Bill Chace, shaking his head in his living room, “Zero.”

“What I remember is: we were bringing the most impressive liberal voice to Wesleyan,” affirms Professor Elphick, crossing his legs in his office, “the *only* woman in the South African Parliament, the *only* true liberal in the South African Parliament, the only *Jew* in the South African Parliament. But those things were not good enough for Wesleyan radical students,” he says, and he laughs a hard, dry laugh.

The anti-Suzman cause was in large part championed by the black South African community on campus. There were a dozen black South African students at Wesleyan during the 1989-1990 school year. Professor Elphick had facilitated their exchange with the University of Cape Town, and his wife, Esther, took them to buy toiletries and other necessities when they first arrived and settled them into their housing. But by October, the views of the black South Africans on campus were at

odds with Elphick's. "If you know about South African history," explains Professor Elphick, crossing his arms over his short-sleeved button-up, "you know that by the stage we have reached, the South African system is in crisis and blacks were no longer impressed by the Helen Suzmans of this world, or liberals, generally speaking."

According to Kofi Taha, who, as co-editor of the *Ankh*, Wesleyan's Tri-Minority Council newspaper, was already recognized as a leading activist on campus, a number of black South African students approached him in advance of Helen Suzman's appearance. They were anxious about her influence, and Taha helped to publicize their concerns. The first *Ankh* of the 1989 school year read "SUZMAN GO HOME!" across the top, and contained a statement from the South African Wesleyan Community. "In light of our personal experience of the South African situation," they wrote, "we ask of you not to be blinded by a seemingly impressive resume of Ms. Suzman." They wrote that in Helen Suzman's 36 years in Parliament, the status of the black and coloured people of South Africa remained unaffected. "White opposition politics in parliament against white domination has proved to be a purposeless activity," they wrote.

Helen Suzman expected this. In her 1993 autobiography, *In No Uncertain Terms: A South African Memoir*, Suzman writes that she was usually welcomed warmly onto college campuses, but that when she was on occasion "assailed," it was almost invariably by black South Africans living abroad. It had happened at Wesleyan University in Connecticut, she wrote.

She wrote that she had been surprised, however, at the “gross” distortions of her remarks by student activists who distributed flyers and pamphlets around the campus before she arrived.

The fliers and pamphlets, distributed over the weekend before Helen Suzman spoke at Wesleyan, painted her a racist and an apologist for apartheid. “HELEN SUZMAN: THE TRUTH,” read one flier, and it disputed “myth” after myth about the former parliamentarian.

“We may not have done a service to her with the quotes,” admits Matt Reed. He admits that he and others may have taken her words out of context. “We sort of pushed to mine pieces, yes.”

Helen Suzan arrived at Wesleyan on Monday, October 9, 1989. She was brought to campus as a Baldwin Fellow – a nationally and internationally known figure in public affairs, the responsibilities of which were to meet with students and faculty and to ultimately deliver an address. On Monday night members of DivestNow and the South African Action group rallied in protest of Suzman’s presence outside of South College, the administrative building housing the president’s office.

A flyer distributed by DivestNow at the Monday night rally instructed its members to wear black and a red ribbon on their right arm to Suzman’s Tuesday night address “as a show of solidarity,” and to get to the venue, Wesleyan’s Cinema, forty five minutes early “to pack the room.” 60 students arrived in the designated



uniform at 7:15 on Tuesday night. At 8 PM the Cinema was deemed too crowded and so Helen Suzman's address was moved to Wesleyan's dilapidated Chapel.

Professor Elphick escorted Suzman to the Chapel and onto the dais. He recalls that there were some older people from surrounding Middletown sitting toward the rear and that they clapped as he walked her up the aisle. Student protestors sat toward the front of the Chapel and were decidedly silent. Professor Elphick refers to them now as "fascists" and then corrects himself: "students *behaving* like fascists." He pauses. "Of course they weren't fascists for the most part." He pauses again. "Maybe one or two."

Mid-introduction, President Chace was interrupted by shouts of "FIFTY STILL OUTSIDE!" from the back of the Chapel. The fifty protestors who had not made it into the Chapel pounded on the doors and shouted "LET US IN! LET US IN!" President Chace let them in to sit on the stage behind him and Suzman, the only remaining room in the building.

In her speech, "Can South Africa Reform? Prospects After P.W. Botha," Suzman denied that she had ever claimed to have a mandate to speak for the black people of South Africa, as some of the leaflets distributed around campus had said. "Disgusting distortions," she called them. She acknowledged that both Nelson Mandela and Archbishop Desmond Tutu supported economic sanctions, while she did not. But she also argued, as she had to PBS NewsHour's Robert MacNeil, that turning South Africa into an "economic wasteland" would solve nothing.

Suzman was harangued and harassed by the student protestors throughout. President Chace recalls that the "crowning" – he corrects himself – "most dramatic"

moment came when she was fed up and confronted a mixed-race South African student in the middle of his diatribe. “What is your name?” Suzman asked him – according to Chace, “like a schoolmarm.” When the student told her his name, she said to him, “I know your brother!” The student, Chace recalls, was visibly embarrassed, but Suzman was not through. “You know better than that!” she said to him, “You know much better than that, young man,” and she told him to sit down and listen to her speech. He did so.

The question and answer portion of Suzman’s address was dominated by a group of male students dressed all in white, Kofi Taha, Sean Sharp and Matt Reed among them. (They wore white, according to Taha, because they had worn black during the inaugural protest and were wary of being “pigeon-holed.”) They demanded that President Chace outline his views on divestment for the audience. “We have sat here for over an hour” one of the young men dressed in white declared, “listening to this woman throw out rhetoric, telling us how she wants to change South Africa. Mr. Chace can you come up here and tell me what you are going to do?” President Chace declined. He told the young man dressed in white that this wasn’t the time or the place or the audience. “The evening is now over,” President Chace announced, and he took Helen Suzman back to his home.

“I remember pouring her a drink and saying, ‘That was difficult,’” recalls Chace. Helen Suzman was unconcerned. “Let me tell you what they used to say about me in *Parliament!*” She told him. Chace notes that when Helen Suzman returned from a visit to Connecticut College the following day, she said it was “so boring” compared to Wesleyan.

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Helen Suzman emerged from her visit to Wesleyan “virtually unscathed,” according to President Chace. “She was *marvelously* unperturbed,” he recalls with a smile. Indeed, Suzman’s recollection of her visit and address takes up only a quarter of a page in her autobiography. But the Wesleyan student community continued to debate her visit for weeks after. “The air doesn’t change very much” at a school like Wesleyan, Bill Chace explains to me now. “It is a provincial place.”

The next edition of the campus publication *Hermes* – Wesleyan’s Magazine of “Political, Critical, and Creative Thought” – included a critical article by Christopher Tshivhase, “Suzman: The Reality Behind the Rhetoric,” claiming that Suzman’s speech “merely contained a list of systematic and sophisticated attempts by the South African government to sugar-coat the apartheid system.”

Chris Carlisle, a senior, published an op-ed in the *Argus* “In Search of Toleration” on October 13<sup>th</sup>. He suggested that “all those who think free speech should be tailored to liberal oppression should go to Tufts,” which had only recently repealed a policy banning offensive T-Shirts from residence hall lounges. “Wesleyan liberals of course have no need of such a policy,” Carlisle wrote, “They already know how to make moral lepers out of any who would dare wear a Reagan/Bush shirt, drink a Coors beer, or question the strategy of divestment.”

Helen Suzman's chief student defender was freshman Andrew Hazlett. Hazlett was a contributing writer to the *Wesleyan Review*, a neoconservative campus publication developed in the likeness of the *Dartmouth Review* and likewise funded by the national neoconservative organization, the Madison Center for Educational Affairs. The MCEA was founded by neoconservative intellectual Irving Kristol and former Treasury Secretary William Simon to finance conservative research and conservative student publications. Now defunct,<sup>2</sup> the MCEA awarded grants annually totaling \$200,000 in support of approximately 70 conservative college student publications. Hazlett embraced the neoconservative stance. "He was a total *vocal* right-winger, who was just targeted by everyone," says a friend of his, Paul D'Arcy '93, now a software executive in Austin. Bobby Donaldson suspects he may have been one of few black students that actually talked to Hazlett – "because we were hall mates," he explains.

Hazlett had met with Helen Suzman in the afternoon before her Chapel address. His "In Defense of Helen Suzman" appeared in the October 1989 Edition of the *Wesleyan Review*, alongside an editorial, also by Hazlett, praising "the heroic Ayn Rand," and an essay by contributor Kristian Dahl "reconsidering Roe." In defense of Helen Suzman, Hazlett criticized what he called the "tunnel vision ideology" of his classmates, likening them to "naughty third graders."

Peter Paris '92 wrote a *Wespeak* in *The Argus* in response to Hazlett's article, condemning the *Wesleyan Review* as an "Example of Modern Racism." In his *Wespeak*, Paris, who is mixed-race, advised Hazlett, who is white, "to watch your

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<sup>2</sup> The Center was absorbed into the Hudson Institute in 2000.

proverbial step when you decide to take on and insult virtually the entire black community on this campus.” Paris’ op-ed continued: “Mr. Hazlett, *The Wesleyan Review*, and those who condone this type of thought, know this: you are my and many of my comrades’ enemies. I see you only as that and will treat you as such.”

Peter Paris is now a real estate attorney in Iselin, New Jersey. Sitting across from me in a Ruby Tuesday’s on the New Jersey Turnpike, he reads over the letter he wrote more than twenty years ago. “Yeah it really pissed me off,” he says of Hazlett’s essay, dropping the letter back onto the table. “And then I went to my mailbox a couple of days later and somebody had put in my mailbox this anonymous note.” The note was signed by an organization calling itself “The Majority Committee Against Abuse of Free Speech.” It informed Paris that he did not belong on the same planet as Helen Suzman, and that if “Mr. Hazlett” was his enemy, the Committee was his enemy, too. “And I am much more dangerous an adversary. So you beware!”

Andrew Hazlett suggested it might have been sent by a friend of Peter’s hoping to make Paris “and his comrades” look better. “I guess you’d call it a frame,” said Hazlett in an *Argus* interview, “I’ve heard of some extreme elements doing that sometimes.” Hazlett subsequently received almost twenty obscene and threatening phone calls. “Some messages were delivered in what Hazlett said he could only describe as exaggerated ‘black’ vernacular by a man who said, ‘I be Leroy,’” reported the same article in the December 12<sup>th</sup> *Argus*.

Paris recalls finding out who Andrew Hazlett was shortly thereafter. “He ended up being this meek young guy who never had . . . you know,” he shrugs and laughs and finishes his hamburger.

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The Wesleyan Board of Trustees did not vote to fully divest from South Africa until June 2, 1990 – after the Admissions office was occupied on January 26<sup>th</sup>, after the president’s office was firebombed on April 7<sup>th</sup>, after shots were fired off of Foss Hill on April 25<sup>th</sup> and after eleven students went on a hunger strike for nine days in May.

For months, trustee meetings were interrupted by screaming, angry students. President Chace recites a string of obscenities they shouted at him: ‘You dirty motherfucker,’ you know, and things like that. ‘Bloodthirsty bastard.’” Matt Reed organized a flag burning in February of 1990 to resurrect what he described to the *Argus* as “the conspicuously dormant campus divestment movement.” Chace responded in the same article that the University’s “infinitesimal” holdings in South Africa were “not the most important nor even close to an important issue” for Wesleyan.

“It was as if you had this one remaining *sore* on your body,” says Chace now, staring at his living room ceiling, “and your body was otherwise pure and clean, but you had this one remaining sore.” He recalls strongly urging the Board to divest from Johnson and Johnson and thus “clear the air.” “I said, ‘This will strike many of you as

a doctrine of expediency . . . but, ultimately, Wesleyan University is not going to be able to *match* the affairs of South Africa.” He later refers to the amount of time that year spent discussing the issue as a “grossly inefficient use of energy.”

Years later some of the students who participated in the protest of Helen Suzman would express some regret. “I Smearred Helen Suzman” Brian Shott ‘90 wrote to New America Media on January 3, 2009, shortly after Suzman death. “I remember editing articles that attacked Suzman, of whom I had never heard,” Shott admits. He calls what he and other students did to discredit Helen Suzman “despicable.”

Matt Reed, on the other hand, feels that whatever criticism might be made of the actions of student protestors, ultimately he and the other student activists were justified. “I think the vindication was that the isolation [of South Africa] – the total isolation, if that was possible – was what facilitated the transition” to a post-apartheid state.

As for Helen Suzman, Reed thinks they did her a favor, and his wife Amy agrees. “If anything we did her a great service,” he says, “because she probably had . . .” “ . . . Our attention,” says Amy, finishing his sentence and chuckling. “600 students instead of 150 who showed up to hear what she had to say.”

Kofi Taha feels less confident. “I feel like we could’ve been more respectful, I’ll put it that way,” he says, staring at the table between us. “I think we definitely crossed some lines. Even in my publication that I was editing, to have something like ‘SUZMAN GO HOME’ was . . .” he pauses, searching. “. . . disrespectful.”

Taha feels that the protest of Helen Suzman, even more than the inaugural protest that preceded it, was a good example of how he and other student activists like him were “*emerging* in our understanding of how to have the kind of complicated conversations that we wanted to have, and not having the means to do it.” By his own account that struggle would characterize the student activism he helped lead over the subsequent seven months.

Richard Elphick was deeply hurt by what occurred on the night Helen Suzman lectured at Wesleyan. “I say the thing was sufficiently traumatic for me I actually applied for a job somewhere else,” says Professor Elphick. “It was the only time I’ve ever done that, because I really thought this tradition at Wesleyan – this crazy student tradition – I’ve had it. But in fact,” he says, glancing at the bookshelves behind his desk, “I hadn’t had it. It was a moment of despair – *unjustifiable* despair – but it’s probably clouded my memory.”



## CHAPTER TWO

How people remember the 1989-1990 school year twenty-two years later is colored primarily by what they knew or heard of Kofi Taha and Nick Haddad, who were sophomores. Neither graduated from Wesleyan. Taha, suspended in 1991, completed his undergraduate degree at Columbia University eight years later, and Haddad, shot in Hartford in the summer of 1990, was killed before he turned 21.

Kofi Taha is currently based in Cambridge, Massachusetts, but, as the Associate Director of MIT's "D-Lab," travels regularly to rural communities in the developing world to advise community members on ways they might invent new devices out of the materials of their everyday life. The goal, he explained to the MIT News Office, is to get them to "take that expertise you have, and develop a tool that helps you to do it better."

The general understanding among his former Wesleyan classmates and professors is that Taha is – or was, as a 19 year-old – charismatic and sometimes intimidating. "He's *very* hostile, just generally," says his first-year advisor Anne Greene. Friends of Taha would agree that he was "angry," but they remember him as "serious" more than anything else. Kofi Taha is still charismatic and sometimes intimidating. He is tall and broad-shouldered and handsome, as he was at 19, but now with graying hair and glasses.

Taha takes me to a conference room in the D-Lab offices for our interview. He fills up his chair and covers the small table with his hands when he gestures. He speaks quietly.

Taha was raised, like many of his classmates, in New York – in the Bronx. His mother is white and his father is black and both were political before and while they raised children. Taha’s mother was involved in the Women’s Movement and his father from the Depression through the 1960s in community economic development work that aimed to create opportunities for New York’s neglected neighborhoods. Though the family was at times on welfare, Kofi – one of three siblings – earned a scholarship to Fieldston, a preparatory school in Riverdale that was then and remains now a “feeder” to Wesleyan. Taha had intended to go to college in California until his mother was diagnosed with breast cancer in 1988. Taha decided to remain on the east coast and attend Wesleyan, about which he didn’t know much.

During his freshman year – 1988-1989 – Taha was politically more “observant” than active. He took some interest in the divestment movement, but was focused on his mother’s health, and on navigating a long-distance relationship with his girlfriend.

But the summer of 1989 was a tumultuous one, a “very *hot* and difficult summer in New York,” explains Taha. Only a short week or two before Taha arrived on the Wesleyan campus for his sophomore year, 16-year old Yusuf Hawkins was shot to death on August 23<sup>rd</sup> in the Bensonhurst neighborhood of Brooklyn. Hawkins and three friends were attacked by a mob of between thirty and forty young white men who believed – mistakenly – that Hawkins was dating a local white girl.

Hawkins’ killing was but the most recent in a string of incendiary examples of racial violence and conflict that for years defined the city in which Taha grew up. In 1986, Michael Griffith, a twenty-three year old African-American man, was assaulted

by a mob of young white men in Howard Beach, Queens, and chased onto the Belt Parkway, where he was struck by a car and killed. The same year, Tawana Brawley, a fifteen-year old African-American girl living in the New York suburb of Wappingers Falls received national media attention when she accused six white men – some of them police officers – of abducting and raping her, smearing her body with feces and writing “bitch” and “nigger” on her skin in coal. Despite public advocacy from Civil Rights activists like Rev. Al Sharpton, Jr., a Grand Jury report dismissed Brawley’s allegations. Evidence was brought forward suggesting that she had fabricated the attack to avoid a punishment from her stepfather. The atmosphere of anger and mistrust that year was only intensified by the trial and ultimate acquittal of Bernie Goetz, who had become a figure of public controversy when he shot four black teenagers on a subway in 1984 and claimed they had been about to mug him. Two years later, in the spring of 1989, tensions were further heightened by the brutal rape of the “Central Park Jogger” and the subsequent prosecution and conviction of five black or Hispanic teenagers who were later revealed to have made false confessions under duress.

Surrounding these events, moreover, were the city’s continuing crime wave and drug wars, the frequent complaints against police brutality, and the political atmosphere encouraged by Mayor Ed Koch, who appealed to a political base of middle class white voters by emphasizing “law-and-order” and “quality-of-life” issues. But the tensions in New York City during the 1980s were in some ways merely symptomatic of the larger American political context. The 1980’s were an era of conservatism in American politics, solidified by the presidencies of Ronald Reagan

and George H.W. Bush, who had each sought to limit or reverse government policies aimed at redressing racial injustice. Both employed what Roy Wilkins, executive director of the NAACP from 1964 until 1977, termed “Smiling Racism”: a thinly veiled campaign to demonize African-Americans and cast them as parasites who were stealing from hard-working, decent, middle-class white Americans.

Ted Shaw was a member of Wesleyan’s Board of Trustees during the 1989-1990 school year and worked for the NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund, of which he would eventually become president and director-counsel. He is now a Professor of Professional Practice in Law at Columbia Law School. “Those were difficult times,” he says of Reagan’s deftly managed politics of racial resentment. “He knew exactly what he was saying and to whom he was appealing and to whom he was not appealing,” Ronald Reagan, according to Shaw, “as popular as [his administration] was with many Americans – and there were those conservatives and in particular, Republicans who idolized Ronald Reagan – he was not idolized within the black community or the Civil Rights community.”

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Kofi Taha published a poem called “You Are Not Alone” in the fall 1989 edition of the *Ankh* and dedicated it to Yusuf Hawkins. He felt frustrated with and confused by the seeming complacency of his classmates. In an op-ed published in the campus newspaper in late October, 1989, Taha complained about what he called “educated ignorance at Wesleyan.” He bemoaned the shortcomings of Wesleyan’s

“bleached” curriculum and predicted the decline of its commitment to the use of education against racial injustice. “So while the [African American Studies House] is dismantled,” he wrote, “four year-old children, when shown pictures of a black person and a white person, will continue to describe the black person as ‘dirty’ and the white person as ‘clean.’”

“Yeah, that was a big one,” he says now, looking over a hard copy of the editorial more than twenty years after he wrote it. He tosses the paper back onto the table. “I wrote things that were inartful,” Taha says, simply, but he denies that he was in any way motivated by racial animosity. He looks at me, raising his eyebrows behind his glasses, “My mother’s white. You know what I’m saying?” He laughs, “Like, the idea that I didn’t like white people is ridiculous.”

Peter Paris ’92 was a friend of Taha’s at Wesleyan. “Kofi was a mixed race guy like me,” he explains, contemplating the Ruby Tuesday’s menu, “and at a place like Wesleyan, especially for mixed race people, you’re always faced with a stark choice. You either have to be with the black community or the black community would kind of reject you.” He pauses. “And I think that a lot of us took that and kind of went a little overboard on it.”

Paris describes to me what he calls the “Malcolm X dichotomy versus the King dichotomy” of political activists on campus. “Not that these are legitimate extremes,” he adds, “but that’s how it got played out. Malcolm X-type guys would *do* something,” he says, “whereas others would just sit around and talk about it or try to work within the system and be naïve in that way.”

Malcolm X was experiencing a national revival as a symbol of black radicalism in the years when Paris and Taha were students at Wesleyan. Throughout the 1980s, Malcolm X's name was ever-present in the lyrics of the politically charged hip-hop group Public Enemy, and his likeness on T-shirts. Baseball hats with the letter 'X' prominently displayed were also very popular. This "Malcolmania" was, according to Adolph L. Reed Jr. in his 1999 book *Stirrings in the Jug*, caused by the absence of legitimate black leaders in the United States in the 1980s. Young African-American people, according to Reed, were thus inclined to seek out an "insubstantial" image of Malcolm X as an alternative. Reed's theory was supported even by his sometime critic Cornel West, who warned of the threat of "Nihilism in Black America" and the "Crisis of Black Leadership."

The appeal of Malcolm X was not lost on the members of the Wesleyan community, particularly young black men drawn to the vision of activism and manliness with which Malcolm X was often associated at the time. Indeed, the most vocal activists during the 1989-1990 school year were male. For this reason, according to faculty and students alike, the political voice of the African-American student body was not shaped that year in its official student organization, Ujamaa, the leadership of which was primarily women. Instead, the political epicenter was physically located in the brick Greek-revival mansion at 345 High Street – the Malcolm X House, where both Kofi Taha and Peter Paris lived.

The Malcolm X House remains both the Center for African American Studies and a residential dorm for students dedicated to the exploration and celebration of the cultural heritage of the African Diaspora. Because it is at the corner of the Wesleyan

campus – past the Center for the Arts and the past the Health Center – many of its current residents got low picks in the annual housing lottery, but twenty years ago the “X House” was the social and political center for Wesleyan’s African American community. The dorm and the associated CAAS had been created two decades earlier as the result of a preceding generation’s political activism.

In order to implement a larger African-American presence at Wesleyan in light of the ongoing Civil Rights Movement, twenty-five black students were accepted to Wesleyan in the fall of 1965, thirteen of whom ultimately accepted and became the fully-integrated Vanguard Class of 1969. Members of the class established a Reading Group in 1966 to discuss black intellectual works, and an Afro-American Society was founded in 1968. When the University administration denied their request for classes to be cancelled in recognition of the fourth anniversary of Malcolm X’s assassination, over 100 African-American Wesleyan students (and Middletown residents) took over Fisk Hall on February 21, 1969. The protestors demanded, among other things, the establishment of a residential dorm that fostered programs as an integral part of the black community at Wesleyan. What was the John Wesley Building was renamed the Malcolm X House because the students refused to call it anything else.

Bobby Donaldson ’93 recalls “these caucuses of black men” who would meet at X House throughout 1989-1990 school year to discuss philosophy, sports, and politics. Donaldson was not within the inner circle of the upperclassmen of color he idolized – students like Kofi Taha, Jay Ford ’90, and Laurie Harrison ’90 – mostly,

Donaldson says, because, unlike those students, he was not from New York, but he spent time at the Malcolm X House regardless. He was involved in the discussions at X House to plan the inaugural protest in September. Donaldson also recalls visits from prominent alumni to the House that year, though he is unsure whether they were “dispatched” by the university or came of their own accord. “We used to have meetings with them in the House about the history of protest on campus, and things we could do differently.”

Wesleyan students were struggling with the “right” protest methods the whole school year long. According to both Donaldson and Kofi Taha, student activists in 1989-1990 were attempting to fit themselves into a legacy of Civil Rights activism whose applicability to the crisis of the present moment was not entirely clear. “We were trying to think about the past, all of the sacrifice that got us into that position, and where we were going,” explains Taha.

Taha was frustrated, however, that the gains of previous generations of activists – including the Vanguard Class of 1969 – did not seem to be valued at Wesleyan. African-American Studies, which first began to offer an academic major in 1983, remained an academic Program in 1989, as it had been since its creation. Unlike full-fledged academic departments, it faced limits on its influence in the hiring and promotion of faculty. Furthermore, in the two years prior to the 1989-1990 academic year, Wesleyan had experienced a mass-exodus of black faculty. Six of eleven of Wesleyan’s African-American tenured or tenure-track faculty left the University between 1988 and 1990. Four faculty members resigned and one died. One, the political scientist Jerry Watts, was denied tenure, twice.



Jerry Watts is now a Professor of English, Sociology, and American Studies at the City University of New York Graduate Center, where he also directs the Institute for Research on the African Diaspora in the Americas and the Caribbean (IRADAC). A PhD student in his office, Allan Takeall, seems surprised to see me. “Jerry comes in . . . when he comes in,” Allan says simply. When Professor Watts arrives he bustles me into his large, disarrayed office. Professor Watts is a rotund man in a sweater vest and small, tortoiseshell glasses. His voice is low and raspy, and he often takes long pauses to look at the ceiling and to purse his lips underneath his mustache.

Professor Watts tells me he arrived at Wesleyan in 1984 through a joint appointment in the African American Studies Program and the Government Department. “And I immediately fell in love with the students,” he tells me. “They pushed me into doing much more activism than I’d *ever* done, and they fundamentally, like, *altered* me.” Professor Watts smiles. “It was stuff I’d never seen before, like these . . . *kiss-ins*.” Kiss-ins? “Yeah, where gay men and lesbians would *kiss* all in front of the parents who were doing tours. I was *assigned* to read some statement while they were” – he laughs – “*scandalizing* the visitors.”

Professor Watts was extremely popular. Alums remember hordes of students seeking him out after classes. “Jerry used to be, like, up against a wall,” recalls Phillipa Rizopoulos ’92, laughing, “trying to crawl his way out of class and, like, *get away*.” He was a mentor to many black students in particular – a sounding board for their frustrations and concerns at majority-white Wesleyan.

Watts was first denied tenure on February 10, 1989 by a 5-2 vote of the Advisory Committee of the Academic Council (Wesleyan's equivalent of a campus-wide Tenure-and-Promotion committee), but when a campus controversy erupted, he was granted a two-year contract extension. On April 3, 1990, Watts announced that he was leaving Wesleyan to accept a position at Trinity College in Hartford. "I'm leaving in protest of my treatment at Wesleyan," he told the *Argus*. "Race is a factor in all of this," he said, "because it's encoded in much of Wesleyan's attitudes that somehow, as an Afro-American, I should be thankful for just being here." The Government Department subsequently voted down a motion to appeal the Advisory Committee's decision. On April 13<sup>th</sup>, the *Argus* published a letter written by Peter Paris and Kofi Taha entitled "Watts' Resignation Cannot Be Met With Apathy." "Professor Watts is leaving specifically and only because President Chace and his administration have ignored the needs of black professors," Taha and Paris wrote, as well as "the need for minority faculty recruitment, and the need for stability and expansion of the Center for Afro-American Studies." The letter aspired to be a call to action: "The Center for Afro-American Studies is dying, and our president's hands are bloody. We will not stand by and watch!"

Two decades later, Kofi Taha is less certain about this letter than about any other actions he took that year. "*Here* is a great example of how we were jumping in *way* over our head and the administration probably had grounds to say 'You guys don't know what you're talking about,'" Kofi Taha acknowledges in retrospect. "None of us know anything about tenure, right? So Jerry's like, 'I got denied tenure!' but Jerry didn't mention, 'Oh, I didn't publish my book.'"

Professor Watts thinks the decisions surrounding his tenure case may have had to do with his outspoken nature – he refers to several incidents when colleagues attempted to “censure” him. In years previous to 1989-1990, Watts had caused discomfort on campus when he drew attention to the fact that an administrative official had used a racist term while recruiting an African-American professorial candidate, and he had been a vocal opponent of the University’s reluctance to fully divest from South Africa. But, according to the Professor J. Donald Moon, a colleague of Watts’ in the Government Department, the vote not to appeal his tenure case in 1990, at least, was very simple. “We requested from him a current curriculum vitae so that we knew what his record to that point was . . . and he declined to give us his vitae. It doesn’t seem to be an affirmative action issue,” muses Professor Moon, “I didn’t think we could move forward in bringing somebody up for tenure on the basis of a record that was not” – he chuckles – “available to us.”

Regardless, in an open letter released in the spring of 1990, the faculty of the African American Studies program condemned the loss of so many black professors. “The message communicated to both faculty and students alike is that members of the African-American faculty are interchangeable and expendable, as long as a ‘critical mass’ exists for reporting purposes,” they wrote.

African-American students felt similarly about their own place at Wesleyan. “We would say this frequently: don’t fool yourself, you’re not here *just* because it is valuable to educate you,” says Kofi Taha. “Your intrinsic value to Wesleyan as an institution is that we are diversifying the educational experience of white students.” Some politically engaged white students acknowledge some insensitivity on

Wesleyan's part towards their classmates of color. Kim Frederick '93, who teaches history at Concord Academy, a private school in Massachusetts, recalls her frustration with the institution's ideological inconsistencies. "There were all these promises of, oh, Wesleyan is Diversity University . . . and then it's like white-middle-upper-class-o-rama." She recalls feeling disgusted that Wesleyan treated black students as "showpieces."

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By the start of the spring 1990 semester, students and faculty alike recognized Kofi Taha as a prominent political figure on campus. "If there was a young black radical," says Bobby Donaldson in hindsight, Kofi Taha "was the face of it." Not only had he been instrumental in organizing the protest at Chace's inaugural in September and the protest of Helen Suzman in October, he had also been a leader in a takeover of the Admissions office in January, when a group of fifty students staged a "peaceful demonstration" on the third floor of North College on January 26<sup>th</sup> and then went on to threaten to destroy the admissions files. He was on the coordinating committee of Ujamaa and a member of Wesleyan's Student Budget Committee. He was consistently vocal about his antipathy towards Wesleyan's administration, submitting a number of letters to the *Argus* during the 1989-1990 school year.

"Bill," Taha calls the president, now, shaking his head and laughing, "My man Bill . . ." Kofi Taha and Bill Chace first met about a month after Taha had participated in the protest of Chace's inauguration. The six inaugural protestors had

already sat down with Deans Janina Montero and Michael Young on September 30<sup>th</sup> to discuss the demands they had made in their letter to President Chace. “It felt very much like the lackeys were sent to deal with the students,” recalls Kofi, who made similar comments to the school newspaper at the time. When a meeting was eventually orchestrated between the inaugural protestors and Chace at the Malcolm X House on October 13<sup>th</sup>, the president was greeted by thirty more students lining the entry hall with their fists raised, creating a tunnel through which President Chace walked to meet the six protestors. The meeting lasted only twenty minutes. Chace was given a tour of the Malcolm X House dormitories and the Center for African American Studies and was shown needed repairs.

“The entire tenor of the relationship was two folks who feel like the other doesn’t respect them,” explains Taha of his interactions with President Chace that fall and for the remainder of the year. “And that was *fine* with me.”

Bill Chace echoes this sentiment. “I’d seen, we’ll call it, a ‘Kofi Taha’ before, at Stanford,” President Chace tells me, sitting in his living room in Palo Alto, “because there was a black student union here [at Stanford], and I could tell what his passion was and so forth.” At some point that year President Chace took Kofi Taha to O’Rourke’s Diner in Middletown – famous for its steamed cheeseburger – where the two discussed “Malcolm X and ‘the ballot versus the bullet’ and why radical revolutionary change was needed in America.” Chace also interacted independently with Nick Haddad, whom he considered more intelligent “by far” than Taha.

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Twenty-two years later, nearly every person who looks back on the events of the 1989-1990 school year describes Kofi Taha and Nick Haddad as a duo. Former students, administrators, and faculty all speak of them as closely linked.

The two young men met sometime during their freshman year, when Haddad went to Taha's dorm room to ask him to borrow a Koran stand. "He was telling some cockamamie story," recalls Taha with a smile. "He was saying he didn't want to open his Koran- he *couldn't* open his Koran because he didn't have a stand or a place to put it. Which is nonsense," he explains, raising his eyebrows over his glasses and explaining that one could put a Koran on a shelf or on a table. "You just don't put it on the ground."

Taha was not the only one to have such confusing encounters with Nick Haddad. Professor Elphick remembers asking Haddad where he got his name. "It's not a Muslim name," he explains to me, as he explained to Haddad over twenty years ago. "Nicholas is a *Christian* name, and the Haddads are a well known Christian family in the Middle East. I said, 'You know, you can't possibly be Muslim.'" Professor Elphick narrows his eyes. "I don't remember what he answered."

After Nick Haddad was murdered – shot in Keney Park in Hartford in the summer of 1990 – Taha and Elphick learned for certain that he hadn't been a Muslim after all. After Nick Haddad was murdered the *New York Times* asked "Who, Unmasked, Was He?" because Haddad had told different stories to different people about who he was, where he had come from and what had happened to him there.

“I was as manipulated as anybody else,” Kofi Taha insists. Haddad, he says, told him as many lies as he did anyone else. Regardless, the two were indivisible in the minds of many of their classmates, professors and administrators. Taha and Haddad were co-editors of *The Ankh*. In March of 1990 they caused some controversy together by resigning from the staff of *The Ankh* and using the funds allocated to the magazine by the Wesleyan Student Assembly to put out their own publication, *The Afrikan Nation*. The new periodical’s first cover read: “In Creative Struggle, the Embrace of Love and War Will Give Birth to the New Afrikan Nation.”

Looking back, Professor Watts refers to Taha and Haddad’s brainchild as “ridiculousness. It’s a kind of romantic celebration, it’s nostalgia for a moment that never was,” he says, “Like, ‘we’ve lost our revolutionary bearings,’ and ‘Malcolm said this and that.’”

Despite the fact that they were co-editors of *The Ankh* and co-creators of the *Afrikan Nation*, Kofi Taha now maintains that he and Nick Haddad were never really partners. Taha portrays himself as a concerned young man trying to shepherd a troubled young peer. He had invited Haddad to participate in the *Afrikan Nation*, Taha says, to keep Haddad involved in political activity. Later, he claims, he would try to control some of what he felt were Haddad’s dangerous tendencies, acting with particular concern when he believed that Haddad was sexually threatening young women. Taha repeats again and again throughout our interview that he was not close with Nick Haddad – that he was simply trying to “engage” him, to “help him out.” He prefers to group himself instead with Julius “Jay” Ford ’90 and Laurie Harrison ’90,

black student leaders who were two years older than Taha and Haddad and who, unlike Taha and Haddad, are recalled with almost universal fondness by their peers. (Ford, a beloved campus figure, passed away in 2009. Harrison's whereabouts are unknown.) Matt Reed '91, a friend of all these activists, supports Taha's recollection to an extent. But he also says that the relationship between Kofi Taha and Nick Haddad was more complicated than the former is letting on.

"I don't think Nick and Kofi were ever *friends*," Reed muses. "There was a tremendous amount of tension and distrust between them . . . I think they needed each other." Taha, he says, needed Haddad's "energy," and Haddad needed a concrete connection to Wesleyan's community of Civil Rights activists.

Whatever the true nature of their relationship, Kofi Taha and Nick Haddad were both suspected to be behind all of the more radical – and criminal – activities that occurred on the campus of Wesleyan University in the spring of 1990.

\* \* \*

Shortly after 4 AM on Saturday, April 7<sup>th</sup>, at least two persons yet unknown threw 2 or 3 Molotov cocktails through a window of President Chace's South College office. Public Safety Officer Joseph Higgins heard glass breaking and saw flames coming from the office. As he approached the building, he saw two figures fleeing from the site. Officer Higgins ran after one of the two suspects, but abandoned the chase at Olin Library. Higgins later described the suspect to the police as male,



approximately 6 feet tall and about 150 pounds, wearing dark clothing and a white baseball hat. He was unable to be more specific as he hadn't seen the suspect's face.

Director of Public Safety Harry Kinne called President Chace's home at 4:20 AM to inform him of the bombing. Confused by the early morning call, Chace momentarily thought Kinne was phoning to wish Chace's wife, Joann, a happy birthday. "I thought, 'Well that's a little early for Harry to be calling . . .,'" recalls Chace, and he chuckles.

When the president arrived at South College, his office was still being aerated by firefighters in orange jackets. Fire had damaged the rug and desk in the office and blistered some bookcases. According to the *Argus* coverage, "Chace said several documents, including almost all of his incoming mail, were destroyed, and many other documents were charred." No one was in the building; a custodian had left an hour before.

The costliest damage was from smoke particulate, which a company of specialists from Hartford cleaned off of President Chace's ceiling with toothbrushes over the next few weeks. The University offered a reward of \$10,000 for information leading to the arrest and conviction of those responsible.

Four days later, on the morning of Wednesday, April 11<sup>th</sup>, a two-page letter taking responsibility for the firebombing was found pinned to the door of History Professor Richard Buel's office. The document was signed by a self-described "national" group calling itself "S.T.R.I.K.E" – "Students Rebuilding Institutions for Knowledge and Education." It claimed that the bombing of President Chace's office was "not intended as an act against Chace or any faculty member, but against the

academic principles of this university and others.” According to the *Argus* coverage, STRIKE’s letter implied that the firebombing of the president’s office would not necessarily be the last act of its kind, but that no one would be physically harmed.

Because of the incendiary device involved, agents with both the Middletown Police and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives arrived on campus to investigate. Over the following weeks many Wesleyan students were brought down to the Middletown Police Station for questioning. Peter Paris was among them. “Because I allegedly fit the description of the people that were running away,” he explains, wryly. Paris doesn’t remember specifically how he was approached, but he believes he was questioned twice. “They accused me of doing it, and they wanted to know where I was and all that stuff . . . At the time I was kind of, you know, like, ‘go fuck yourself.’” He smiles. “I remember them asking me, ‘Well if you knew who did it would you tell us?’ and I said ‘No.’” He shrugs and takes a bite of his hamburger. “That was back in the day.”

According to Harry Kinne – who is now Director of Safety and Security at Dartmouth College – students were brought in by the police for questioning because they were either seen in the area that night or because they were politically very vocal – because, according to Kinne, they had “put it in writing” in the *Argus*.

As the police and ATF investigation continued, allegations were made that the authorities’ treatment of African-American students varied substantially from their treatment of white students. According to an *Argus* article published a week after the firebombing, “The most specific race-related charge lodged by students is that white

students have been notified in advance by the police or ATF before being questioned, usually by a phone call; black students, they allege, have been surprised by personal visits to their dorm rooms.”

Dean of the College Edgar Beckham sent a memo out to the Wesleyan community on April 13<sup>th</sup> to remind its members that “police routine, of course, is not routine for this or any other university. We believe,” he continued, “that these interviews are being conducted fairly, and in a manner consistent both with standard police practice and the gravity of the crime.”

A number of African-American students went so far as to hold a press conference concerning Wesleyan’s mishandling of the entire situation. “It’s ridiculous,” said Nicole Grigg ‘91, “that the university tries to perpetuate itself as some sort of victim [when] students here are being victimized every day.” She continued: “If [the administration] is so against violence, why on earth are they in South Africa right now?” At this point, according to the *Argus*, the crowd assembled in front of the Campus Center cheered. “If [the person who threw the firebomb] is someone on this campus,” said Kofi Taha, “it is not their fault that they were forced to resort to violence like this.” The crowd hissed and booed.

Over a year later, Kofi Taha was arrested, indicted and tried for the firebombing of President Chace’s office. In the summer of 1990, Nick Haddad had been shot and killed in Hartford by a man he’d recruited to sell drugs for him. In the resulting investigation, Sudhama Ranganathan, an associate of Haddad’s and the cousin of Haddad’s killer, Kumar Viswanathan, told police that he could testify that

Taha had been one of the two people who had thrown bombs into Chace's office. A warrant was issued for Taha's arrest. In the meantime, however, Taha had been suspended from Wesleyan and had left the state for his home in New York, and the warrant was not served for many months. When Taha returned to Middletown to visit friends at Wesleyan in the spring of 1991, he was pulled over by Middletown police in a traffic stop. The outstanding warrant was discovered and Taha was arrested and indicted for the bombing.

The trial of Kofi Taha lasted for four months, between September and December 1992. He was ultimately acquitted on all charges by an all-white jury, which cited a "lack of credibility of the state's witnesses." Along with Sudhama Rangathan, two Middletown residents – Marcus Mickens and LeVaughan Hicks – and a Wesleyan student, Nicole Harmon, testified that Taha had been a ringleader in the bombing. Taha's attorneys were successful in convincing the jury that the witness's testimony was compromised by deals they had struck with the prosecution or by their own involvement in the crime.

"No, I didn't do it," Taha reasserts, and he seems vaguely surprised that I've asked. He acknowledges that he acted to protect those he knew were involved. "Here's the thing: I hope there is a statute of limitations," he says, chuckling, "because *if* the charges against me were withholding information, then they would've won. I absolutely know all the people that were involved."

According to Taha, Nick Haddad threw the bombs, and used Taha as an alibi. On the weekend of April 7, 1990, Taha was going into New York City to see his family for a portion of Ramadan, the Muslim holy month, specifically to take part in a

*Suhoor* – the early morning feast before the fast. Haddad asked to go with him. “‘Oh,’ he said, ‘you know it would be so important to me if I could have a Suhoor, I’m totally isolated from my family.’” Ultimately, according to Taha, although Haddad accompanied him into New York, he disappeared before the Taha family’s *Suhoor*. Kofi was not concerned. Although he admits that he knew Haddad planned to bomb the president’s office, Taha claims had had no idea Haddad was going to carry out the plan “that weekend.”

Taha’s own alibi was corroborated in court by his mother, who testified that she woke him for the *Suhoor* at 2 AM in the Bronx, two hours before the Molotov cocktails were thrown through the window of the President’s South College office in Middletown.

Looking back on the trial and on his public image, Taha claims that a false representation of him as an angry and violent black radical was created by the prosecution. In particular, the State of Connecticut made use of Taha’s article, “The Liberation Game,” published in the first issue of *The Afrikan Nation* in May of 1990, to paint a picture of a violent militant. In the essay, Taha debates the acceptable means of protest. “Malcolm dropped crazy knowledge when he stated that, ‘the biggest mistake the white man made was letting me read his history books,’ for when we check out the foundations of the United Hates [sic], we see nothing more than the primordial instinct of violence which white folks monopolized in the old days and perpetuate today,” Taha wrote. “Where does ‘peaceful change’ fit in this Amerikkkan portrait?”

Taha says now that his writing was "inartful." He is quick to add that the essay doesn't provide a full or accurate picture of who he was as a young activist. "If you look at the full range of activities that I was involved in," Taha says, alluding to the many non-violent forms of activism in which he participated, "you would get a totally different picture than what" – he laughs – "the common perception is."

Nick Haddad, on the other hand, had a fascination with weapons, one that friends and faculty alike were increasingly made aware of as the spring of 1990 continued. "I'll never forget," recalls Jerry Watts, "there were rumors going around a black barbershop in Hartford I went to once. And they were like, 'Look, there's some *fool* coming in here, man, talking about how he wants to buy *guns* and shit . . . and he's from down there where *you* are, at Wesleyan!" Professor Watts laughs.

So when shots were fired off of Foss Hill in the early morning of Wednesday, April 25<sup>th</sup>, Watts had no doubts about who had done it. "That's when I knew," says Professor Watts, "somebody's crazy." It is uncertain whether anyone witnessed or even heard the shots. The Wesleyan community was informed of them by a letter pinned to the door of the *Argus* offices later the same day. A group calling itself "D.A.G.G.E.R" – "Direct Action Group to Generate Educational Reforms" – took responsibility for the "four shots" fired towards North College at "4:33" that morning as part of "Operation April in Her Eyes." Like the letter from STRIKE claiming responsibility for the firebombing, DAGGER's letter claimed that this would not be the last act of its kind and was rather a "final warning." "Next time we strike," said the letter, "We will inflict massive material damage." The letter claimed that attacks

of this nature would continue until “every University and College which persists in mis-educating its students radically alters the educational and curricular practices and policies which emotionally, intellectually, and culturally destroy our children.”

President Chace called the letter “preposterously childish and patently bogus.” He told *Argus* reporter Alex Navarro that the letter was “obviously the work of an extremely disturbed person.” According to Kofi Taha, Nick Haddad bragged to him about the shooting and claimed to have done it to impress a girl.

Taha does not comment on the attempted firebombing of Wesleyan’s boathouse four days later.

\* \* \*

Whoever was responsible for the bombings and shootings, they had far less effect on the wider Wesleyan community than another act of vandalism that took place only a little more than a week later.

Sometime in the early morning of May 4, 1990, a person or persons yet unknown spray painted “Nigger house Nigger bombs Nigger love Niggers” onto a wall of the basement of the Malcolm X House. He or she or they added “Fuck Black Bitches,” “The African Damnation,” and “Go Back to Africa” on the other white walls in green. “I’ve never seen anything like that on the walls before,” Mollie Lane, a black university custodian who discovered the graffiti at the start of her workday, told the *Argus*. “I don’t know why they do it,” she said.

The defacement of the Malcolm X House was seen as a pronounced insult and attack on the black community, Bobby Donaldson tells me. “The very place that we viewed as a sanctuary had been more or less terrorized,” he explains.

“It strikes me as perhaps worse than what happened in my office,” said President Chace to the school newspaper the day of the vandalism. He sent a letter to the community condemning the act as both “outrageous and deeply hateful” but posted no reward for information on the perpetrator(s), as he had done a month previously when his office was firebombed.

There was a vigil in the basement of the Malcolm X House that night. Two hundred and fifty students and administrators filled the space or looked in through the windows. The event, as described in the *Argus*, “quickly erupted into an hour-long emotional attack on university policies and President William Chace.” Chace was present but chose not to respond to specific questions or charges. “I look at you and say, you’re here now, but where were you when we called you before?” Sean Sharp ’92 asked the president, who was silent. “Why does it take a very aggressive act to get your attention?” Laurie Harrison ’90 asked the president, who was silent. “That’s pretty sad,” Harrison said.

“I was at a distinct disadvantage,” President Chace told the *Argus* after the vigil. “I would be glad to talk to students – any number of students – in a way that would be productive and business-like.”

Dean Janina Montero – now the Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs at UCLA – looks back on the graffiti in the Malcolm X house and the events that followed it as



“very painful, I think, for all of us who were close to the students of color, close to the administration.” At this point, she says, many students couldn’t help but wonder, “Is there in fact a targeting of African American students or black students? Is there a racist environment that is targeting these students?”

There was talk of the Klu Klux Klan branch in nearby Middlefield having painted the slurs. (There was a klavern in Middlefield, and the area was reputed to host a Klan guerilla camp.) Students had trouble believing white Wesleyan students were responsible. Greg Baldwin ‘91 recalls talking to white friends about it. “Are there white people on campus who really feel this way and is this their only way to express this?” he recalls wondering. “But it *seemed* a little bit like . . . not credible in that way.” Once again, suspicion centered on Nick Haddad and Kofi Taha, mostly because painted among “Fuck Black Bitches” and “Go Back to Africa” was “Coon Taha” and “Nigger Haddad.”

“I have always thought,” muses Bobby Donaldson, “that in the world of political strategizing, if you really wanted to motivate the masses who were indifferent or otherwise disengaged, to pull off something like [the graffiti in] Malcolm X House would’ve done it.” Professor Watts is fairly positive that the slurs were painted by Taha and Haddad. “Man, come *on*,” he says, laughing, “who else is gonna go into Malcolm X fuckin’ house and write *anything* stupid on the wall?”

Kofi Taha laughs when I ask him about accusations that he and Haddad painted the offensive graffiti. “So the idea is that Nick and I think, ‘Let’s go and incite the community by writing this graffiti, and let’s put our own names on the wall because *that* will make people *not* suspect us, right?’” He thinks that the University

probably should have done a more thorough investigation before settling on the idea – and implying to its students – that the graffiti in the Malcolm X House was an “inside job.” But, says Taha, “I could care less if people think I did it. Nobody can deny the real feelings that were expressed at that rally following it.”

Six months before the graffiti, at the Regional Society Organized Against Racism (SOAR) Conference hosted at Wesleyan, Kofi Taha staged a lynching of himself to incite similar feelings and discussions. During a dinner to commemorate the conference, Taha broke into an impromptu speech on Yusuf Hawkins. Friends of Taha’s, dressed in Klu Klux Klan regalia, grabbed him and covered him in a blanket. They then took a dummy dressed like Taha, put a noose around its neck, and threw the effigy off of the balcony from which Taha had been speaking. “People were like, ‘What the fuck happened?!’” Taha recalls. “It was essentially this: Racism exists. Let’s have a real conversation about that.”

## CHAPTER THREE

Everything that happened in the final weeks of the 1989-1990 academic year at Wesleyan happened very quickly. An extraordinary series of events occurred in bewilderingly rapid succession. Eighteen days after the president's South College office was firebombed, four shots were fired off of Foss Hill towards North College. Four days later, there was an attempt to firebomb Wesleyan's boathouse and less than a week after that, on May 4<sup>th</sup>, racist graffiti was spray-painted in the basement of the Malcolm X House. Over the next several days, a series of public events designed to respond to the graffiti followed – a vigil on the night the graffiti was discovered, a public airing of student grievances a few days later, and, then, a day-long series of teach-ins and sensitivity training sessions that aimed to reestablish the campus's sense of common identity. Then, on May 9<sup>th</sup>, seven Wesleyan students decided to stop eating.

“I actually think – others might say otherwise and I'd totally be willing to agree with them – but I definitely know *I* started talking about a hunger strike way before [May],” says Philippa Rizopoulos '92, one of the seven students who participated in the strike. I'm sitting with her in her apartment in Brooklyn because she isn't comfortable talking about any of what happened that year in public, even twenty years later. She first proposed a hunger strike, Ms. Rizopoulos tells me, as a kind of stunt. “I remember we were talking about the violence and everything and I just started being like, ‘We should go on a hunger strike. It would be hilarious! Can you imagine? What is Chace and everyone gonna do? We'll just follow them around, 24/7, *hungry*.’” She starts to laugh a high-pitched, assertive laugh. “It was partly a

*joke*. I mean there was some truth to it, but we weren't *there* yet, you know what I mean? And then all that shit went down.”

The strike began on May 9, 1990, the day following Wesleyan's first and only Unity Day, an event organized in the wake of the dramatic and destructive events of that spring. Unity Day was organized by the protest “Coalition,” a collaborative alliance of fifteen student groups on campus that had formed in the fall of 1989. “We cannot go on with our daily routines as if nothing has happened,” read their memo announcing the Unity Day event. “Something is wrong, and we need to show each other we care, and are ready to do something about it.” The Coalition structured Unity Day as an “all day demonstration” composed of racism and sexual assault workshops, teach-ins, discussion groups, and letter-writing campaigns. President Chace signed a statement in support of Unity Day, and encouraged faculty to cancel or at least reschedule their classes.

On May 8<sup>th</sup>, 1500 students gathered on the lawn of North College. Professor Richard Elphick conducted a teach-in on divestment, Professor Jerry Watts on tenure. Notably absent was the president. “I’ve talked to friends about this,” Bill Chace told the *Argus* at the time. “In these sessions, if I show up, I’m a real lightning rod for everything. It distorts things.”

Unity Day was almost unanimously considered a success. It was a bright moment in what had become an increasingly tense environment. In fact, the University would use Unity Day to positively reframe the dramatic events of the spring of 1990. “For the next two years, *always* my conversation was to say: ‘It’s not

what happened, it's how the community came together and *handled the events* that makes it a special place," Barbara Jan Wilson, the Head of Admissions between 1990 and 1999 and now the Vice President for University Relations at Wesleyan explains. "That was a good message."

Nevertheless, come the end of Unity Day, a small group of students announced that the event would be followed by a hunger strike. Kofi Taha spoke on the steps of North College shortly after 4 PM. To effect change, said Taha, "we must threaten the lives of others or threaten our own lives."

According to Rick Kaplan '92, who was to act on behalf of the strikers in their negotiations with the University, there had been some debate as to whether or not the hunger strike would be appropriate in the wake of Unity Day. "We asked, 'Would that be seen as taking away from such a positive day? But,'" Mr. Kaplan tells me over the phone from Washington, D.C, "I think the ultimate decision was: you can't have one day and make everything better." Philippa Rizopoulos echoes this sentiment. Kofi Taha has a slightly different recollection.

"We kept hammering the fact that the University's really concerned about PR," he recalls, "and that 'Diversity University' was just PR, right?" The most effective form of protest, he explains, was thus one that had the potential to embarrass the institution, one administrators would be unable to reframe to the local and regional press or to prospective students. In the case of the hunger strike, the imminent arrival of commencement speaker Archbishop Desmond Tutu provided an effective "leverage point." "The story would be: 'Desmond Tutu goes to Wesleyan University while hunger strikers are there,'" Taha explains, smiling, "and they sure as

*hell* didn't want that." Taha remembers that another student questioned the extremism of the strike when it was announced. "He was like, 'Come on! Are you guys really gonna *die* for this?' And I was in my head going, 'You're totally right, dude. We're not going to die. Because our *plan* is to embarrass these fools, and make sure that they come talk to us.'" He smiles. "Instead, I had to sit up there and say, 'Yeah, it's about our principle! And I don't care whether it's'" – he giggles – "'Wesleyan University or if it's a *prison* somewhere!'" The strike was less an act of passion than of strategy, Taha explains to me, looking back on it. "That was the significance of Tutu for us."

When I recount Taha's explanation of the motives behind the strike, Rick Kaplan pauses. "I have no recollection of that," he says carefully. "Did anyone else say that?"

The hunger strike officially began on the last day of classes, immediately before final examinations. The strikers' demands were delivered to President Chace's office by Andrea Harris '93 and by Laura Ruderman '92, now a Congresswoman representing the 45<sup>th</sup> Legislative District in Washington State. (Representative Ruderman was unavailable for comment.) The first edition of *The Afrikan Nation* – the newly created publication of Kofi Taha and fellow sophomore Nicholas Haddad – also published the demands under the headline "STUDENT DESPERATION."

"We are a group of students who have dedicated ourselves to restoring Wesleyan University to a productive and principled environment," the manifesto began. "The education we now receive violently attacks our minds, and now includes physical manifestations of this reality such as bombs and guns."

The demands – or rather “proposals,” as the strikers called them in their document – were eightfold. The strikers proposed that the University draft a Civil Rights Policy, that all buildings on campus be made handicapped-accessible by the fall of 1991, and that the administration raise the percentage of minority representation in the faculty and staff to match the percentage of minority representation within the student body by the spring of 1996. In addition, the strikers proposed that the University institute a financial aid policy with a four-year projection program to avoid yearly changes in the aid packages students received. They requested that the University formulate a proposal for the development of a Multi-Cultural Center and that it divest completely from South Africa. The strikers proposed that the University ensure that at least 85% of the student body would participate in sensitivity workshops before graduation. Finally, the strikers maintained that if Wesleyan were to “continue to make claims on a commitment to institutional diversity, it must begin to institutionalize responses to the diverse needs of its members.” To this end they proposed that Wesleyan create a position akin to an Assistant Dean of the College whose responsibilities would specifically address the needs of students of color.

“Does it really take the loss of human life to wake up to the need for fundamental curricular and institutional changes?” asked the hunger strikers in their manifesto. They would refuse food, they wrote, until they had received the signatures of the president, Dean of the College, and Chair of the Board of Trustees on a document with acceptable terms.

The *Argus* reported that “at least six and as many as 14 students” were prepared to stop eating. Ultimately, Kofi Taha and Philippa Rizopoulos were joined by five

additional hunger strikers: Shawn DiFiore '93, Jay Ford '90, Laurie Harrison '90, David Payne '92, and Miriam Schacht '93. Most of them were members of a tight-knit, informal group that had been meeting regularly since the fall – they were associated with the protest Coalition but met more frequently to discuss campus politics and protest methods. But some, according to Philippa Rizopoulos, were “random.” She recalls freshman Shawn DiFiore as “this *guy* who just showed up.” She pauses, making a face. “And he was totally eating, too.”

The hunger strikers had planned to camp out in a hallway area just outside of President Chace’s South College office, but after the administration called the police and had the students evicted, the strikers were relegated to the basement of the building. There, over the next nine days, they subsisted on liquids and vitamins. Some went back to their dorm rooms to sleep or to study. They were occasionally sent pizzas by students less than sympathetic to their cause.

The strikers were represented in conversations with the Wesleyan administration by four negotiators: Rick Kaplan, Matt Reed, Ilana Feldman '91, and Simone White '93.

“I think I was probably just more wimpy than [the strikers] were,” says Kaplan and laughs. The strikers were all his friends, Kaplan tells me, but he acknowledges that he wasn’t sure in May of 1990 that a hunger strike was necessarily the right means to a dialogue. He wasn’t alone. Simone White – currently writing a Ph. D. dissertation in English at the City University of New York – wanted to be supportive



of her peers, but, she says of the hunger strike, “I didn’t think it was something that needed to happen, and I . . .” she trails off and shrugs.

Matt Reed was more fully on board. He and his wife both maintain that Reed was a negotiator rather than a striker simply because he was too skinny to be starving himself.

The administration’s side of the negotiations were led by the University’s Dean, Edgar Beckham. Beckham, who passed away in 2006, was a black graduate of the class of 1958 and the first African-American Dean of the College. Throughout the 1989-1990 school year he was reviled by unhappy African-American students, who called him an “Uncle Tom.” At the end of that year, Dean Beckham would resign from Wesleyan to become a program officer at the Ford Foundation, whose Campus Diversity Initiative he would lead throughout the 1990s. The problem at Wesleyan, Beckham told *Jet* magazine when he resigned from the University, wasn’t “racism or social tension” but tension between “some students and the institution which is symbolically the president.”

Beckham was joined in negotiations with the strikers by Executive Assistant to the President William “Bro” Adams and by Brian Fay, a professor of Philosophy and one of the two Chairs of the Faculty. Adams, currently the president of Colby College in Waterville, Maine, had come to Wesleyan with Bill Chace and was a close friend to the president. According to Kofi Taha, “We understood that Bro was really the man who was running things,” and so needed a place “at the table.” Brian Fay, newly

elected co-Chair of the Faculty, was, by his own account, a little confused about what he was doing in the midst of the negotiations.

“I don’t have anything to say to them!” He recalls telling President Chace, ““What do I have to say to them?”” Professor Fay looks incredulous even now. We are sitting in his large, dark office, in leather chairs in front of a sealed-off fireplace and a dead plant. “Anyway,” he recalls, “being a nice guy, I said ‘OK,’ I got in the car, and I drove down [to campus].”

Because the hunger strikers had requested a “neutral site” for the negotiations, the students and administrators met above Wesleyan’s Ezra and Cecile Zilkha Gallery – in the Center for the Arts – in a glassed-in room. Professor Fay recalls his initial displeasure with the student demands. “They were based on such ignorance about the way things functioned,” he explains, “but you couldn’t *explain* that to them because that was *insulting* and because they didn’t trust what people had to say anyway.”

Anticipating this disconnect, the strikers requested that the negotiations be mediated by Dean Janina Montero and Frank Tuitt who, as an Area Coordinator in the Office of Residential Life, worked with some of the student of color organizations at Wesleyan. I met with Dean Montero when she returned to Wesleyan for the 2011 Homecoming Weekend to moderate a panel discussion for the Annual Dwight L. Greene Symposium: “Journey from Student to Teacher.” Dean Montero is lovely, soft-spoken with a lilting accent. She was born in Italy but grew up in Argentina and Uruguay and went to school in Spain where she was involved with some student protest herself. “The *idea*,” says Dean Montero, explaining the hunger strike

negotiations in hindsight, “was that we would not let *misunderstanding* rule what the exchange would be.”

Despite her efforts, the hunger strike was not quickly resolved. Negotiations extended over approximately 21 hours across nine days. On day seven, the hunger strikers, who until this point had remained ostensibly anonymous, organized a photo and interview with the *Middletown Press*. Kofi Taha told the *Press*’s Ellen Delisio that they had come forward only “to point out the desperate means required to get the college to respond to their needs.” The students – photographed in the basement of South College, surrounded by pillows and blankets and with their eyes shut or staring mournfully at the camera – restated their commitment to the strike and thanked their support system: faculty, students, and parents. Freshman Shawn DiFiore told the *Press* that his father was visiting campus for a few days “and had not been eating either.”

Ultimately the ad hoc group signed an agreement at 9:15 AM on May 18<sup>th</sup>, and the strikers went to Ruby’s eatery for pancakes, waffles, and bagels. President Chace said in a prepared statement that he was in “general agreement” with the strikers’ proposals, many of which – like the restructuring of financial aid packages and the creation of an administrator whose responsibilities would specifically address the needs of students of color – were coincident with administrative actions already underway or planned. However, President Chace made sure to tell the *Argus* later that “it would be extremely unfortunate ever to give the impression that under any circumstances university policy issues from that sort of situation.”

Several of the strikers look back with disillusionment over how the administration actually responded to the terms that had been agreed to. “What they did was they chopped different things up. They said, ‘We’ll study this, we’ll study that,’” Taha now explains, “They played us.” In an *Argus* article examining the accomplishments of the hunger strike the following September, 1990, Dean Montero said that the proposed projects were “still in the works.” The faculty approved changes to Wesleyan’s Blue Book prohibiting “any statement or act that is intended to insult, injure or stigmatize a person or group because of race,” but President Chace was forced to renege on the proposed plan to raise the percentage of minority representation in the faculty and staff to match the percentage of minority representation within the student body by the spring of 1996. This plan was “unworkable,” according to Chace, and would necessitate hiring between 35 and 44 new faculty members.

Philippa Rizopoulos recalls being disappointed when she read the article, but acknowledges: “That was always going to be a danger of that situation. Like, What could you really get them to *do* within x number of days that could actually make a difference, you know? Whatever,” says Rizopoulos, shrugging, “Things had shifted and the political tension had moved onto other subjects, frankly.”

\* \* \*

Now that they are 22 years older and parents, lawyers, doctors, social workers, graduate students, professors, and college administrators, the Wesleyan alumni who

helped to define the school year look back on 1989-1990 with some detachment. “This is really fun to talk about,” Rick Kaplan tells me. He is currently the Chief of the FCC’s Wireless Telecommunication’s Bureau. “It was a great, great learning experience,” he says of that year, though he does acknowledge that some of the actions in which he participated were “absolutely silly.” (These include acts of protest or vandalism on which he refuses to give details.) “I’m glad I was involved,” echoes Philippa Rizopoulos. “I think I learned a lot – both personally and about how politics work . . . . There were your basic protests, and speeches and signs and then this violence and there were hunger strikes and emotional conversations and speak-outs . . . .” She nods. “It was good training.”

For some among the Wesleyan faculty and administration, however, who had seen protest come and go, the activism in which Kaplan and Rizopoulos and their friends were involved had implications they felt the students could not understand or simply overlooked.

“You’re dealing with people for whom there isn’t a lot of *cost* for the kinds of protests they’re doing,” explains Professor Fay, who was moderately involved in protesting the Vietnam War as a college student. “People can *change* a lot,” he says. “They can do this when they’re in college and then they get out of college and they take that garb off and start doing something else.” He leans back in his chair, re-crossing his legs, “But the rest of the people who are in the institution are left to hold the bag. They have to make all of these adjustments.”

Former Wesleyan Trustee Ted Shaw ’76, who was politically active himself at Wesleyan – and who would become president and director-counsel of the NAACP

Legal Defense and Education Fund – admired the political spirit of the students who led protests on campus in the 1989-1990 school year. But he could not help but feel that some of the actions in which they engaged were not well thought out and may even have been counterproductive. “I stopped,” he tells me in hindsight, “at the point where I couldn’t understand why people were doing things that were harmful to the university. You know when you protest, you’re trying to improve the place, but I think that’s a protest that’s based in love.” He’s quiet. “I thought some of this protest crossed that line.”

Indeed, the events of 1989-1990 had some tangible, negative effects. The next year, applications for the class of 1995 declined. This was attributed in the Annual Report both to the downturn in the economy “and to the campus events of the spring of 1990 with the resulting publicity.” In some quarters, the University developed a reputation not just for activism, but for strange or extreme behavior or even for liberal intolerance. The stereotype dogs the school even now. In a 2008 article on the pending commencement address of then-Presidential candidate Barack Obama, *The New York Times* called Wesleyan “one of the last outposts of the Woodstock Nation,” to which the school’s current president, Michael S. Roth, responded: “There’s a stereotype based on a little sliver of the campus that became well known in the 1980s, but that’s totally inaccurate now.”

I spoke with President Roth in his office – which shows no sign of the firebombing it endured 22 years ago. “When I started four years ago,” he tells me, “I did sense that the school had tried to move away from the culture of activism.” To

effectively embrace the activist spirit of Wesleyan, President Roth explains, is to re-term what it *is* to be political: “It’s not about protest, it’s not about the volume of your protest, and it’s really not always about the University.” Wesleyan students, asserts Michael Roth, *are* political – are interested in making change in the world around them – “and we want to give them the tools to be more successful in being political, not in being protest” – he pauses – “*mavens*.”

According to Kofi Taha, what he and his fellow student activist’s most struggled with throughout the 1989-90 school year was not having the “tools” for which Wesleyan’s current president stresses the need. “We were not finding the tools at Wesleyan,” Taha explains, “even though Wesleyan was this place where we were hoping to have this formative experience.” The Wesleyan administration expressed very little willingness, by all student accounts, to give them information – or access to channels of information – they were seeking. “I think that at the end of the day,” says Rick Kaplan now, “that if there was an administration that really connected to the students, there was a way to have headed off some of the stuff.” There was a sense, Kaplan explains, that students were being looked down on, “and I think we really *felt* that.”

For their part, the students were unable – by Kofi Taha’s own admission – to articulate effectively and to respond appropriately to issues they would discover were more complicated than they had initially supposed. They were aware, for instance, that Wesleyan was not the “racial utopia” that it presented itself as being, but, according to Taha, “we were yet to understand that racism is a lot more subtle” than he and his peers were presenting it as on the Wesleyan campus. The students, Taha

claims in hindsight, were most hindered by their own reluctance to admit uncertainty about what they were protesting and the protest methods they were using. “There were a range of complicated questions that we as 18-, 19-, 20-, and 21- year olds were trying to grapple with and didn’t quite [know how].”

According to Taha, the resulting confusion and tension was a “fuse.” But the fuse was lit, he claims in retrospect, by the unpredictable factor of an emotionally disturbed ally. “When you throw into that mix someone who is mentally unstable,” Taha says now, “something that’s not volatile can become volatile.” He is speaking, of course, about Nicholas Haddad.

\* \* \*

By the end of the 1989-1990 school year it was clear to most everyone that Nick Haddad was likely mentally unstable and certainly prone to violence. He had been seen with guns and their accompanying paraphernalia. Taha, for one, knew that Haddad had been involved in the bombing of the president’s office, and he knew that some women believed that Haddad represented a threat of sexual violence or coercion. Nick Haddad’s fascination with violence and his erratic inclinations had not been clear from the start, mostly because he was an adept liar, and one who changed his story – and the persona that accompanied it – all the time.

When he was a freshman – during the 1988-1989 school year – Nick Haddad had been a staunch conservative. He was closely affiliated with the *Wesleyan Review*, the



campus's foremost conservative publication. Haddad's affiliation with the *Review* would seem confusing to those who knew him later and only as the leftist activist of his sophomore year.

Haddad made his first transition to the Left when he interviewed for a student trustee position on Wesleyan's Social Responsibility Subcommittee, which dealt with the University's investment policy in South Africa. He was ultimately denied the position, but during the interview process, Haddad met Matt Reed, a junior and an activist leader on campus. The two would remain friends for the rest of the year.

"If I have a perspective," says Reed, now, about Haddad, "there is a sadness, because he was so clearly looking for a place to fit, and a way to make sense, and if it wasn't going to be the right-wing paper on campus it was going to be the whole hog."

"The whole hog" for Haddad ultimately meant being not only part of Wesleyan's politically-active African-American community, but making himself a leader within that community. This was problematic because Nick Haddad was of Lebanese descent and had spent most of his childhood in Beirut. He *looked* Lebanese by all accounts. "He needed an African connection," explains Reed. And so sometime during his sophomore year Nick Haddad began to tell a variety of stories about who he was and where he had come from. He said he was a Sudanese – Dinka – prince and that his mother was dead or kidnapped, that his father was dead or in the air force. He said he was a diasporic African Muslim.

"Whatever he *told* you," explains Professor Nat Greene now, "he told you with the most complete plausibility." Professor Green was one of Haddad's professors, and

his wife, Anne, was Haddad's advisor. The Greenes are still at Wesleyan. Nat returned to the department of History after President Chace fired him from the Administration in 1990, and Anne runs the Wesleyan Writing Center.

Anne Greene is one of Wesleyan's most popular professors. She wears black always and speaks often in superlatives. "I never talk to anybody about any of this," she tells me. She tells me that Haddad wanted "desperately" to attach himself to friendly faculty members. He would come to dinner at the Greenes' house, occasionally, and bring them gifts that Anne still keeps in her closet. As far as her husband was aware, Nick Haddad was from Lebanon. Anne Greene tells me she's so upset about the fact that Haddad was killed that she can't even remember where he said he was from.

"So I had this student," Anne Greene says – and she isn't looking at me but at her legs – "who was tormented in his dorm and called a *sand nigger*, and black students didn't think he was black and made fun of him, and white students, of course, thought he *was* black. And it wasn't *fashionable*," she says, "to be biracial, and it *was* fashionable in the sort of social circles in which [underclassmen] talked about being important to be an activist leader."

Nick Haddad succeeded in some measure in becoming an activist leader. During his sophomore year, in 1989-1990, Haddad, by sheer force of assertion, made himself a prominent political figure on the Wesleyan campus. He participated in all major protests, co-edited the *Ankh* and subsequently the *Afrikan Nation*, and generally sought the spotlight. He commented on all major offenses against members of the African American community in particular. When Peter Paris '92 received a

threatening note in his mailbox in the fall of 1989, Haddad told the *Argus*: “I think the person who sent it is a coward. I felt the letter was an attack on every member of the African-American community.” When President Chace offered a \$10,000 reward for information leading to the arrest and conviction of the arsonist who firebombed his office in April, Haddad told the *Argus* that the money would have been better used to provide medical care for Ed Blackwell, an African-American artist-in-residence at Wesleyan who was on bed rest in New York City. When the ATF arrived on campus following the firebombing, Haddad told the *Argus* that he and other black students were putting together a “support network” for black students questioned by the authorities.

Nick Haddad was considered an extremist even by students and faculty members he knew well. Professor Watts taught Haddad during the 1989-1990 academic year and often felt the need to tone down Haddad’s rhetoric. “I’ll never forget, he said to me something like, ‘Why are you acting like blacks are represented by the American flag?’ or something.” Professor Watts rolls his eyes. “I was like, ‘What does that mean? They’re *American* – that’s the damn flag!’ He said ‘*No*, they have their *own* flag, the *red, black and green flag!*’” Professor Watts raises his eyebrows at me. “Now I don’t know if that makes any sense to you, but that’s the flag that *Marcus Garvey*’s organization had. And I was like, ‘What are you *talking* about?’”

Those who knew Nick Haddad or knew of him were less comfortable rolling their eyes on May 8, 1990. “You have come across an afternoon called the ‘Day of Rage?’” President Bill Chace asks me two decades after he experienced the event.

What President Chace calls the Day of Rage the *Argus* called an “open forum.” Held at the Alumni Field House – a big, empty gym known colloquially as “the Cage” – the forum was an opportunity for students, faculty, and administrators to discuss student concerns. The forum lasted for four hours, during which student after student railed against the University – “some in the form of tearful pleas and others in angry shouts,” according to the *Argus* – about its divestment policy, its recruitment and retention of faculty of color, campus lighting, and the lack of Asian-American representation in the curriculum. “They lashed out at me,” President Chace recalls of sitting on the podium, “but they lashed out at everybody. It was almost – not a vomiting forth but an *expulsion*,” he explains, “of these demons and things that were in the minds of the students.”

Halfway through the forum, Nick Haddad appeared at the entrance to the Cage. “With a long coat,” recalls Dean Janina Montero, who was in the audience, “which was interesting.” Haddad asked the president why he hadn’t offered a reward for information leading to the arrest of the perpetrator of the Malcolm X Graffiti three days earlier, as he had done when his office was firebombed in April. “Yes I did, Nick!” The *Argus* reported Chace as shouting. “No, you didn’t!” Haddad shouted back, and he placed a bullet or shell casing on the podium of the president.

“The ballot or the bullet!” shouted Nick Haddad, and then he turned to the crowd assembled at the alumni Cage and shouted, louder than before, “African Nation, follow me out!” and no one did. He may have said “Africa, let’s leave!” or “Comrades, depart!” depending on whom one asks and how much he or she

remembers twenty years after the fact. But everyone remembers that Nick Haddad left the Cage alone.

Two months later Nick Haddad was dead. Haddad was shot and killed on July 6<sup>th</sup>, 1990, by Kumar Viswanathan, 21, a history major at the University of Connecticut and the son of Wesleyan artist-in-residence Tanjore Viswanathan. Haddad had hired Viswanathan and Viswanathan's friend Carl Lightner, 20, of Hartford – out on home release from prison after his conviction on a drug charge – to buy and distribute marijuana. Haddad had given them \$12,500, which they spent or lost. Fearful of their lives – Haddad, according to Lightner's testimony, had threatened to kill them if anything happened to the money – the two men arranged to meet Haddad at Keney Park in Hartford. There, Viswanathan shot Haddad three times.

Viswanathan fled cross country with his cousin, Sudhama Ranganathan, son of another Wesleyan artist-in-residence, Tanjore Ranganathan, who had died just three years earlier. Sudhama Ranganathan was a Middletown High School student and had participated in some of the protest activities Haddad had organized in 1989 and '90. He introduced his cousin Kumar to Haddad in the spring of that year. Ranganathan was ultimately charged with the firebombing of President Chace's office – though he served no jail time – and is currently the author of a website detailing his lawsuit against The University of Connecticut's Landscape Architecture Department for racial harassment. In his website he also details his interactions with Nick Haddad, who stored guns in Ranganathan's home. Haddad told Ranganathan

that the guns were for his upcoming “revolution,” and that “when he needed me I had to be there or he would kill me.”

When the two cousins were apprehended in Cleveland, Ranganathan asked the local police to contact the FBI – he was seeking witness protection from the Sudanese mafia with which Nick Haddad had told him he was affiliated.

\* \* \*

Almost everyone I spoke to, in hindsight, claims Nick Haddad was “crazy” was “bipolar” was “unstable.” However, Haddad’s pathological need for attention and for controversy was not entirely out of place on the Wesleyan campus during the 1989-1990 academic year, when almost every other week brought a new protest or a new press conference. Haddad’s use of radical and extremist language – “by any means necessary” in particular – was likewise commonplace on the campus during this time.

Multiple Wesleyan students and faculty were aware that Nick Haddad had weapons, had an interest in weapons, had fired weapons. His friend Sean Sharp recalls walking into Haddad’s dorm room “and he was laying there with a shotgun, almost hugging it, and he had the word ‘AFRICA’ spelled out in shells on the floor, but there were, like, a couple shells that were missing in the ‘A’ of the ‘AFRICA.’” Professor Watts says Haddad had asked at some point if Watts wanted to see his rifle. “And I’m like, ‘Uh, *not particularly* . . .” Kofi Taha tells me that Haddad admitted to him that he had fired shots from the top of Foss Hill on April 25<sup>th</sup>. Neither Taha, nor

Watts, nor Sharp, nor any of the other people who had occasion to know of Haddad's interest in guns appear to have acted on their knowledge.

The Head of Public Safety, Harry Kinne, was not informed and was unaware of Haddad's fascination until he himself saw Haddad purchasing automatic weapons at the Meriden Gun Shop in June of 1990. At that point Mr. Kinne contacted the Middletown detective who had been looking into the arson at Wesleyan that spring. It is unclear whether the police took action, but if they did, it was not enough to prevent the actions that led to Haddad's death a month later.

"It was absolutely shocking," says Bobby Donaldson, says everyone about the murder of Nick Haddad. Students and faculty were informed of Haddad's death at various points throughout the summer by friends or by newspapers looking for comment. "I get this call from Channel 8 news," recalls Brian Fay – though he is unsure whether it was Channel 8 or Channel 4 – "And he said 'I'd like your opinion on recent events.' I said, 'What recent events?' 'Nick Haddad was found murdered in Keney Park this morning.'" Fay widens his eyes, remembering the morning of July 6. "And I thought, *holey mackerel*."

The Wesleyan faculty and administration were represented by only two people at Haddad's funeral – Nat Greene and John Driscoll from alumni relations. A mere handful of students attended the ceremony. Sean Sharp went, Bobby Donaldson went, Matt Reed went. Kofi Taha didn't attend and he doesn't say why. Everyone from Wesleyan at Haddad's funeral was surprised not only that it was held in Willimantic,

CT – where it turned out Haddad had close family – but that Haddad’s mother – who he had claimed was dead or kidnapped in Sudan – walked behind her son’s casket.

The death of Nicholas Haddad dwarfed everything else about 1989 and 1990. “You could’ve had the firebombing,” says President Chace, “you could’ve had the Day of Rage, you could’ve had all these things. But when it yields a dead student, then you’re in an entirely different, different world.”



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