

A History of the Journey from the Third World Center to the Carl A. Fields Center for Cultural Understanding

Since first allowing African-American students into Princeton University in 1942, campus climate was quite hostile, and there were frequent racial conflicts between minority and non-minority students. One such conflict was the Rockefeller Suite incident in October 1978, in which a Black student was urinated on after asking a group of White students who were hosting a party to lower their music. The Black student later organized his friends and returned to the party to confront the white students. A fight ensued.

Growing tired of the racial tensions, Leonard Brown '71, leader of the Association of Black Collegians (ABC) proposed that Black students request a "Black House". At an ABC meeting in early 1971, Brown formed a committee of ten students who would ensure that the administration met their demands. Committee members included Marion Humphrey '72, Gregory Howard '74, and Thurman White '72. At the next Black House committee meeting on February 9, 1972, Humphrey led the Committee to Lowrie House, home of President Robert F. Goheen. Humphrey and White presented President Goheen with a draft of the proposal for an Afro-Am Center. They requested an on-campus facility with space to accommodate 300 people including current Black students, incoming Black students, White people interested in Afro-Am studies, campus workers, and their guests. They envisioned this facility being located on Prospect Ave or at Palmer House. However, President Goheen had many doubts about their proposal and saw the "Black House" as a separatist movement that would only serve Black students and not benefit the University community as a whole. During their talk, Goheen and Humphrey spoke about the possibility of a "Third World Center," a space that would be inclusive

of all minority groups. President Goheen made no promises that these students would receive a center but requested that they draft a revised proposal for a Third World Center for his consideration.

Tshombe Abdul '72 wrote a proposal for The Third World Center, as previously outlined in the meeting with Goheen, which was delivered to the President's office by Humphrey. The Third World Center's mission was to "provide a centralized area in which close examination can be given to the political, cultural, and social movements of the minority groups in the United States." It was intended to be a space for Blacks, Latinos, Chicanos, Native American, and other Third World minorities. This center would host seminars and colloquia about cultural issues and have both a library and a boutique to display the arts and fashions of Third World America. In the days following, ABC awaited a response from campus administration regarding their proposal for a Third World Center. After five days had passed with no message, the students followed up with President Goheen to demand action regarding their previous conversation and demanded that their proposal be forwarded to Dean of Students Neil L. Rudenstine. Dean Rudenstine disapproved of the proposal for reasons similar to those brought up by President Goheen in his meeting with ABC.

The lack of response to the Third World Center and the University's decision to cut student financial aid for disadvantaged students, including minority students, solidified the students opinion that Princeton University did not value its minority student population. To combat this, students formed the Third World Coalition and on March 12, 1971 staged a sit-in at Firestone Library with 170 students in attendance. The sit-in lasted over three hours after the library's closing time of 11:45. The point of this sit-in was to gain the attention of the

administration, and while some students involved were disciplined, the administration began to take notice of the needs of their minority students.

At a meeting on March 17, 1971, the Third World Coalition met with members of the administration and members of the Priorities Committee to press the University about its commitment to the minority students. At this meeting, students proposed the Third World Center once more and Dean Rudenstine, previously opposed to the idea, expressed his support. He expressed further support at a Board of Trustees meeting on April 15, 1971, partially due to his belief that creating such a facility would serve as a show of the University's commitment to minority students. Provost William G. Bowen echoed these sentiments on June 7, 1971. With support from these administrators, on September 1, 1971, the University announced plans to build the Third World Center in the Osborn Field House, located at 86 Olden Street.

On October 16, 1971, the Third World Center (TWC) officially opened with Conrad Snowden as its master. Since its establishment, the Center struggled to provide students with what they needed because the facility was on the outskirts of campus and too small to host programming that would bring the minority community together effectively. A request for the TWC to be moved to Cannon Club was denied by the University. Instead, the University gave \$200,000 to renovate the TWC and provide them with more space to aid their programming and community building efforts. They also dedicated an annex, Liberation Hall to TWC in 1975, the year TWC elected its first governance board, a group of students who made decisions about the center. The student-led governance board allocated monies to support diverse cultural, educational, and political programming that was not readily available at Princeton. Prominent former TWC student governance board leaders include Supreme Court Justice of the United States, Sonia Sotomayor '76, and former First Lady of the United States, Michelle Obama '85.

Under the leadership of the first full-time program director, Stanley T. Kwong TWC became a haven for students of color- a place where they could explore their respective cultures while acclimating to Princeton and forging connections with others. TWC membership within the Princeton community also included progressive white students along with many faculty and administrators. The Center's status as a university facility provided annual funding, enabling TWC to serve as an umbrella organization for various Black, Latino, and Asian student groups on campus. In the spring of 1978, Kwong resigned from his position as center director and Deborah Stapleton became the director that summer.

Before her resignation in the fall of 1980, the TWC's operation budget was doubled, and equipment to facilitate operation was acquired. Anita Defrantz assumed the position of acting director until 1981, when Czerni Braswell was named director. Under the directorship of Braswell, the Center commemorated its 10th anniversary with a conference to discuss issues of concern affecting Third World students at Princeton. Braswell resigned in December 1983.

Professor Arcadio Diaz-Quinones was named acting director until Michael Martin was named Director of the TWC in May 1984. In the fall of 1984, Martin began work on aggressive programming efforts and initiated growth of the TWC's infrastructure, including making improvements to the facility and its communication and support systems. He submitted proposals to increase administrative support, the Third World Center became a copy center for the University, and membership rose from 239 to 335. Additionally, Martin established the TWC Co-Op Center, a viable alternative for TWC upper-class members. Active programming continued with the sponsorship of lectures, colloquia, and speakers.

Martin resigned in spring 1990 and Melinda Contreras-Byrd was then named acting director of TWC. In preparation for the search for a new director of the TWC, the TWC Working Group was formed to gather information about the past achievements, initiatives, and directions of TWC and to investigate possibilities for its future.

In the fall of 1991, Michael Rodriguez '81 was appointed director of TWC. During his tenure, the Campus Center Committee suggested that the Women's Center, the International Center, and the TWC be moved to the new Campus Center; however, TWC's Governance Board strongly opposed this move and contacted President Harold Shapiro to express their concerns. The Third World Center remained at 86 Olden Street.

Rodriguez resigned in spring 1994, and Heddy Ducree took over as interim director of the TWC. Ducree held meetings to develop a strategic plan for the Third World Center to serve the student body effectively. At this time, many students began to feel that the name "Third World Center" did not accurately represent them or their identities because their countries of origin no longer belonged to the Third World and students felt that changing the name of the center would make it more appealing to the Princeton community. Many alumni and current students wanted to keep the TWC name for the sake of history; however, it was important to Ducree to honor the desires of the students that the center currently served.

Discussions regarding the name change continued until spring 2001 when the governance board of the TWC spearheaded discussions with students, alumni, and administration. Through these discussions, they decided to name the center after Dr. Carl A. Fields, the first African-American administrator at an Ivy League institution. The decision to rename the center was approved by the Board of Trustees on April 13, 2002, and took effect July 1, 2002, with the dedication ceremony taking place on September 20, 2002. This name change

represented the center's mission to provide a cultural, social, and political environment that reflected the needs and concerns of students of color. With the name change came a revision of the mission statement of the center: to create a "hospitable place ... conducive to social interaction that [emphasized] the cultural, intellectual, and social interests of undergraduate and graduate students." The Center would also focus on engaging the wider University Community and encouraging broader community participation. In August 2003, Ducree resigned.

Makeba Clay served as director of the Carl A. Fields Center until 2011. Under her directorship, the Carl A. Fields Center was moved from 86 Olden Street to 58 Prospect Avenue. The new facility reflected the updated mission of the center and its renewed commitment of openness to people of all backgrounds, including those from Princeton University and the surrounding community. The new space provided offices for administration; spaces for teaching and community building; and spaces for musical, academic, and social programs.

In 2012 Tennille Haynes became the director of the Carl A. Fields Center.