

- **FIRST STOP: Chapin Steps**
 - **LOCATIONS:** Chapin, lawn, Baxter
 - **NARRATIVE:** Welcome, and thanks for joining me this afternoon. You've likely wondered about the history of student activism here at Williams College. To be sure, it's no new phenomenon: tales of student occupiers, strikers, and protesters fighting against the grain of bigotry and injustice have been immortalized in lore. And for good reason -- the Davis Center, the Minority Coalition, Latinx and Africana Studies are a few of the tangible fruits of student of color activism of past. These students' courageous labor in organization, protestation, and negotiation have been instrumental to the evolution of this College, which has come far since its auspices as an elite institution for the creme de la creme of white America. But aside from few exciting lores accrued in collective memory -- of hunger strikers and building occupiers -- how do we go about remembering student of color activism at this College? What else was there, besides these few exhilarating details? The next forty minutes will launch us into a reliving of the histories we have only heard in myth. Situating ourselves on the physical sites on which these histories occurred, we will use our imaginations to attempt a collective (re)imagination, to flesh out these moments of historic significance, and to rethink our relationship to these pasts.
 - For example: Have you ever wondered about the history of the mundane? Take Chapin steps, for example: emblematic as the performative site of the idyllic liberal arts experience, these steps today are much more than a few slabs of concrete. But rarely does it cross our minds that these steps has also been the site of contestation, a place for the public expression of collective anger, joy, and declaration.
 - **QUEER STUDENTS**
 - April, 1993: a day similar to this one -- the sun has just begun to peep from behind the clouds, teased out by a gentle breeze. Beneath the soft rays, the front entrance to Chapin hall is decorated with a rainbow banner which reads, "Reclaim the Flame." Standing beneath the declarative sign, which poses a stark contrast to the austerity of the Greek Revival's brick and marble exterior, a student clad in a black leather jacket places one hand carefully on a hip hugged by straight-legged black jeans. With the other, she clutches a mic. Her crew cut bobs in the wind, and her rubber-soled feet, planted firmly next to a chunky speaker, strike a determined stance. We can almost hear her words quivering proudly broadcasted through the colonnades. It is queer pride week, 1993, and the Bisexual, Gay, and Lesbian Union, in collaboration with Bi-the-Way, the campus bisexual organization, have organized a public rally centered around a strategy of visibility. Through poetry, prepared speeches, and recitations, students speak about their particular experiences of being queer in a heterosexist world. "First and foremost," a BGLU representative muses, "[this] is a celebration of being queer -- a celebration of who we are, where we came from, and how far we've come. It's also a chance for us to be visible to those who would rather have us quiet but also visible to our supporters and mostly to those

people just beginning to find their own sexuality.” Touching on issues of queer reclamation and giving a nod to the diverse array of racial identities that intersect with the identities of queerness, students are seeking to shed light on the “importance of coming out,” and being “proud” and “open” about their queer identities. Addressing a crowd of 300 listeners, Miriam G., the emcee of the rally, speaks on the difficulties students of color commonly face when “coming out” to their families.

- Tabling in the central hub of Baxter Hall, BGLU members pass out printed stickers with slogans ranging from “queer” to “99 44/100% straight” to a write-your-own variety. Inviting participants to engage and “embrace [the] ambiguity” of sexual orientation, the participatory event attempts to engage in a powerful visibility politics that at once reinforces and challenges the notion of queer “pride.”
 - Acknowledging the “diversity of the voices of the queer community at Williams,” in an era before the rhetoric of diversity had replaced multiculturalism, queer students at Williams are striving to highlight and provide an inclusive space to “political, non-political, bisexual, homosexual, [and] queers of color.”
- ASIAN AMERICAN STUDENTS
- Yonder, on the patchy grass that is Paresky Lawn, Asian American Students in Action staged annual convocations to formally launch the political agenda of a new year. An occasion for speech, song, and dance, these celebratory moments dually operated as frameworks in which the Asian American student body gathered to engage in collective reflection. If the personal is also the political, these convocations presented a showcase of political art: a particularly memorable 1998 April celebration saw the performance of songs from Chris Ijima, Nabuko Miyamoto, and Chris Chin’s folkloric tribute to anti-colonialism, *Grain of Sand*, followed by a student speech titled “What Does it Mean to be Asian American at Williams College?” “Let me tell you about the Asian experience,” it begins...
 - Though overrepresentation can be the burden of the minoritarian subject, these convocations provided valuable spaces for Asian American students to engage in consciousness building, and experiment with the production of racial discourse. Above all, it was a space in which they were, if only for a moment, able to find relief in shared difference.
- LATINX STUDENTS
- Most of us know Baxter Hall as the central hub of student activity. But far from being simply a place for benign social gathering, Baxter has served as the location of student collaborations of a much more urgent nature.
 - 1993 witnessed an uncomfortable confrontation between the College administration and a group of concerned Latinx students and their allies.

Frustrated by the administration's failure to make good on its promise to hire a tenure-track Latinx studies professor (and what they saw as empty excuses of "rigor" and "academic relevance"), a group of thirty students went on hunger strike in efforts to persuade the College administration to reconsider its recent rejections of tenure to Bolin fellow Galdys Jiminez Muñoz (who taught on Women of Color feminist thought) and visiting professor Gerardo Renique (who taught on Latin American history and the Asian diaspora in Latin America). The strike was a part of a longer standing frustration first articulated by the 1988 takeover of Jenness House, and later, the 1991 hunger strike, initiated by 3 Latinx students, who, frustrated with the lack of representation they witnessed in curricular offerings, voiced the necessity of a Latinx Studies department. "We write to you concerning a situation that for Mexicano/a, Latino/a, and Puerto Rican students here at Williams has become unbearable," they wrote to the administration. "[T]he negation of our existence as students with a culture and reality of our own... Today we start a hunger strike because we are faced with the reality that this school has not offered any curricular means for non-Latino students to lessen their ignorance...and nothing to us, who have the right and responsibility to study and learn about our experiences in the United States." Out of this first strike came the agreement (and College promise) to establish a tenure track position for a Latinx Studies professor, initiated by a multi-departmental arrangement between Romance Languages, Psychology, English, and History. However, when, more than two years later, two qualified and well-liked candidates were rejected, this promise remained unfulfilled, to considerable disappointment. Consultations with the head of the History department, President Oakley, Dean Graver, and Professor Brown of the Committee on Appointments and Promotions proved to be futile. Students profess to discovering "disturbing attitudes about how US Latino Studies was understood and defined as well as departmental politics that seemed to inhibit the fair consideration of candidates." Dean Graver salaciously (and cruelly) told a delegation of Latinx students that Professor Jiminez Muñoz was the "worst Bolin fellow...in the history Williams College." Professor Frost, head of the History department at the time, told students that faculty members were "pissed" at Jiminez Muñoz. In her reflection for the Davis Center Newsletter, the *Spectrum*, Jiminez Muñoz mused about the lack of clarity given to her about her rejection, and related the exclusion and infantilization she had faced in her two years at Williams. "[The Latinx Studies hiring process] corroborates one of Williams College's serious problems: it brings people of color here and then assumes that 'they' are going to act the way that Williams College thinks people of color should act," she wrote. "Meanwhile, the College does not take into consideration

the specificities involved -- past experience, needs, aspirations, age, etc. -- always assuming that Williams College knows what's best for 'these people.'”

- More broadly, student requests earned them the ire of top administrators, who viewed them as demanding and mettling. March 10, a few days before their submission of their open letter of purpose, *Por Nuestra Gente*, students were confronted by President Oakley, “who stated that he would rather resign than allow students to have the final say in who gets hired.” Motivated by what they perceived to be an unjust denial and delay of the professorship, and what they feared was a reconsideration of the validity of the tenure-track position by faculty and administrators, a group of 21 of Latinx students their and Black, Asian, and white allies, went on strike, sitting in Hardy House and Baxter Hall. Their demands were simple, but startlingly radical for a College that continued to delegitimize their voices: a commitment to filling a tenure track position for Latinx Studies in the history department by the next year, and the inclusion of a student vote in the committee search.
 - Baxter Hall served as a central location for the planning and execution of this second round. In an interview, Teresa Rodriguez, '94, a student participant, recounts the hours she spent in the old snackbar with a group of student leaders, including VISTA board members and seniors who had been involved in the 1991 hunger strike. “We assigned one student member as a spokesperson, and, together with a multiracial coalition, worked together to plan and execute the hunger strike,” she said. “We met often in Baxter, the VISTA office in Jenness House, and Hardy House. We spent the last few days of the hunger strike in Baxter, where we took turns sitting in.” According to Rodriguez, it was the arrival of negative press -- from publications such as the *Boston Globe* and Harvard Crimson -- that finally convinced the College to come to terms with student demands. Even so, it wasn't until 2004 that enough tenured faculty were hired to formally establish a Latinx Studies department.
- Start walking: Pass Hopkins Hall
 - **NARRATIVE:** The famed 1969 occupation of Hopkins Hall is an event that has (perhaps righteously) been immortalized in lore. But the actual details of the occupation, and the significant role it has played in the history of student of color activism are rarely ever mentioned, at least within the archive of popular knowledge. The location of the event, too, has elided somewhat into the back burners of our memory. But it was on this very site that 46 years ago the Williams Afro-American Society took its courageous stand. Imagine a young man, looking above the camera.

The coppery veneer of the sign HOPKINS HALL alights behind him, while below it, his oval sunglasses concealing his eyes, lips set in a determined straight line, and his long, curly hair folded neatly behind him. This is the famed picture of the Hopkins Occupation, of James Thornton ('72) looking out above the campus on the balcony on top the entrance of Hopkins Hall. Addressing a rain-soaked crowd of some 200 student and faculty supporters on April 5, 1969, Preston Washington, chair of the Afro-American Society, reaffirmed the significance of the AAS's occupation: "By your show of support here you have demonstrated that we are not a miniscule minority on campus, but that we are a significant entity in your lives and you are a significant entity in our lives. You should be glad and happy about the stand that you have taken."

- "Through this act, we hope to impress upon the college, the degree of our concern and the extent of our seriousness. The administration's response to our demands is proof enough that we have not yet made this point. Disruption is not a pleasant task...We have put our futures and our status as students at Williams on the line," a public statement issued by further stated. "That this decision was reached unanimously by the members of the Williams Afro-American Society is indicative of our great resolve and our unyielding commitment to meaningful change at this institution. We are firm in our beliefs and secure in our strength."
- **SECOND STOP:** Lassell Gym
 - **NARRATIVE:** This building is also likely familiar to you. Maybe you know it as the gymnasium where you get your daily workout, or if you're like me, Lassell reminds you of all the exercise you haven't done. But before this gym née church took its present form, it was also a theater. That's right, folks, Lassell has seen the sweat of all kinds: from gym rats to worshippers to, yes, you guessed it, thespians. But I bring you here to muse about something much more exciting than sweat: for roughly twelve years during 1991 to 2003, Lassell housed the Asian American Theater Project, which brought to life plays written, performed, and intended for Asian America. What's so special about that? You may wonder. But in a world -- and theater -- where our voices and *bodies* are continually anthologized and pathologized without our consent, the opportunity to watch and perform worlds written about and for us is a rare and radical thing. Plays like *Letters to a Student Revolutionary*, *Model Citizen*, and *The Life of a Scrambled Egg* gave space for the telling of Asian American selfhoods in formal and informal experimentations with form. Today, as students of color struggle to find themselves reflected within the theatrical microcosm of life and stage, a repurposed Lassell lives on as a reminder of a palimpsest (dormant?) past waiting to re-emerge.
- **THIRD STOP:** Morley Circle
 - **LOCATION 1:** Rice House
 - **NARRATIVE:**

- **(Walk to)** In the aftermath of the Hopkins Occupation, numbers of other students of color began to speak up, coalescing in a 'Third Williams' Organization' in line with the "Third World" movements that had begun to spring up at College campuses across the country. On April 11, 1969, the *Williams Record* noted the negative reactions to the club, which was criticized for "jumping on the bandwagon" -- presumably, of racial awareness. In defense, Rod McLeod, '70, maintained that Third Williams was "not a selfish concern, since through it, the entire problem of cultural diversity may be brought into perspective." McLeod further stated that he hoped "to emphasize that the cultural diversity is not simply black vs. white, but includes many groups which do not come under the general headings of black and white."
 - It is key to note that as members of a short-lived precursor to the Minority Coalition, many students of the Third Williams Organization met through the Afro-American Society. As within the broader Leftist Third World Movement, Black student organizations served as key leaders and coalition builders across other groups of marginalized peoples.
- **(Arrival)** Now, for the rest of the story on the Hopkins Occupation. Though the seizure officially lasted two days, it was a long time in the making. On Wednesday, March 12, 1969, the Afro-American Society sent a list of 15 "non-negotiable" demands to the Williams administration. Out of frustration with what they perceived as continued ignorance and denial by the administration and student body, the organization now known as the Williams Black Student Union noted the importance of establishing an "African-American area studies" and allowing Black students to house together, should they choose. A little bit of backstory to this moment of eruption: the 1960s was the first time a substantial number of Black students were admitted to the College
- A. Pendelton Beach writes, in her 1987 thesis on the Hopkins Hall Occupation that
- *Williams College before 1969 can be characterized as a racist institution. Williams was not racist in a virulent, overt way. Sterling Brown '22, a black alumnus, stated that racism at Williams was characterized by "benign neglect. I did not meet with anything blatant." Rather, the racism was both an institutional racism characterized by a neglect of blacks and a racism born of ignorance perpetrated by individual members of the Williams community. Examples of Williams' institutional racism included its housing system, which was based on fraternities which excluded blacks, and the fact that there were no black faculty members or courses dealing with blacks. Because blacks were ignored, neglected and mistreated on the Williams campus, Williams before 1969 can safely be labeled a fundamentally white institution.*

- Discriminatory practices by Williamstown businesses, combined with the very few numbers of other people of color in the local area made it additionally difficult for Black students -- and other students of color -- to attend Williamstown. Perhaps these incredibly inhospitable circumstances is why between 1889 and 1956 (that's some 57 years) only 41 Black students graduated from the College.
- Some more on our school's illustrious history:
- *For almost the first one hundred years of its existence, from 1793 to 1885, the only blacks on the Williams campus worked in service positions as barbers, laundresses and the like. This was [supplemented by] opinions like the one expressed by the Williams debating society in 1834 that "people of color should not be admitted into the colleges in New England." Williams' only other dealings with issues concerning blacks during this period was the formation of a Williams Anti-Slavery Society in 1823, an organization that disbanded after eight years. They would hold meetings, sponsor orations, and sing songs. This society was not as progressive as it might sound: it wanted to free the slaves, but then they wanted to send them back to Africa so that they would not have to live side by side with them.*
- From 1889 to 1962, when fraternities were officially abolished, Black students were *de jure* excluded in housing, dining, and *de jure* from many other curricular activities. Renowned African American historian Rayford Logan, Williams class of 1917, remembers a professor calling him the N word. Alison Davis, for whom the DC is named after, was not allowed to join the tennis team because he was Black. His brother, John Davis, the esteemed political scientist and academic, recalls an incident in which a professor told him he would have given Davis an A if he were not Black. The Commons Club, the only dining hall for students not associated with fraternities, was declared white-only in 1928. John Davis remembers talking to Mark Hopkins about his concern regarding this resolution. The President was sympathetic, but was able to offer no solution, instead encouraging Davis, who was at the time was a 17 year old freshman to "not to where one was not wanted."
- *This whole environment left many black students with unpleasant remembrances of their Williams experience. Sterling Lloyd '34 had been unhappy at Williams. Allison Davis still felt bitter about Williams more than thirty years after he graduated; this can be seen in a few stories of Gordon Davis'. When Gordon Davis was in high school, the Davises drove back to Chicago from Boston through Williamstown. When they got to Williamstown, "he [Allison Davis] said "Oh, by the way, this is where I went to college" and accelerated. It was "that kind of bitterness." Davis also remembered that during his four years at*

Williams his father only came to Williamstown once, for his son's graduation.

○ **LOCATION 2:** Hardy House

- **NARRATIVE:** With this kind of history, it's not hard to imagine what moved Black students to action. But the particular timing of the occupation was beset by both external and internal shifts. For one, Williams College's admittance of Black students in the mid-1960s under President John Sawyer
- In 1964-5, *the admissions office began to recruit black students. This policy was undertaken solely by the the admissions staff independent of any directive from the administration, which was at this time still deeply occupied with the fraternity issue. One reason that the admissions office might have begun such a policy was that other colleges and universities were beginning to recruit black students because of the heightened awareness of the country in general on racial issues, an awareness fostered by the growth of the civil rights movement. The civil rights activists on campus also advocated and helped carry out this policy; in 1963-64, WCRC (Workers and Civil Rights Coalition) members talked to black students at all-black high schools trying to encourage them to come to Williams. For the class of 1969, fifty non-white, disadvantaged students were contacted; twenty-nine blacks and Puerto-Ricans applied and sixteen were accepted. Seven black students eventually entered in the class of 1969.*
- With an increasing population of Black students on campus, the Afro-American Student Association students was able to achieve the critical mass necessary to stage their occupation. At 4AM on April 5th, a month after the demands had been issued, to no avail, around 20 Black students entered Hopkins Hall and began the sit in. They did so after the Afro-American Society voted unanimously to escalate their tactics. "Williams was built for a purpose that we were not included in. We were an afterthought," Preston Washington, the Society's chair, said in an interview in 1987.
- Contrary to the 1993 Latinx Hunger Strike, the administrative reaction to the students was cool and controlled. President Sawyer and Dean John Hyde outlined the administration's response as such: 1) no force or violence would be used to get the Society to leave Hopkins Hall, 2) The administration believed the sit-in to be the response of a "gross misunderstanding" of President Sawyer's response to the Demands, which was mistakenly interpreted as negative, when it was, in fact positive, and 3) that the administration was prepared to re-open conversation as soon as the Society left Hopkins Hall
- In the end, a tremendous student turnout and overwhelmingly visible student support convinced the administration to engage in dialogue before the day was over. On Saturday afternoon, Provot Stephen R. Lewis met with "white students in Jesup Hall to describe the contents of a letter he had sent to the WAAS which clarified the administration's response." 12 of the 15 demands were granted. Among the granted was the establishment of an African American studies department -- what we now know as Africana Studies, and more multicultural

programming -- but what was conspicuously absent (decried a “non-negotiable no” by the College administration) was the request to establish an African American cultural center with residential facilities for Black students who wished to live there. As we will see, the demand for a cultural center would not die down...

○ **LOCATION 3:** Jenness House

- **NARRATIVE:** Flash forward to Saturday, April 22, 1987. Over a hundred students have gathered in front of Jenness House, where a banner, reading “BY ANY MEANS NECESSARY, WE SHALL NOT BE MOVED.” The students have walked together from Paresky Lawn, where they initially gathered, across Route Two, and through the science quad to Jenness House, where they stand in a semicircle, embracing the building in which their friends have occupied since Friday. Responding to “the administration’s unwillingness to address fundamental issues regarding minority concerns at the college,” the Williams Coalition Against Racist Education (CARE), comprised of Black, Asian, and Latinx students, staged a sit in in Jenness House. Some 50 students participated in the occupation, with at least 15 members in Jenness at any given time.
- On March 4, CARE had delivered a list of 13 demands related to minority student concerns to President Oakley and Dean of the College Stephen Fix. By the time of the last meeting with administrators on March 17, Oakley agreed to only PARTS of THREE of the 13 demands: to establish a memorial for deceased theater professor Michael Knight, and to maintain support for 2 Bolin Fellows. However, this was not enough. “These discussions, as well as similar discussions involving other groups over the years, have not been fruitful. Rather, what has become clear...is the power differential that exists in favor of the administration,” a CARE statement said. “This action is not one of empowerment.”
- Among student demands was the divestment of College investments in apartheid South Africa, increased support for and hiring of minority faculty, implementing curricular changes to address the lack of minority presence in the academic curriculum, and establishing formal mechanisms of support for minority students.
 - On Saturday, the *Boston Globe*, Associated Press, and *NYT* reported on the student strikers. Local television stations sent camera crews to cover developments. Faced with the barrage of news coverage, administrators hastily entered into negotiation with students. Only after an intensive, on-and-off 25 hours was a working plan finally agreed to.
- Lasting FIVE days, and with the support of the Black, Latinx, Asian American, and Jewish student associations, the takeover of Jenness resulted in (1) the establishment of a committee to “concentrate on attracting minority faculty in the natural sciences, mathematics, and computer sciences, (2) the implementation of the Educational Diversity Initiative (the EDI), a divisional requirement designed to “acquaint all Williams students with the culture, experience, and achievements of America’s minority populations and of Africa, Asia, and Latin America,” (3) the establishment of four named scholarships to support “low-socio-economic

status students at Williams, with preference to minority students from urban areas, and secondary preference to minority students from non-urban areas, and (4) the creation of the MULTICULTURAL CENTER “to serve the unique social and cultural needs of minority and foreign students open to the entire community.”

- **Davis Center** as site of success and continuity for student activism
 - Crossroads presented by present day--DC's role? Future of student activism?
 - My experience
 - Asian American Studies
 - College Council
 - Trustees
 - Solidarity work