The Two Nations
At Wesleyan University

By RICHARD J. MARGOLIS

“What atonement would the God of Justice demand for the robbery of black people’s labor, their lives, their true identities, their culture, their history...?”


“I came to America to convert the Indians; but oh! who shall convert me?”

—“The Journal of John Wesley” (1738).

MIDDLETOWN, Conn.
The old John Wesley House, a splendid campus landmark with white Ionic columns, turned into the Malcolm X House one sunny day last April. Overnight it became a

RICHARD J. MARGOLIS, a freelance writer on social problems, is author of a recent book of poems about the inner city, “Looking for a Place.”

The conspicuous presence on the startled New England landscape. The sky did not fall and the earth did not tremble; neither did the alumni withdraw their support. But Wesleyan, a small, estimable, historically white university in Middletown, would never be the same. “We have passed the point of no return,” says a Wesleyan administrator. “The blacks are here in force and they are here to stay.”

The first black who came to Wesleyan was Charles B. Ray, and he did not stay. He departed in 1832, soon after fellow students passed a resolution describing his presence there as “inexpedient.” Ray’s white friends deplored his banishment even while conceding it was “the wisest course.” They wished him Godspeed.

After the Civil War, Wesleyan and the rest of the North discovered tokenism, and from time to time a few Negroes slipped through the academic mesh. Such lackluster integration as there was continued for a century. Then, in 1965, the present drama began to unfold when Wesleyan enrolled 14 black freshmen. More came the next year, and more the next. This year blacks and “other minorities” (mostly Puerto Ricans) make up 12 per cent of Wesleyan’s 1,400 students and 20 per cent of the freshman class.

Compared with most other traditionally white universities, these figures are exceptionally high. Black enrollments at Yale and Harvard, for instance, are below 5 per cent, which suggests that in the intercollegiate-interracial sweepstakes Wesleyan is several lengths ahead. But the track has been treacherously mined and the finish line is nowhere in sight.

Nearly all of Wesleyan’s glib and early assumptions about black-white integration—having to do both with its necessity and its ease of attainment—have by now gone the way of the John Wesley House, onto history’s discard pile. “At first we thought all we had to do was recruit black students,” notes Edwin D. Etherington, who in 1967 forsook the presidency of the American Stock Exchange for that of Wesleyan. “Now we know we have to do much more.”

“Much more” has meant the appointment of 23 blacks to positions on the staff and faculty, and the establishment last spring of an Afro-American Institute in cooperation with the Martin Luther King Center in Atlanta. The institute, known to

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blacks as Ujamaa ("family" in Swahili), has its headquarters in the Masonic Temple and is the vital center of Wesleyan's black community. Designed in large measure by the black students, Ujamaa sponsors two major events each school year: history and culture and promotes such endeavors as an arts festival and a black reperatory theater.

In times of racial crisis, which are frequent, Ujamaa's Central Committee is the blacks' chief spokesman and bargaining agent. Its pronouncements are a cheers of invective, full of phrases like "racist institution" and "white liberal swine.

As a white English teacher has observed, the pronouncements are the language of escalation. They have to be deciphered rather like statements from the Kremlin.

Membership in Ujamaa is optional, though the student body, including Middletown blacks who would otherwise have no connection with the university. They thus constitute a center of life and a special community that shelters them, but their loyalty to that community has been spotty to say the least.

ALL THIS has been allowed to occur, say administrators, in a sincere effort to satisfy black needs, and no one at North College — the school's administration building — is undermining these needs. That particular mistake is already history.

"Back in 1963," explains Edgar W. Beckham, an associate dean, "the University of Wesleyan's few black alumni (class of '58), "we believed in what you might call automatic assimilation. We thought that black students would automatically merge into the white landscape. That might have worked in my day — there were so few of us, and Stokely wasn't shouting. 'Black Power' yet, but it won't work today."

When Wesleyan's first sizable group of blacks was graduated last spring, their black brothers presented them with a plaque: "To the Vanguards of the Class of 1969." As Beckham explains, "Those guys had gone through their own special hell. The other blacks showed the whites the way through the special hell, it would seem, was less a consequence of white prejudice than of white indifference; or, more precisely, other determination to ignore blackness.

The blacks came to Wesleyan not knowing exactly what to expect; but they assumed, somewhat contradic- torily, that they were entering a white paradise and also that they were going to be discriminated against — as blacks. They were wrong on both scores. "The whites were very condescending to black students," says William C. Sanders Jr., a large black man from "the vanguard class" who is now co-director of Wesleyan's Afro-American Institute. "We didn't want to be taken for granted."

"We wanted to pretend they were just like them."

Most of the blacks played this game at first, on the historic campus that they hated to admit was all the secrets of superior life. Then, as the black student explains, "We began to see that the whites weren't supermen. They were just people with ordinary hang-ups. That's when we stopped assimilating."

In pursuit of assimilation, school officials had cleverly dispersed the students throughout all the dormitories and had provided each black with a white roommate. "The official policy was to keep us black kids apart," recalls Edwin C. Sanders Jr., a large black man from "the vanguard class" who is now co-director of Wesleyan's Afro-American Institute. "Every morning I'd write out another quotation from Malcolm X or Stokely and nail it to my door. I had to show them who I was."

But most of the white students failed to get the message. Their gestures were yielding to black protest. A turning point came in December, 1967, at a Wilson Pickett "soul" concert which the black students tried to shut down. Some of the more carefree whites in the audience shouted, mocked, lavished use of the word "nigger" and, in a final act of gallantry, took off their pants. To everyone's surprise, the blacks protested. Thirty-seven of them signed a letter to The Argus, Wesleyan's weekly: "We are exploring "the display of pale pink asses in the presence of our black sisters."

(Although Wesleyan went coeducational in 1969, only five of its 1,200 students are black. Most of the "black sisters" came from Middletown and cities near-by.) The letter concluded with the threat that if the whites did not turn out to be a typical threat: "The lid blew off, Baby. We're burning and we hope that the flame doesn't reach you."

It was the first time the blacks had ever spoken to Wesleyan with a single voice, an unprecedented act. When Etherton issued a public apology, "The most disturbing thing about the evening," he declared, "was the undertone of racism, a lack of specific words and gestures." An Argus editorial dismissed the incident as the mere hijinks of "upper-class party boys of certain fraternities," but no one could entirely forget the show of black solidarity which the incident had inspired.

A YEAR later, on the anniversary of Malcolm X's death, the blacks consolidated their gains by briefly taking over Fisk Hall, the school's main classroom building. "We seek to remember the death of a great American and a Black saint, Malcolm X," the demonstrators announced. Earlier the faculty had rejected a black student's request to cancel classes on that day. But by midday of the take-over, Etherton was reminding teachers that they had to agree to suspensions of all classes, individual teachers could do whatever they wished. As one professor remarked later, "It was tanta- mously brutal."

At 8:30 P.M. Wesleyan was shut down. In this way the blacks gradually compelled Wesleyan to put aside childish thoughts of assimilation and see through a glass darkly. The white missionaries were being converted. Yet aspects of the old dream have lingered. "We must learn to be comfortable with the black at large," says Beckham, who, as a kind of ideological middleman between the blacks and the administration, knows the meaning of discomfort. And Etherton, a patient man, speaks wistfully of "many races, one community," a new dream for Wesleyan.

On the other hand, many white students remain infected with a tired old racism and, many black students respond with a fierce new separatism. The 1968 edition of Olla Podrida, Wesleyan's yearbook, contained hundreds of photographs depicting life at Wesleyan but only three that included black students. The blacks responded one night by burning four copies of Olla Podrida on the steps of North College. It was, they declared, "an outrage, unforgivable insult to all Black people". "Unforgivable", an Argus key (Continued on Page 54)
Packing. "It was the dresser," he says. "I never had my own dresser before. I kept looking at it, wondering how you space out the clothes."

Back home in St. Louis, he never had to worry. He slept in a narrow corridor off the living room and shared a dresser with his brothers and sisters. Hayes's father is a hod carrier, hard-working and steady on the job; but the job does not pay enough and Hayes has had to work most of his life, starting as a newsboy when he was 10, then moving on to after-school jobs in supermarkets, restaurants and fancy department stores. "I worked at least 20 hours every week all through school," he says. "Maybe that's why I only got a B average."

Early in his senior year, at Seldon public high school (3,100 blacks, two whites) Hayes began investigating colleagues. "I've wanted to go to college ever since I was a little kid. My older brother, he graduated from high school but he never went to college. Now he's working 60 hours a week in a car wash." Hayes spent study-hall periods waiting to talk to his counselor about college. But his counselor had 499 other students to see and he never got around to Hayes. So Hayes wrote to college on his own, got the names from brochures in the counselor's anteroom. "I'd never heard of most of them," he says. "They were just names to me."

Eventually he applied to 10 "names," including Harvard, Dartmouth, Wesleyan and the University of Missouri. He was not hopeful. "I knew I'd missed out on my S.A.T.'s [Student Aptitude Tests]." He just couldn't put himself in a mood to take a test. He tensed up and blacked out.

But Hayes was operating in an applicant's market; competition among colleges for promising black students was stiff, and there was a growing consensus that such traditional measuring sticks as S.A.T. scores and class rank were irrelevant to applicants from the ghetto. Wesleyan, pursuing these new tenets of enlightenment, accepts one-third of its black applicants and only one-fourth of its white applicants, although black S.A.T. scores are 130 points lower, on average, than white scores. (A perfect score is 800.)

In any case, Hayes was accepted by nine of the 10 colleges, and Harvard — the sole holdout — might have accepted him, too, had he not been in New Haven before Harvard made up its mind. The way Hayes chose Wesleyan tells us much about him. He had decided on an Eastern college—"I'd heard that it was better" — which narrowed the choice to Dartmouth and Wesleyan. Since he knew little about either school, he was sent to Dartmouth when Dartmouth in turn accepted him to an open house in a St. Louis suburb.

The catered affair took place at the home of a wealthy Dartmouth alumnus. "It was one of my big days," says Hayes, "with a circular drive-way and Cadillacs, and servants all over the place. Most of the servants were black; they were the only black people in the place, except me and one or two other guys. I decided not to go to Dartmouth. I didn't want to be bought off.

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football game of the season and its first threat of organized racial violence, must have been annoying.

By half-time on Nov. 8 Wesleyan was in danger of suffering two defeats: in the stadium Williams was being beaten, and elsewhere the races, both white and black, seemed to be carrying the day. Two dormitory incidents had heated up the tension, but Etherington had felt compelled to cancel the Homecoming dance and get a court order enjoining a band which had been playing "athletic, social or academic events" that weekend.

As the fans munched hot dogs and awaited the second half, a voice on a public-address system. "Wesleyan is a white racist institution," intoned Bernard Freamon, a black senior from New Haven, on a siren night at Ujamaa. Etherington had given him permission to tell the blacks' side of the story. As Freamon finished, the fans gathered with wild cheer — their team had come back on the field. (It went on to win, 18-17.)

The center Freamon might have told began early this fall with a rash of burglaries in the dormitories. White students suspected three or four blacks, who had been frequently wandering through the corridors of several dorms. One night a white student, hearing a knock at his door, opened the door and saw two blacks; they fled. The student made a racist remark about the difficulties of finding clearly labeled bathroom doors. More was this no doubt a threat to all of the black students, during which the other black, George Walker, pulled a knife — not to attack, he said later, but to prevent other whites who had rushed to the scene from interceding. It turned out that Walker was one of "the San Francisco Blacks," who had been seen from Wesleyan whom San Francisco police had arrested last spring and charged with illegal possession of weapon. He was released 13 days after the fight, Wesleyan's five-man Student Judiciary Board (S.J.B.—four whites, one black) put Walker and his friend on "disciplinary probation, meaning that any further trouble would lead to automatic expulsion. At the same time S.J.B. issued an "official warning" to the white student, noting that his language may have been belligerent. The decision triggered the next disaster. On Nov. 4, Jonathan Berg, a white senior from New Jersey, wrote a fiery letter to The Argus in which he called the S.J.B. ruling on the white student "just incredible and called Walker a "common criminal" and "a punk." In black argot, and unknown to Berg, "punk" means homosexual. That night about a dozen blacks went to Berg's room and threatened him with physical harm if he did not retrace his statement. The next night Walker paid another call on Berg, found him taking a shower, and beat him up. Walker was accompanied by Kerry Holman, a black junior from Washington, D.C., who also goes by the name of Kwasi Kibyuo. Were everywhere. Etherington, fearing the worst, then canceled the Saturday night Homecoming dance and got the injunction from Circuit Court Judge Aaron Palmer—the same judge who will preside over the coming Black Panther trial in New Haven—aimed at keeping the peace. In a way it worked—there was no violence that Homecoming weekend; but the action may have severed the gossamer tie of trust between Etherington and the black community. Members of Ujamaa, the injunction implied, as one black faculty member put it, that "all blacks were potential criminals." If it was true that some black moderates were trying

**66Solomon**

**would have been overwhelmed**

**at Wesleyan.**

At midnight Berg called both the police and David W. Adamany, a young associate professor of government, who is also dean of students. Adamany, deciding to short-circuit S.J.B.'s slyly judicial machinery, promptly expelled Walker and suspended Holman.

The next night (two days before Homecoming) Ujamaa held a mass meeting attended by many blacks from Middletown. Ujamaa's newly elected Central Committee, which some white observers think represents "only the radical wing," had drawn up three demands to be made to Wesleyan: fire Adamany, restore Holman to full student status; and set up a separate, all-black student judiciary board to rule on cases involving black students. The meeting endorsed the proposals.

By 11 A.M. the next day spokesmen for students in Etherington's office listing their demands and giving him until 1 P.M. to decide, or else suffer the very serious consequences.Etherington waited until 5 P.M. He then told the blacks he would neither dismiss Adamany nor approve an all-black judiciary; on the other hand, he had reinstated Holman and turned his case over to S.J.B. (Holman is still at Wesleyan.)

**MEANWHILE,** alumni bent on a jolly reunion were beginning to stream onto campus, and rumors of disruption to rein in the "radical" Central Committee, the injunction could hardly have strengthened their hands. The injunction may have lowered the level of trust," Etherington concedes, "but it raised the level of reality."

In any case, the violence did not end there. On Nov. 19 a large fire at the door to Jonathan Berg's bedroom forced that unhappy letter-writer to jump to safety from his second-story window. Witnesses said it was a gasoline fire and that it had been started by two blacks. Middletown police promptly arrested Harold Williams, a black sophomore from New Haven and one of the "San Francisco five" apprehended last spring. Earlier that day Williams had been dropped as a student from Wesleyan for academic reasons. He faces charges of arson, but he is said to have been supplied by a joint faculty-student fund, with both whites and blacks contributing. Many races, one community.

In early December shots were fired—aimed apparently, at Rham Khabib, a black administrator. Earlier that day, two other blacks in his apartment one night, Khabib received a spurious phone call; the telephone was near his face when Khabib hung up bullets shattered the glass. No one was hit. Friends of Khabib speculated that the shooting was
the work of white high-school students in Middleton. Weeks earlier Khabib had angered many whites by interceding in a controversial disciplinary case involving a black high-school student.

This incident was followed by a series of anonymous phone calls to the Wesleyan switchboard warning that bombs had been planted in various places on the campus, including the basement of the Malcolm X House. No bombs have been found, but by now many blacks are convinced there is a white conspiracy afoot to destroy Ujamaa.

Suspicion, in fact, has been increasing on both sides. When police, in response to the bomb scare at the Malcolm X House, limited their search to the basement, they were rebuked by both whites and blacks. The latter wanted the police to find a white bomb; the former, a black arsenal. Neither group doubted that its quarry existed somewhere in the Malcolm X House.

What worries some observers is that the search for guns and bombs precludes the search for understanding. It is clearly too late at Wesleyan for anything but understanding, yet with rare exceptions white students and black students do not even talk to each other. When Worth Hayes first got to Wesleyan he risked an occasional dinner with white friends and resented pressures from his brothers to keep him at "the black table." Nowadays there is no need for pressure; Hayes is content to associate with blacks only.

Similarly, a black artists' exhibition at the Malcolm X House, putatively open to everyone, has attracted few white students. Classroom announcements urging students to attend have been greeted with snickers from whites who view Malcolm X House less as a gallery than a fortress. "If the white man stays in his cocoon," says Hayes, "he'll never understand the black man."

But cocoons come in several colors at Wesleyan, as they do elsewhere in America. The blacks have their Ujamaa; the white have their centuries-old brotherhood of inherited wealth and power, the same brotherhood that expelled Charles B. Ray from Wesleyan in 1832; and the school's handful of Puerto Rican students have their newly formed Latin Leadership Conference, which specifically excludes Mexican-Americans.

If the analogy with cocoons means anything, it means that sooner or later they must give way to a freer, more mature form of living. That is what Wesleyan has been groping toward since 1965—"an experiment in hope," John Maguire calls it—and if moving ahead seems difficult, the alternative of turning back seems downright disastrous. "I am not discouraged," says Etherington. "We came out of this with a good deal of strength. Both our white students and our black students have a sharper awareness of each other's problems."

In the final analysis, only the students can insure the success of Wesleyan's experiment in hope, and they will not speed the day by giving aid and comfort to the armies of the night.

"It is no longer a choice now between violence and nonviolence," Martin Luther King told a Wesleyan audience at the 1964 commencement exercises. "It is either nonviolence or nonexistence."
Graduate Edwin Sanders: He looks to a 90-per-cent black Wesleyan.

Senior Dwight Green: "Most white teachers here don't know how to teach blacks."

Senior Jonathan Berg: A wrong word led to trouble.