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Pre-Dawn Fire Destroys Africana Studies Center

An early-morning fire at Cornell University Wednesday burned out the Africana Studies and Research Center at 320 Wait Ave., resulting in campus and community activity to relocate and rebuild the tragically damaged Center and its academic program.

No one was injured in the fire. The three-story, wood-frame building, with a value estimated at more than \$100,000 was believed to be unoccupied when the alarm sounded at 1:02 a.m. Wednesday.

Negotiations were completed at week's end with James E. Turner, Center director, and the State Dormitory Authority (SDA) for temporary use of Dormitory 8, in the North Campus complex, to house the Africana Center program. Furniture was being moved in over the weekend and telephones have to be connected, so that the building can be used for Africana Center programs starting Monday morning.

Since the fire, investigators including City of Ithaca fire and police officials, Cornell Division of Safety and Security officials, an outside arson investigation experts have been sifting through the ashes to try to find the cause. By the weekend, investigators had still been unable to

determine the cause or probable starting point of the fire.

There has been speculation ever since the fire that arson may have been involved, and the possibility is also discussed in official University statements. However, to date there have been no reports of suspicious persons in the area at the time,

nor have investigators been able to confirm any such conclusion, or any other conclusion, from the materials found inside the building.

The last physical check of the building before the blaze was at 11:55 p.m., when a building guard entered, checked stations

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North Campus 8 Houses Africana Studies Center

Classes and other business of the Africana Studies and Research Center will be conducted temporarily starting tomorrow at Dormitory 8 in the new housing complex at Jessup and Pleasant Grove Roads.

Thomas W. Mackesey, Cornell's vice president for planning, said the building was obviously not constructed for academic use, but that it presented the best available opportunity to rehouse the Africana Center and related activities without delay and to enable classes and other activities of the Center to resume with the return of students tomorrow.

Further, Mackesey said, the use of Dormitory 8 enables all

the activities formerly housed at 320 Wait Avenue to be rehoused together.

"An all-out effort had to be made to obtain New York State Dormitory Authority approval for the changed use of the building on an interim basis," Mackesey said, "and to equip it as fully as possible by tomorrow."

"Having solved the problem of temporary rehousing on this basis, we are now turning to the problem of the permanent relocation of the Africana Center."

James E. Turner, director of the Center, said he thinks the building is "inconvenient and not very useful for office and academic use." He said the dormitory building is "very unique and highly compartmentalized".

"It has the added problem of being very far out," Turner said. "Bus schedules are not synchronized with class schedules."

Turner said the dormitory would present a "problem of usability" because of the "awkwardness of the construction."

"Our main concern is now that

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ON SITE INVESTIGATION — Investigation into the fire at 320 Wait Avenue, burned out home of the Africana Studies and Research Center, continued over the weekend. On Saturday, Chester Whiteside, an arson investigator from the Syracuse Police Department, joined the investigation team. Whiteside, with lamp and briefcase, talks with J. Congress Mbata, Africana Studies associate professor, far left, while Ithaca Police Chief Herbert L. VanOstrand, in light coat, and James Cunningham, Africana Center writer-in-residence, look on.

Commitment Fund Response 'Encouraging'

Contributions to a Cornell Africana Commitment Fund, created to support the Africana Studies and Research Center, and help replace scholarly materials lost in the fire, have been "immediate and encouraging" in the words of Dean of the Faculty Robert D. Miller.

"Although the first tally won't be completed until tomorrow," Miller said, "I can report that envelopes containing contributions started arriving at my office early Thursday and by Friday afternoon we had received more than 50 contributions."

The Fund was established last

Wednesday, April 1, by the Faculty Council during a special meeting called by Miller. In an announcement released shortly

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Fire Rages at Africana Center



FLAMES AT 320 WAIT — Flames leap from upper floors of building at 320 Wait Avenue housing Africana Studies and Research Center which was swept by fire early Wednesday morning.

Chronicle Special

To brief the community on Wednesday's fire at the Africana Studies and Research Center, 320 Wait Avenue, and subsequent events, Cornell Chronicle today publishes this special edition.

This edition, printed and distributed today, is available at all normal Chronicle distribution points.

There will be a regular Chronicle published Thursday.

Chronicle Capsule

TURNER statement on fire.

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FACULTY COUNCIL, Corson, City of Ithaca and other statements.

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BOOKS, theses, research notes all lost in fire.

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RUMOR Control Center in operation.

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Turner Issues Fire Statement

James E. Turner, director of the Africana Studies and Research Center at Cornell, held a news conference Friday in the West Lounge of Statler Hall. Here is Turner's statement at the news conference:

"I said yesterday (Thursday, April 2) that we would make a statement about the events surrounding the burning of 320 Wait, the program there, and the possessions of all the students and faculty participants who use the facilities of that building and occupy that building for office space and class use.

"I also said yesterday that we were concerned about the lack of public attention devoted to this very serious incident. We were particularly concerned about how the lack of public attention relates to the general attitude and reflection of attitude of the larger public; that is the community at large at Cornell specifically and the broader metropolitan community.

"There seems to be very little concern about both the threat of and injury to persons and property in the black community.

"What I would like to do is just set things in perspective as we see them.

"As most of you know, during the early morning hours of April 1, one or more terrorists operating under the cover of night and taking advantage of a campus relatively vacant because of spring recess, did apparently plan and, in fact, effectively execute an arson attack against the Africana Studies and Research Center at 320 Wait Avenue.

"This arson assault upon the property and possessions of the black people making use of that facility is the most recent of a continuing current of violent attack and threat upon the lives of black people in this community. I bring to your attention the fire at the Southside Community Center several months ago which is yet to be explained. More recently, the attack upon Wari House at 208 Dearborn Place, the cooperative used as living quarters by young women in the COSEP program, predominantly black women. At that time (February 21) there was an attempted arson assault on Wari House. In fact, several gasoline flares were thrown directly at the front entrance of the house in an apparent attempt to block off escape by the people there. That also happened at approximately 1 a.m., about the same time as the attack upon 320 Wait a couple of days ago.

"That was the first indication that they had planned to escalate the violence directed at black people in this

Corson Statement 12:25 p.m., April 1, 1970

Three things are uppermost in my mind. First, shock at the fire and this blow to the development of the Africana Studies and Research Center. As of this morning, it has not yet been possible for the authorities to study the site. The possibility of arson will be fully investigated. If arson is involved, I anticipate that every person in this community will share my anger and condemnation. An act of arson would represent an assault, not only on the Center and the Black students, but on Cornell University, on each of us and upon everything we stand for.

Second, I am relieved that there has been no injury or loss of life.

Third, there is an absolute determination that this tragic fire will not impede Cornell's commitments to the Africana Center and to our Black students, faculty, and staff. Alternate facilities for the activities that were housed in 320 Wait Avenue are being made available immediately. These facilities will be protected, as is Wari House.

We do not yet know the full extent of our losses at 320 Wait Avenue, but we do know that valuable books and papers were destroyed. The University will make funds available for rehousing and recovery. In addition, I join the Faculty Council in asking every member of this community to join in a demonstration of faith and commitment to the Africana Center and to our Black students, faculty, and staff by contributing to a special fund that will provide concrete evidence of community support for the Center.

community. The common response was to refer to that regrettable incident as 'vandalism'; again reflecting the attitude and the psychological outlook of the larger society in regard to incidents that threaten the lives of black people.

"That, in fact, was not an act of vandalism. It was a calculated and premeditated attempt at assassination of the women who were sleeping in those quarters. It was an attempt, in fact, to commit murder in cold blood. I think it's worth while to point out at this point two very important things: that the response of white people in this community and around the metropolitan area to the incidents at Wari House, and at 320 Wait Avenue, is indicative of what black people have constantly been pointing at. That is — the function of racism in American culture. There is a great deal of outrage and self-righteous moral indignation expressed by many members of the white community when black students and others refer to acts of white racism. Most people personalize that concept, saying 'I personally have never used any invective toward any individual black person.'

"Of course, black people are talking and have been talking about a concept much wider than that. It has to do with the systematic cultural and political response of the white nation toward those black people oppressed in this country.

"For instance, last April a similar threat against life and property of black people — that is, the burning of the cross at Wari House, was another incident in this current violence. But the response of black men at Cornell to that incident was carried across the nation on news wires, with pictures of that incident. We find that the nationwide news response to this incident (the burning of 320 Wait) has not only been small, it is almost negligible. Small columns, a few lines in some obscure newspapers, no reporting on national television networks, sporadic radio coverage, and, of course, not a swarm of representatives from the major press.

"If the situation had been the reverse; that is to say, had property occupied by white people on this campus been the victims of this kind of attack, we can say without doubt, because we have great precedent, that the white community would have responded with tremendous alarm, with magnificent attention and plenty of comment. We would have heard comments like the need for 'law and order', the need to 'restrain and contain extremists', and the other kinds of political slogans that we often hear.

"But the clear fact is that this incident reflects a historical truism in America — that it has been in the white community that law and order has never been respected. It has been in the white community that the breakdown of law and order has been most criminal and, of course, been most damaging to both life and property of black people.

"The second thing I want to mention is that we not only see this incident as being the most recent of current events that reflect the hostility, the hatred and atmosphere of threat of violence that black people live with in this community, specifically here at Cornell; but also, in fact, it is a reflection of the growing current throughout the American nation that has its origin at the top from the federal government in Washington on down. We can relate to the incident a couple of weeks ago in South Carolina where we saw white men attacking and overturning a bus used to transport young black children to school. It recalls the horror of white violence that preceded and occurred during the civil rights movement.

"But there have re-emerged overt acts of terrorism across the country: the murdering of young political activist Fred Hampton in Chicago; the assassination by bombing of two friends of H. Rap Brown; his disappearance for more than 25 days now, with no national comment or man-hunt to determine his safety. And, of course, the increasing level of just sheer political repression.

"I think all those things must be seen in the context of an emerging pattern — the federal government's retreat on its obligation not only to defend the political rights, and the civil opportunities of the black community, but its open collusion with those elements of the Congress and within the body politic who have been historically the purveyors of right wing fascism and repression. Not just simple moral collusion with them, but political coalition that has led to a retreat from the slim provisions made for citizenship rights for black people.

"The consensus of the entire black community at



JAMES E. TURNER
Africana Center Director

Cornell reflects that of the larger black community around this country, that their persons and their property are insecure and are threatened in this atmosphere. There seems to be an ineffective ability or will to assure their persons and their property. The collective determination within that community is not simply to give defensive response, but to take initiative to assure that acts of vandalism no matter how minor, or threats of violence against the life of black persons, will not go henceforth without appropriate response from the black community. That is to say, in short, our determination is to see that not only are we protected, which is a defensive measure, but to make sure that we have the initiative to ensure that these acts will not continue with impunity."

City, County Officials Pledge Support

Ithaca Mayor Hunna Johns and Harris B. Dates, chairman of the Tompkins County Board of Representatives, issued a statement Friday morning in which they called upon "the citizens and community agencies in Greater Ithaca and Tompkins County to assist the Africana Center in rebuilding and furthering its important contribution to the education of students and to scholarly work."

The Johns-Dates statement reads:

"We, the Mayor of Ithaca, Hunna Johns, and the Chairman of the Tompkins County Board of Representatives, Harris Dates, sharing the concern expressed by the community, met this morning (Friday) with Director James Turner of the Africana Studies Center and three members of his faculty who were in Ithaca.

"From them we learned first-hand the great extent of the loss suffered through the recent fire. In addition to personal effects, many books, objects of art, educational materials, and equipment had been contributed by faculty and students and are not covered by insurance.

"Although there were no persons living in the building, the Center has served as a home away from home for almost 200 students.

"But the greatest loss from the fire is the severe setback it has given to the impressive educational and research program that the faculty and students had begun to develop at the Center. Original manuscripts, historical documents, recordings, and data records have been destroyed. Much of this loss is irreplaceable.

"Cornell University is currently engaged in a major effort to provide new quarters and re-establish the educational program for students returning on Monday. In addition to the efforts being made by the University, there remain concrete needs in terms of books, electronic equipment, and educational materials needed for continuing and advancing the program of the Center.

"We call upon the citizens and community agencies in Greater Ithaca and Tompkins County to assist the Africana Center in rebuilding and furthering its important contribution to the education of students and to scholarly work. Efforts are being coordinated by the Mayor's office, and a further announcement will be made on Monday."

Rumor Control Center Operating

Cornell University's Rumor Control Center will be open from noon to at least midnight today (Sunday, April 5), to answer questions about Wednesday's fire in the Africana Studies and Research Center at 320 Wait Ave.

Alan L. Sapakie, administrative aide to the University ombudsman, said the Rumor Control Center will be reopened at 8 a.m. tomorrow (Monday) and operated until noon when a decision would be made on whether or not to continue its operation.

The Center, first operated during last April's crisis, was ordered reactivated by University President Dale R. Corson. Sapakie said Corson called him at 8:30 a.m. Wednesday and asked that the Rumor Control Center be manned once again to answer questions. The reactivation took place at 9:30 a.m. and the first call was logged at 9:40 a.m.

A total of 30 calls were received the day of the fire, about two-thirds of them from persons seeking to find out the cause of the fire. On Thursday, seven calls were received, many of them long distance calls from persons hearing brief reports of the fire on radio. The rumor clinic was closed on Thursday.

The Rumor Control Center is at 214 Ives Research. The telephone numbers are 256-3880 and 256-3724. Sapakie said he would welcome student

Ag Faculty

The following resolution was passed unanimously Wednesday, April 1, during a regular monthly meeting of the faculty of the New York State College of Agriculture at Cornell University:

The faculty of the College of Agriculture reiterates the University Faculty Council sentiments expressed today in reacting to the destruction by fire of the Africana Studies Center and supports the President of the University and the Council in efforts to restore losses and to increase the admission of black students to the University.

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volunteers to help man the telephones.

The idea of a rumor clinic was included in proposals to set up an ombudsman's office after last year's April crisis.

Fire Destroys Center

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in the basement and on the second floor, saw nothing out of the ordinary, and left, locking the building behind him.

At 12:35 a.m., Safety Division Sgt. Arthur S. Graham drove past the building and checked it visually. He reported that he saw nothing unusual, and no indication of fire or smoke.

Center Director Turner said at a news conference Friday that the fire was an "arson assault on the property and possessions of the black people making use of that facility . . ." In response to an inquiry, he said he was "sure it was a white" who set the fire. He said further that the fire "is the most recent of a continuing current of violent attack and threat upon the lives of black people in this community."

Local investigators at the fire scene were joined on Thursday afternoon by William Timmins, an investigator with the Arson and Fraud Division of the American Insurance Assn., who spent the afternoon with the Ithaca team.

Ithaca Fire Chief Charles Weaver had called Timmins, with the concurrence of local police and Safety Division officials assisting in the investigation. It was explained that Timmins was not called because of anything found of a suspicious nature, but only to make sure that everything that could be done in the probe was being done.

On Saturday, Chester Whiteside, an arson investigator from the Syracuse Police Department, joined the investigation.

University President Dale R. Corson, who was at the scene of the fire Wednesday morning, issued a statement at 3:45 a.m. in which he said: "I am deeply disturbed by the fire which destroyed the Africana Studies and Research Center. The Safety Division is cooperating with City Police and Firemen in determining the cause of the blaze. We will provide temporary space for the Center's program."

In a statement later that morning, Corson said there is "an absolute determination that this tragic fire will not impede Cornell's commitments to the Africana Center and to our Black students, faculty and staff."

Corson also said, "The possibility of arson will be fully investigated. If arson is involved, I anticipate that every person in this community will share my anger and condemnation. An act of arson would represent an assault, not only on the Center

Books, Research Notes

Center's Papers Destroyed

While the loss of the building at 320 Wait Avenue was an extremely damaging blow to the burgeoning Africana Studies and Research Center at Cornell, an even more serious loss was suffered with the destruction of

virtually all of the notes, manuscripts and books that were assembled in the 70-year-old structure.

"The loss was awful," James E. Turner, director of the Center, said Friday.

Hundreds of books purchased for the Center, many still in cartons waiting to be catalogued and shelved, were destroyed when the south end of the building, which housed the library, collapsed in flames.

In addition, notes, outlines and manuscripts for the doctoral dissertations of C. Dalton Jones, research associate of the Center, and Rukudzo Murapa, associate professor of black studies and political science, were destroyed.

Turner said that many of the faculty and staff of the Center had been assembling notes they kept at home or in the library, in anticipation of a spring recess week of work.

Personal research, out-of-print books, rare documents, and manuscripts for articles and at least one book were lost. According to Turner, the book "represented 20 years of experience and at least four years of hard research."

In addition, most of the papers were not covered by insurance.

Also burned or destroyed were the research projects of students at the center.

Africana Fund Response Is 'Encouraging'

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after noon, the Council stated: "We have informed the President that we pledge our support to efforts to make up our losses and move ahead. We urge the community to contribute generously to this effort "to make up our losses and move ahead." That evening, the College of Agriculture Faculty, in a regular meeting, voted full endorsement of the Faculty Council resolution. The Interfraternity Council issued a statement on the fire Friday as did the Interim Election Committee of the Cornell Constituent Assembly.

The fire will be the main topic for discussion at the April meeting of the University Faculty at 4:30 p.m. Wednesday in Bailey Hall. It will include reports from President Corson and Africana Center Director Turner.

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North 8: New Africana Site

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no intermediate place is acceptable unless or until there is a definite determination about replacement," Turner said. "From our perspective, the question of a decision about acceptability of a facility is only relevant to that which would involve relocation.

"There have been pronouncements about the University's unequivocal intent to replace all material loss and

equipment that is needed for the growth of the Center and to maintain continuity in the development of its program.

"We are waiting for fulfillment of those announced commitments and the future position of all of us will be determined on how quickly all of these things are done," Turner said.

Telephone service will be *Continued on Page 4*



MOVE TO EIGHT — Personnel of the Cornell Department of Buildings and Properties moved furniture and academic equipment into North Campus 8 over the weekend. Building will house relocated Africana Studies and Research Center.

and the Black students, but on Cornell University, on each of us and upon everything we stand for."

The Cornell Faculty Council Wednesday established the Cornell Africana Commitment Fund, and urged the entire community to contribute generously to this effort "to make up our losses and move ahead." That evening, the College of Agriculture Faculty, in a regular meeting, voted full endorsement of the Faculty Council resolution. The Interfraternity Council issued a statement on the fire Friday as did the Interim Election Committee of the Cornell Constituent Assembly.

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Some records and documents were saved in the fire, but many more were lost — some of them one-of-a-kind manuscripts. Also destroyed was the Center's library, which was fast becoming an outstanding collection of works in the black studies field.

Firemen had no chance to save the building. When they arrived, just minutes after the alarm had been received on the alarm system, indicating a break in the circuit at 320 Wait, all three floors were in flame.

Firemen had the blaze under control by 3 a.m., but by then most of the third floor was destroyed, the second floor was gutted and in many places fell through to the first floor level, which also was heavily damaged. Smoke and water damage was severe even in those areas which were not burned.

A Safety Division guard was placed at Wari House, the black women's cooperative at 208 Dearborn Place, immediately after the alarm was received. Wari was unoccupied at the time because of the spring recess.

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Fire Destroys Center

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Safety Division personnel had been keeping a security check on the Wari building during all times of occupancy since an unlighted construction flare pot was thrown onto the porch there February 22.

When fire inspectors entered the 70-year-old building at 320 Wait Wednesday afternoon, they found burning was extensive in some areas, but only smoke and water damage in others.

There was no indication of fire in the basement, or in the first-floor office of Director Turner and an administrative aide.

At the end of the day Thursday, investigators reported that they had completed a thorough search of the first floor. On Friday, the probe was halted until workmen could remove debris to make it safe to continue on upper floors.

Eugene J. Dymek, director of safety and security, said it would be too dangerous to go onto the upper levels until they could be made safe. He said he expected the investigation to continue on into this week.

As they went along, investigators took samples of burned material from various areas of the building, to be used for chemical analysis if that is necessary in reaching a finding on the fire's cause.

Ithaca Fire Chief Weaver said a good bit of time was spent on the front door area in front of the stairwell, since that was where burning was most intense when firemen arrived. The central stairwell reportedly acted as a "chimney" for the fire and was almost entirely burned out.

The building contained six classrooms and some offices on the second and third floors, plus offices and a seminar room on the first floor. The basement housed the Africana Coffee House, which served coffee and snacks, and provided meeting facilities for the Black Liberation Front (BLF).

The structure was once a music building, and more recently had been the home of the former School of Education, until it became the headquarters for black studies programs in December 1968. This fall, the building, which underwent renovation over the summer, was turned over to the Africana Studies and Research Center.

Faculty Council Statement 12:17 p.m., April 1

The circumstances in which the building housing the Africana Studies and Research Center was virtually destroyed, following two incendiary attacks on Wari House, make it imperative that all understand that attacks aimed at any of our faculty or students are attacks on all of us and we deeply resent them. Whether or not the supposition of arson is confirmed or refuted by investigations now underway, the Faculty Council will undertake to rally the community to support the consolidation and

North Campus 8 New Center Home

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installed tomorrow and furniture was moved into the dormitory over the weekend.

Dormitory 8 is one of five similar low-rise structures which are part of a planned 11-building North Campus complex. Besides those five buildings, two high rise buildings and a commons building are either completed or under construction. Three other buildings in the 11-unit complex have not been contracted for.

Mackesey described Dormitory 8 as "essentially completed, except for landscaping."

Dormitory 8, like the other four structures it resembles, is designed to include studies, lounges, suites for small groups, rooms for special activities and other conveniences.

Commitment Fund

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in which he described the Fund and procedures for making contributions was broadcast by radio station WHCU several times Thursday and Friday.

The East Hill Merchants Association was among early contributors to the Fund, donating \$100. The Association's president stated in a letter that the membership had voted to make the gift, and that several members had indicated they would also provide individual assistance.

Checks made out to the Cornell Africana Commitment Fund may be mailed either to Miller's office at 304 Day Hall or directly to the Records Secretary, Gift Records, B-7 Day Hall. Privacy will be assured by placing personal checks in sealed envelopes marked "Cornell Africana Commitment Fund (CACF), Gift Records." Miller stressed the importance of including the donor's name and return address so that Gift Records may acknowledge each contribution as a tax exempt gift.

Persons wishing to contribute but who are unable to send a check on short notice may send pledges to either address. Miller recommends using the following pledge form:

I pledge \$ _____ to the Cornell Africana Commitment Fund payable in full by June 30, 1970.

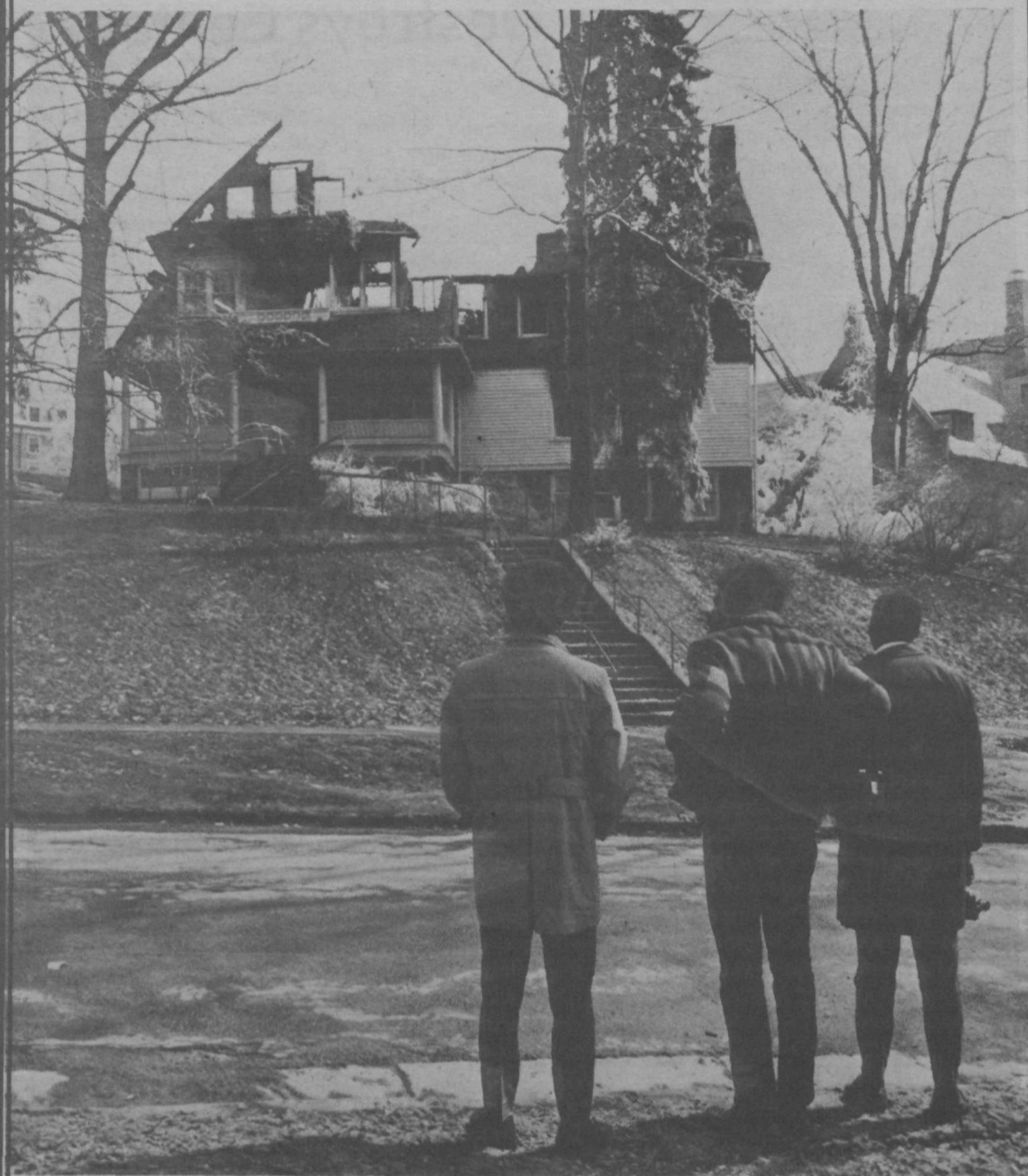
Date, signature and address should follow.

growth of the Africana Studies Center and the President's objective of increasing admission of black undergraduate and graduate students to the University.

We have informed the President that we pledge our support to efforts to make up our losses and move ahead. We urge the community to contribute generously to a Cornell Africana Commitment Fund, and to send their contributions to the Fund to the Office of the Dean of the University Faculty, 304 Day Hall.

"...it was so promising...

that tinderbox!"



Restore the promiseMake a commitment

"...it was so promising...that tinderbox!" That was the reaction of Dr. Gloria I. Joseph, associate professor in the Africana Studies and Research Center at Cornell, to the fire which virtually destroyed the Center at 320 Wait Avenue last Wednesday. The fire dealt a blow to the development of the Center and to the hopes of Cornell's Black students, faculty and staff.

The Faculty Council at Cornell has asked the community to join in demonstration of faith and commitment to the Africana Center and to Cornell's Black students, faculty and staff by contributing to a special fund to provide concrete evidence of community support for the Center.

Contributions to this fund, the Cornell Africana Commitment Fund, can be sent to B-7 Day Hall.

Cornell Africana Commitment Fund,
B-7 Day Hall, Cornell University