Not unlike other colleges and universities across the country in the 1960s and early 1970s, the University of Hartford experienced the political, social, and lifestyle turmoil of the time. On campus, the fledgling University was reaching out to prospective students even as enrolled students were protesting against higher tuition rates, the Vietnam War, and other issues.

At the same time, the University administration was being criticized, primarily by black students, that recruitment of black students, faculty, and staff was not a high enough priority. Although African American students had been accepted from the University’s inception, they remained a small portion of the student body in 1971—3.2 percent of a total student population of approximately 3,800, according to then University President Archibald Woodruff.

The 1969 List of Proposals
In the spring of 1969 black students sent a list of 19 proposals to improve race relations to Woodruff and the administration. These proposals were also published in UH News, the student newspaper. The first, and possibly primary, proposal requested the establishment of a black studies department and major. Other issues raised included increasing the number of black students, black faculty, black staff, and black regents; naming one of the new dormitory complexes after black leaders (see “Hartford Dormitories,” p. 15); inviting more black artists to campus; and providing funding for a black newspaper and library.

The University’s response was initially cautious, but Woodruff was open to negotiations. Responding in UH News, he said the black students’ “suggestions . . . represent an interesting approach to problems which have been of deep concern to the regents . . . and to my faculty colleagues and to me.” At the request of the board of regents, a task force was set up to look into the students’ proposals.

BY NOVEMBER 1971, BLACK STUDENT LEADERS WERE DISILLUSIONED AND DISSATISFIED WITH WHAT THEY SAW AS A LACK OF PROGRESS.

In a memo dated April 28, 1969, to members of the Administrative Council, Hector C. Prud’homme, senior vice president at the University, suggested steps to improve black students’ experiences without waiting for the task force’s findings. “We can take some steps . . . so as to make their studies and campus life more meaningful.” He said there could be “immediate action” in three areas: History 537: After Slavery, Black America since Emancipation, would accommodate all black students who wished to enroll; the University housing policy would include the provision of appropriate accommodations for groups of students desiring to live in adjacent rooms; and Paul Britto ’72, president of the Afro-American Organization (AAO), and the group’s members would be asked to suggest books for a black studies section in the library.

Two years later, in 1971, the University began offering a major in black studies leading to a Bachelor of Arts degree. Some of the courses were taught at Trinity College, the Hartford Seminary, and Saint Joseph College in West Hartford through the Intercollegiate Registration Program. By the 1972–73 academic year, the University Bulletin listed an interdepartmental major in
black studies with three emphases: African studies, Afro-American studies, and Afro-Caribbean studies. Today, the University offers a minor in African American studies with the same three areas of emphasis set up in the original program.

THE 1971 SIT-IN AT NORTH HOUSE
Negotiations between black student organizations and the University’s administration continued on various issues, but by November 1971, black student leaders were disillusioned and dissatisfied with what they saw as a lack of progress in some areas. In his autobiography, *Never Say Never*, David Garry ’74, a founder of the University’s chapter of Omega Phi Epsilon fraternity and a member of the Black People’s Union (BPU), reports that there was a long and heated debate between the two student organizations about what steps to take next. They decided to convene a meeting with Woodruff and other University officials to submit a proposal of 12 items.

According to Garry, 13 members of the BPU were selected to attend the meeting on Nov. 10, 1971, at 3 p.m. in the Regents Room in North House (now Bates House). An article in the *Hartford Courant* at the time identified the central issue as a request for $50,000 in scholarship money earmarked for recruiting blacks. Black students did not want the money to come out of the general financial aid fund because that would cause white students to lose their aid. Carl Clay ’76, spokesman for the BPU and chief negotiator for the black students, said that would turn things into a “black versus white issue,” something the BPU wanted to avoid.

When Woodruff reviewed the proposal and replied in the negative, some 60 members of the BPU entered North House and the Regents Room. A four-day sit-in had begun. By all reports the occupation was peaceful. Woodruff told the press that the students were there at his invitation.

According to an article in the *Hartford Courant* (Nov. 11, 1971), how the $50,000 in scholarship funds for recruiting black students would be made available was the first issue settled. The administration agreed that the money would not come out of the regular scholarship fund unless the University’s income fell below the previous year’s income. Although Woodruff announced to the media “that agreement had been reached on 80 percent of the issues,” students began bringing in blankets and food in preparation for spending another night. While negotiations continued, the Student Senate voted to support the black students’ demands.

Late Friday afternoon, Nov. 13, the strike was peacefully concluded, with both sides pleased with the agreement. Other issues resolved included the establishment of a board of black and white students as well as members of the faculty, administration, security force, and community to investigate alleged harassment of black students by white public safety officers; giving black students priority for housing in Du Bois and Malcolm X Houses; establishing a committee to consider whether black students could be given their own meeting place; funds to send black students to black educational conferences; and trying to find a van or bus for use by the BPU to carry on its community affairs programs.

A University press release dated Nov. 13 stated, “The students and the administration expressed their feelings that this is just the beginning of negotiations and not the end, to see that the University of Hartford continues to take an active part in promoting equality in the university community and within the United States.”

Hartford Dormitories Honor Black Leaders—Thanks to Student Activism

First-year residence halls on campus (Complexes A–D) are divided into buildings with their own names and entrances. Three of these residence halls have names that embody black leadership and the civil rights struggle—King, Malcolm X, and Du Bois. If not for student activism, those names might not be there.

When University officials put together a list of names for the new dormitories that were being built on campus in the late 1960s, they recorded names like Harriet Beecher Stowe, Eli Whitney, and Wallace Stevens, all of whom hold a revered place in history and all of whom do have a residence hall named after them. When black students at that time asked why no black leaders’ names were included, archival documents show that they were told it was the University’s practice to “name dormitories after leading historical figures from Connecticut.” This policy eliminated people like Martin Luther King Jr. and W. E. B. Du Bois from consideration.

The Afro-American Organization (AAO), a student group on campus, submitted a list of 19 requests to the University in March 1969 (see “Campus Unrest,” p. 14). The fifth request asked “that a dormitory complex be named after black heroes, with the understanding that black students have priority in choosing their living accommodations in these dormitories.”

The AAO also submitted a list of names, and negotiations began with University officials. In a Sept. 30, 1970, newsletter issued by the president’s office, the final list of campus residence hall names included the W. E. B. Du Bois House, Malcolm X House, and Martin Luther King House.