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 expert 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.

The last physical check of the building before the blaze was at 11:55 p.m. when a building guard entered, checked stations and found nothing.

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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North Campus 8 Houses Africana Studies Center

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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 thereafter, Miller encouraged contributions to a fund created to support the Africana Studies and Research Center.

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Fire Rages at Africana Center

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 briefer, talks with J. Congress Moara, Africana Studies associate professor, far left, while Ithaca Police Chief Herbert L. VanOstrand, in light coat, and James Cunningham, Africana Studies investigator from the Syracuse Police Department, joined the investigation.

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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.
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 say today, April 21 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 used 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 which I was particularly concerned about when the lack of public attention relates to the perception 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 would I 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 cloak of night and taking advantage of a campus relatively vacant because of spring recess did destroy that plan and, in fact, effectively execute an arson attack against the Africana Studies and Research Center at 320 Wait Avenue.

"The 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 that this assault of that building, the Blackside 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 that building in an effort to block 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.

"This is the first indication that they had planned to escalate the violence directed at black people in this 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 attack at assassination of the women who were sleeping in those quarters. It was an attempt, in fact, to commit an act of 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 on black students and others and refers to acts of white racism. Most people personalize that concept, saying ‘I personally have never taken any inventive 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 systemic 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 violent attack upon black people at Cornell to assess the nature of 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 Avenue) has been 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 nation has been most criminal and, at the same time, most of course, been most damaging to both life and property of black people.

"The second thing I want to mention is that not only see there is a comparable current of current events that reflect the hostility, the hatred and atmosphere of threat of violence that black people live within this community, specifically here at Cornell; but also, in fact, its growing throughout the American nation that has its origin at the top from the federal government in Washington down. We can relate to the incident a couple of weeks ago in South Carolina where 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 bulldogging of two friends of H. Rap Brown; his disappearance, his two missing days, 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 openness to 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 collusion that has led to a retreat of the slim provisions made for citizenship rights for black people.

"The consensus of the entire black community at 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, however minor, or threats of violence against the life of black persons, will not go henceforth without appropriate response from the black community. That is, this is an intolerable.见解.
Fire Destroys Center

Continued from Page 1

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 conflagration" and that he did.

Local investigators at the fire scene were joined on Thursday afternoon by William Timmins, an investigator with the Ithaca Fire and Fraud Division of the American Insurance Assn., who spent the afternoon with the Ithaca Fire Department. Also on the scene were joined on Thursday were saved in the fire, but many records and documents were destroyed, the second floor was gutted and in many places fell away. The 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 Cornell Police and Firemen in determining the cause of the blaze. We will provide temporary space for the Center's programs.

In a statement later that morning, Corson said there was 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 added: "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."

The Cornell Faculty Council Wednesday established the Cornell Africana Commitment Fund, and urged the entire university 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 joint statement praising the efforts of the Ithaca team.

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. Ithaca Mayor Hunna Johns and County Board of Representatives Chairman Harrie B. dates issued a joint statement Friday calling upon "the citizens and 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.

Some records and documents were saved in the fire, but many more were lost. Among them were the Africana Manuscript collection, one-of-a-kind manuscripts and some of the University's Africana Fund.

North 8: New Africana Site

Continued from Page 1

no intermediate place is acceptable until or until there is a definite determination about replacement," Turner said. "From our perspective, the question of 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 damage. We have informed the President and the Council in the ordinary, and left, locking the building behind him.

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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, according to the report of the tenant because of the spring recess. Continued on Page 4
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 pit was thrown onto the porch there February 22.

When fire inspectors entered the 70-year-old building at 3:20 Wait Wednesday afternoon, they found burning was extensive in every area, 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.

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 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.

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

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Commitment Fund
Continued from Page 3

in which he described the Fund and procedures for making contributions was broadcast on 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.

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.

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