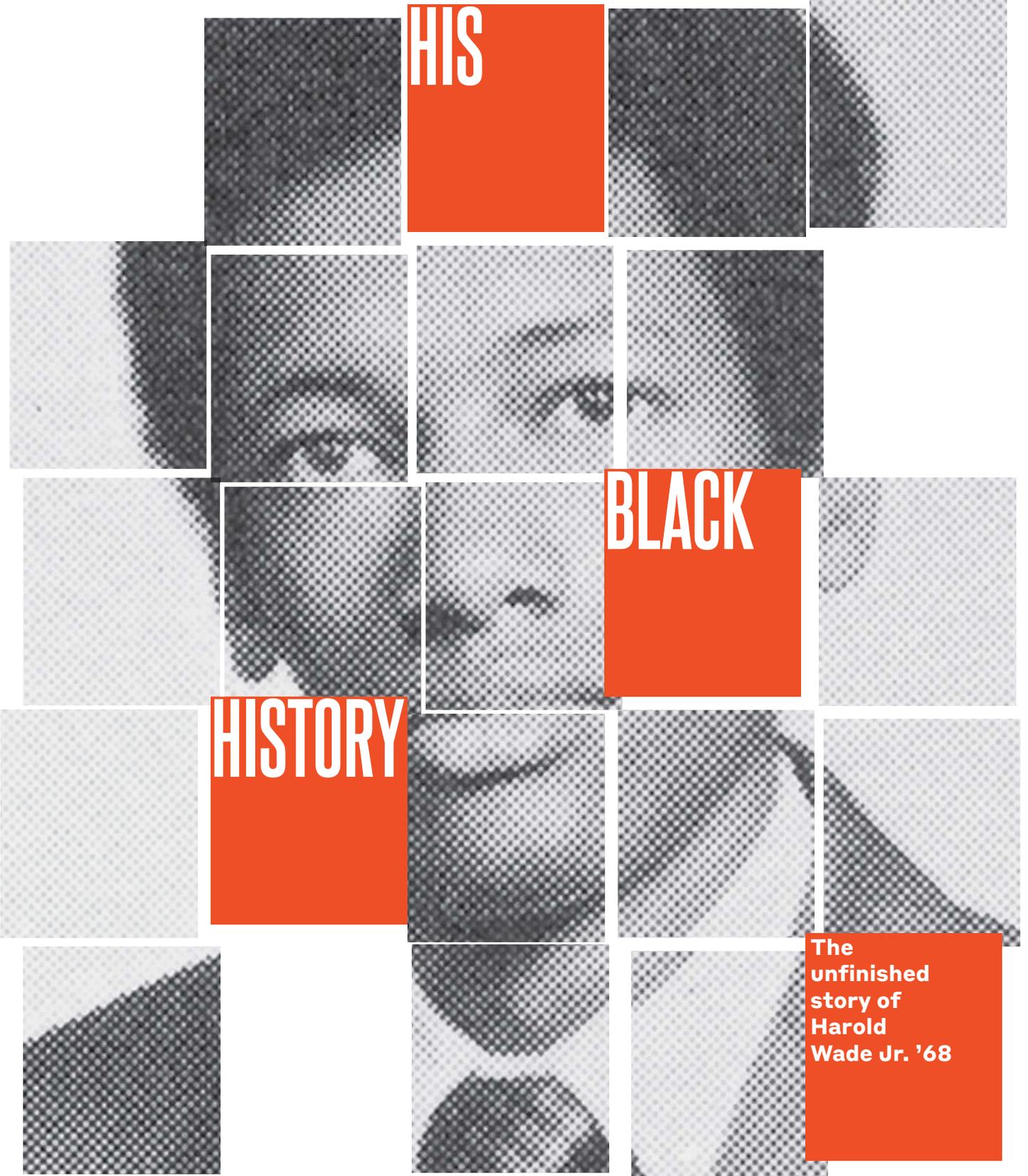


**ALSO INSIDE**  
How Catherine Newman '90 wrote her way out of a certain kind of stuckness in her novel, and in her life.

Winter-Spring  
2018

# Amherst



HIS

BLACK

HISTORY

The  
unfinished  
story of  
Harold  
Wade Jr. '68



21

Amherst  
Winter-Spring  
2018

The inspiring, tragic, wistful story  
of [Harold Wade Jr. '68](#), who  
wrote *Black Men of Amherst*.

By Katharine Whittemore  
Illustration by Rebecca Clarke

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# His Black His- tory

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# W

WHEN YOU ASK the friends of Harold Wade Jr. '68 what he might have become, had he not died so young, they get sweetly and painfully carried away. "He would have run for office, and people would've voted for him and trusted him," says Adrian Johnson '68. Cuthbert "Tuffy" Simpkins '69 rolls out an even loftier scenario: "Harold would've been a candidate without the personal

flaws. An Obama, but much more savvy about how to deal with people who hate you no matter what you do for them. A combination of Obama and JFK, without Kennedy's personal shortcomings and Obama's naiveté."

Still others scale it back from the nation to the College—but are no less wistful. Like Frank Motley, former assistant dean of students: "Harold would have spent much of his life making Amherst better than it was."

If the name Harold Wade strikes a chord, it might be because you've thumbed a copy of the history book he wrote, 1976's *Black Men of Amherst*. Or maybe you've seen his smiling likeness on the Octagon mural. Or, to come at it sideways, you could have met up with one of the 21 Wade Fellows, African-American alumni representing the Wade Memorial Fellowship, who have come back to Amherst these past four decades to help students ponder potential careers, possible lives.

If you're well-versed in the illustrious, sometimes fraught history of African-Americans at Amherst, you know that Wade was a founder of the Afro-American Society, the first black-majority organization at the College and the forerunner to today's Black Student Union. Some of you watched Wade become a rising star on the political stage. In fact, when he died in 1974, Wade was working as an aide to Paul Gibson Jr., New York City's first-ever black deputy mayor. In the *New York Times*

obituary, Gibson called the young man's death "a tragic loss not only for his family but for the entire city, with particular emphasis on blacks in the city."

A few reading this, undoubtedly, knew Wade firsthand. Unlike the rest of us, you have the privilege of being able to conjure him whole in your mind, this tall, fearless, talkative, funny, astute, politically progressive, jazz-loving, change-making diehard Mets fan. The work-within-the-system strategist who, tongue firmly in cheek, sometimes signed letters "H. Rap Wade." (It was a play on the name of the radical African-American activist H. Rap Brown, who famously said "violence is as American as cherry pie.") The same guy who, as the mayor's aide, insisted that Manhattan parades should be routed through Harlem, rather than a whiter neighborhood, because, as Simpkins imagines Wade saying, "black people like parades too!"

Finally, and most notably to the Amherst community, there's Wade the archivist and writer. The one who asked his readers to forgive him for possible "emotional excess" in writing *Black Men of Amherst* because, when it comes to black history, "sometimes excess is necessary to counteract the sin of omission."

There are multiple sides to this black man of Amherst, of course. But whether you knew Harold Wade in reality or by reputation, it turns out there is more to learn about who he was, what he stood for and how his legacy refuses to fade away. Let's get to that story.

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## THE OPINIONATOR

# H

Harold Wade Jr. was born in 1948, the only child of Thelma Weekes Wade and Harold Wade Sr. His parents divorced during his childhood, and he was raised mostly by his mother, a Jamaican immigrant who worked for the postal service. He dedicated *Black Men of Amherst* to her. The Wades lived in Queens, in the Springfield Gardens neighborhood, a middle-class enclave that drew in many African-Americans from Brooklyn

and Harlem after World War II, enticing them with its newer homes, its greater space.

A skinny, thoughtful, studious child, Wade excelled in school and was tagged an SP'er (a "Special Progress" student) in junior high, a student stellar enough to skip a grade. He arrived at Amherst a few months after he turned 17, a product of Andrew Jackson High School, whose name Wade, had he lived into our time, presumably would have winced at. (Evidence: in one *Black Men of Amherst* footnote on naming traditions, he expresses disbelief at having an uncle "with the outrageous name of Jefferson Davis Wade.")

But this (now defunct) mostly African-American high school had a strong reputation in its time, and was a feeder school to Amherst, one of the newly promising stops for Dean of Admission Eugene S. Wilson, a Quaker who pushed to bring more black men here as the civil rights movement deepened, at the behest of President Calvin Plimpton. When Wade arrived on campus in the fall of 1964, he had

**"Some-  
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For decades, Amherst's African-American students either roomed together or got singles: it was understood that a black roommate would make a white roommate uncomfortable. David Glass '68 was one of the first white students housed with a black student, and this roommate introduced Glass to Wade. The two were simpatico: Glass was also a liberal Democrat, a Queens-raised SP'er and a serious fan of the fledgling Mets (though he did not match Wade's love of outfielder Ron Swoboda). After he mailed in his acceptance, Amherst sent Glass the standard questionnaire about housing arrangements which, to modern ears, sounds decidedly coded.

"I'll never forget the way the question was phrased," says Glass. "It was something like, 'Many students value the opportunity to room with a student from a different ethnic background. Would you like us to arrange such an experience for you?'" Glass wrote that it didn't matter either way, and his "maybe" was bumped up to a yes. "It makes me realize how many said no," says Glass. "There were clearly people uncomfortable with the idea of being integrated."

At Amherst, Wade pitched in at *The Amherst Student* and WAMF. Meanwhile, he grew even more confident academically, gamely challenging professors from his freshman year on up.

"He took on Baird frequently," recalls William H. Hastie Jr. '68, speaking of the formidable English professor Theodore Baird. "Harold had strong views early and could express and defend them. Most of us couldn't do that at that point," adds Hastie. He is the son of William H. Hastie Sr. '25, the country's renowned first black federal judge—whom Wade asked to write the foreword to *Black Men of Amherst*.

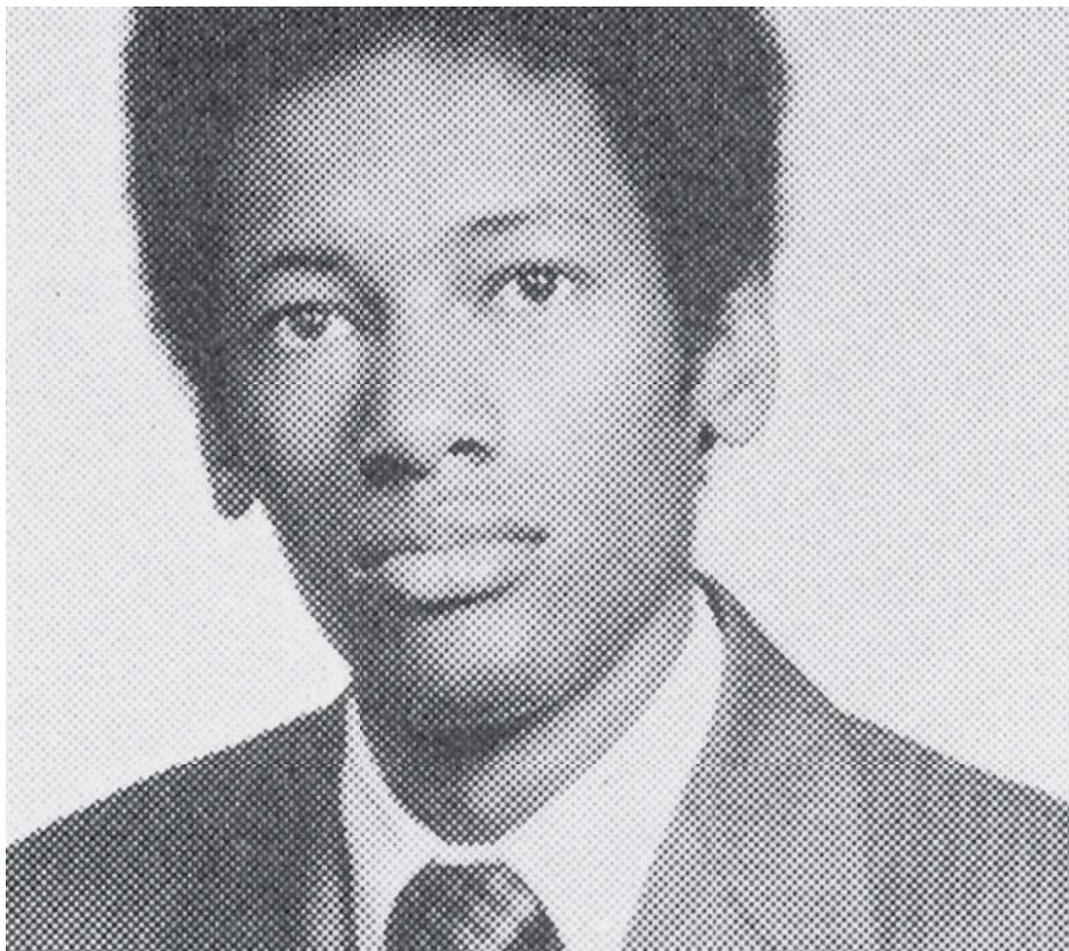
Wade did not fence his outspokenness inside the classroom. "Harold was mildly sarcastic and always intense," recalls Hastie. "You could sense him holding in a bit: that's the mild part. But not all the time: that's the intense part." When it came

to racism, to be sure, that intense part held sway. For example, Adrian Johnson remembers that one of the College's a cappella groups was still performing a minstrel number called "Mississippi Mud." Wade insisted they cut it from their repertoire or their name would, indeed, be mud. Out went the song.

a handful of friends from Jackson High, which eased the various shocks of the transition.

Wade joined a class that then boasted the highest number of African-American students of any class in Amherst history. Today, the actual figure underwhelms—it seems there were 11—but it was a leap from previous years.

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HLS YEARBOOK 1971

# A

## THE TACTICIAN

POLITICAL SCIENCE MAJOR, Wade's true passion bloomed in the nascent political movement among the College's African-American students. Tuffy Simpkins spells out this moment of change, around 1965, as enrollment of students of color hit a new tipping point: "When I got to Amherst, there was a weird rule that black students wouldn't gather together, wouldn't be more than three to a group. And that was because the whole

idea was to integrate yourself." As the student body spiked from the standard eight African-American students to upwards of 25, there was power—and comfort—in numbers.

"The burden was on us to integrate and be involved with everybody," says Simpkins. "We just relieved ourselves of that burden. We didn't have to disperse ourselves among everybody. We were going to sit and enjoy ourselves, and be with each other. And if anyone wants to come over and sit with us, fine, that's great."

This burgeoning cohesion led to an "intensification of something," as Simpkins says, which led to the formation of a student organization that started out mostly social, as

American cohort at Amherst, of course, wasn't monolithic: "We ran the gamut from those completely in favor of non-violence to those a lot more in favor of Malcolm X's viewpoint." Besides which, "we were the first group of black kids who had not come from the moneyed black class," adds Johnson, whose mother was a maid. He and Wade, and several friends, connected over their working-class roots. Most of Amherst's black students, before then, had fathers who were judges, doctors, professors.

At some point, African-American students planned a protest and President Calvin Plimpton got wind of it. He told Simpkins he did not approve; it was too rogue. Simpkins went to Wade, trying to figure out the next move. "Harold sat back and he stroked his chin and he said, 'This is what you got to do: There's this organization, Students for Racial Equality. It was very active before, but now it's just a shell. It only has a president. And the president is really functioning off-campus. But if we all join, we could just ask the president to leave. We would have a mailbox, we would have a budget, we would be within a structure right away.'"

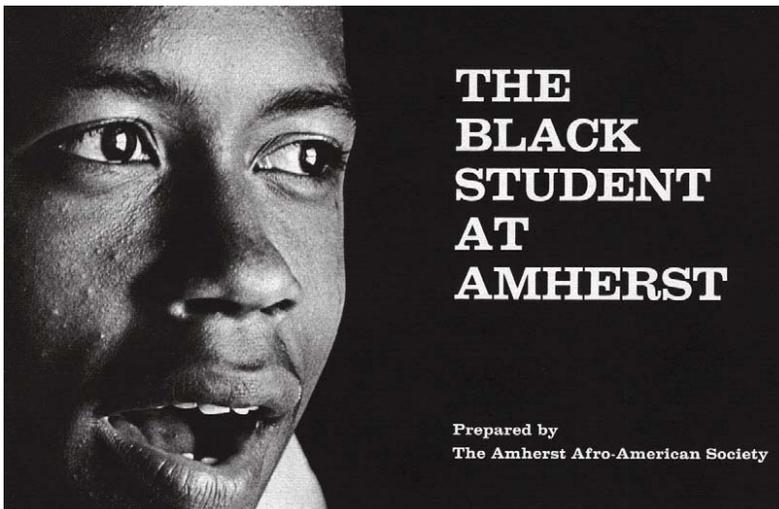
This was vintage Wade: acting behind the scenes, using institutional tools to retool the institution. And, indeed, the initially mostly white SRE became the placeholder until a more robust organization could launch. "Harold was clever at doing things that are good," says Simpkins. "He didn't use guile for anything bad." Meanwhile, Wade and other SRE members recruited African-American upperclassmen who had a good rapport with Plimpton, and asked them to try and win him over.

Perhaps six months later (everyone's memory is fuzzy), feeling the climate was right, Wade encouraged Simpkins to give a speech at a morning session at Johnson Chapel, with Plimpton present. Simpkins stood up and movingly traced the heritage of African-Americans at the College on up to that very day (a topic already Wade's "obsession," recalls Bryan). He declared that the time had come for Amherst's black students to formally establish their own advocacy group, not build one on the scaffolding of a formerly white-dominated precursor.

Then Simpkins said, "The masquerade is over: we are the Afro-American Society." Plimpton was so moved, he had tears in his eyes.

Using history as motivator, as explainer, as justifier: this became Wade's signature. He knew how much heritage and context mattered and, as such, decided to back Simpkins over Johnson to become the first president of the Afro-American Society. It was a calculated move, or maybe it was par for the course, picking the more mainstream candidate. "Harold was unique in the sense that he tried to bridge the gap between all the people at Amherst," says Jacques Cook '67, the son of Mercer Cook '25, a French professor who became the ambassador to Senegal and gets many pages in *Black Men of Amherst*.

Johnson, who went on to become a lawyer specializing in prisoners' rights, perched on the more radical end of the spectrum (he'd often heard Malcolm X speak a few blocks from his home in Harlem). Yet Simpkins, who went on to become a physician and surgeon who also specialized in violence prevention, came from a family that had sacrificed



the Five College black population (also growing) organized dances and parties. "These were soul gatherings, lots of celebrations of Motown," recalls Johnson. "Before that, the average campus party ended with The Beach Boys. That was not where we were coming from."

Trevor Bryan '67 recalls the backlash that resulted. These soul gatherings became "a point of consternation for some of the white students," Bryan says, and *The Amherst Student* ran editorials decrying such supposed self-segregation. "We had to convince them it was social and there was a need for that." Indeed, African-American students countered that, if Jewish students had Hillel and Catholic students the Newman Society, why couldn't they also forge an affinity group?

"It was about ending the isolation," says Johnson, "and then social identity became more prevalent." The African-

The College has called for a reinvigoration of the fellowship named for Harold Wade Jr. '68. It brings black alumni to campus to engage with current students.

## The Wade Fellowship

"You might say Harold Wade was the first Wade Fellow," reasons Alumni Secretary Betsy Cannon Smith '84. "He came back to campus often, out of a sense of obligation and goodness. What other students saw in him we wanted to honor and recognize." The Harold Wade Jr. Memorial Fund was established in 1976 by Wade's friends and classmates. Since 1977, black alumni Wade Fellows have returned to campus to engage with current students as informal career counselors, mentors and role models.

In 2016, the Loeb Center for Career Exploration and Planning transferred the fund to the newly created Office of Diversity and Inclusion. The chief of that office, Norm Jones, has called for a rethinking and reinvigoration of the fellowship, and the College has organized a steering committee of African-American alumni (Angela Brown '00, Cuthbert "Tuffy" Simpkins '69 and John Williams '75) and staffers (among them, Bilal Muhammad '98).

Here are the 21 Wade Fellows who have served thus far, and their current or most recent jobs:

### 2016–Present

ANTHONY JACK '07, *sociologist, junior fellow at Harvard's Society of Fellows*

### 2013–14

KIM WYCHE-ETHERIDGE '87, *pediatrician working in public health and assistant professor of pediatrics at Meharry Medical College*

FRANK THOMPSON '87, *manager of HIV services, Kansas City Health Department*

### 2011–13

MARISSA E. HORNE '00, *director of employee technology, American Airlines*

MATTHEW M. MURUMBA '04, *actor, writer and producer at Kota Productions/Larrikin Productions*

### 2008–11

STANLEY FRANCOIS-CALHOUN '94, *commercial real estate attorney*  
NICOLE D. SCOTT '97 (*deceased*), *senior director of new schools, New York City education department*

### 2006–08

KIMBERLYN R. LEARY '82, *Amherst trustee, Harvard Medical School associate professor of psychology*  
L'QUENTUS THOMAS '97, *director of Stonehenge Capital, managing*

*operations of the firm's community banking subsidiary*

### 2000–02

ANTONIO PIERRE JACKSON '78, *lawyer in private practice*

KIM WYCHE-ETHERIDGE '87 (*see 2013–14*)

### 1998–99

YVETTE MENDEZ '84 (*deceased*), *attorney, president of Massachusetts Black Women Attorneys*

### 1996–98

SUSAN PRATTIS '80, *veterinarian, educator, scientific editor, marketer, writer and veterinary medical researcher*

### 1990–92

RICHARD V. SIMS '70, *physician specializing in gerontology, and professor emeritus at the University of Alabama*

CHERYL SINGLETON '81, *actor (see page 26)*

### 1988–89

KELLIE JONES '81, *art historian, curator, MacArthur Fellow, associate professor at Columbia University*

### 1984–85

L. ROBERT BOLLING '82, *CEO of the*

*nonprofit ChildSavers, which provides child development and mental health services*

### 1982–84

CUTHBERT "TUFFY" SIMPKINS II '69, *trauma surgeon, inventor, founder of the Violence Intervention Program and author of Coltrane: A Biography*

### 1981–82

WAYNE M. WORMLEY '72, *professor and consultant specializing in diversity management and culture change; president and CEO, The Wormley Co.*

### 1980–81

HUGH B. PRICE '63, *retired nonprofit executive and corporate director; formerly vice president of Rockefeller Foundation and president/CEO of the National Urban League*

### 1979–80

JUNIUS WILLIAMS '65, *lawyer in private practice, instructor in leadership and community organization at Rutgers University (see page 29)*

### 1977–78

GUICHARD PARRIS '27 (*deceased*), *ran public relations division of the National Urban League*

"These Wade Fellows helped show us how to reconcile the blessing and burden of our education, to take it and do something for our communities."

— ADRIENNE WHITE-FAINES '82

"As a certified 'old fogey,' I delighted in regaling students with tales of what Amherst was like for me back in the late 1950s and early 1960s. I was confident they'd be shocked—and I was correct." — HUGH B. PRICE '63 (WADE FELLOW 1980–81)

"One great success, when I was a Wade Fellow, was an 'alumni speed interviewing' event for current students. It was an example of the Wade Fellowship providing opportunities for students to ask 'silly questions' and make mistakes in a safe environment and then learn from those mistakes." — MATTHEW MURUMBA '04 (WADE FELLOW 2011–13)

much. White supremacists had—twice—bombed the Simpkins' homes in Shreveport, La., as his father gained a higher profile in the civil rights movement.

Wade understood the heft of that personal history, and he always had the continuum in mind. He began digging into the backgrounds of Amherst's black alumni, from Edward Jones, who graduated in 1826; to Charles Hamilton Houston '15, who hammered out the legal foundation for *Brown v. Board of Education*; to Charles Richard Drew '26, who discovered the chemical method for preserving blood.

This history didn't need to be relegated to scholarly obscurity, however. It could also enrich on a more accessible plane. Thus Wade's first widely circulated publication, the College's original recruiting pamphlet for African-American prospects. Its tone? Modern, proud, personal. Its title? *The Black Student at Amherst*.

#### THE AUTHOR

IN HIS SENIOR YEAR, the College recruited Wade to recruit others. He became one of several co-authors on *The Black Student at Amherst*, along with Carl Galloway '68, William Robinson '68 and Arnold Kawano '70.

*The Black Student at Amherst* was a bold piece featuring charismatic photos and candid reportage on what it was like to go here, with a bonus overview of standout alumni. We can't know if Wade wrote this bit of pamphlet

text, but it sure sounds like him: "All of these men together do not begin to represent a responsible share of the Nation's promise to overcome its discriminatory history of education. Nor does the fact that sixteen men in the incoming class are black out of three hundred. But this college is moving and does not have to disown its past to do so."

Handed out at college fairs and high schools, the pamphlet soon became the model for similar recruiting efforts at other colleges. "No question, that brochure was used on a regular basis, and with pride, in trying to attract and encourage black students," says Wayne Wormley '72, who pored over it as a prospect and later handed it out as a green dean. (Wormley went on to be a Wade Fellow in 1981–82.)

"*The Black Student at Amherst* was very influential in my coming to Amherst," says Richard Ammons '74, whose mother and father had gone to historically black Howard University and Morehouse College, respectively. "It didn't sugarcoat what it meant to come to Amherst. But the attraction was that it was a place where I would not be a newcomer, because it had a long tradition of African-American students who had been there."

The campus tour and pamphlet sealed the deal for Ammons, but it mattered that he also held a vague but glowing impression of the College from childhood: "I was a bit of a nerd growing up. I read encyclopedias and came across Charles Drew, and Hastie and Houston, and in reading about them, I saw that they all had gone to a place called Amherst," says Ammons. Then he offers the punch line: "I'd never heard of a historically black college called Amherst!"

Drew, Hastie and Houston, by the way, were all graduates of Washington, D.C.'s Dunbar High School, for many years

#### Wade Fellow Profile CHERYL SINGLETON '81

## The Actor

"Terrifying, exhilarating, gratifying." When asked to choose three adjectives to describe her career, that's what actor Cheryl Singleton '81 offered up. Singleton, whose most recent role was Calpurnia in *To Kill a Mockingbird* at the Gloucester Stage Co., was a theater major at Amherst, where she excelled as a stage manager. Her passion lay in acting, but the times weren't in her favor. Unlike today, few productions at Amherst then featured nontraditional casting, so while she did some sketch revues, she was never cast in plays with parts ostensibly slated for white actors.

After graduation this Brooklyn native returned to New York to reach for a career on stage and screen. She landed a part in Spike Lee's 1986 movie *She's Gotta Have It*. Talk about a fiery cameo: Singleton starred in a nightmare sequence, playing a vengeful girlfriend who menacingly holds a lit match to protagonist Nola Darling's mattress.

As Singleton acted more, she also kindled a prime reputation as a theater director and stage manager. But competence can be a curse. "If you're a stage manager and you're good, they want to keep you there," explains Singleton. "I really had to stop and say, 'OK now, I'm an actress and you need to think of me in those terms.'"

This led to a makeover move to Boston. She got a job at a financial services market research firm, where her people skills and stage manager talents converted winningly; she began as a receptionist and worked her way up to the publishing division, and then human resources, staying for 25 years.

Meanwhile, over the decades (often using her vacation time to do the shows), Singleton has made a name for herself in the New England theater scene.

Singleton counseled students that acting “is a business like any other.”

She has acted with the New Repertory Theatre, The Huntington Theatre Co., Commonwealth Shakespeare Co., the American Repertory Theater, Providence Stage and more. Her stage credits include Chekhov’s *The Seagull* and Shakespeare’s *Comedy of Errors*, Lynn Nottage’s *Intimate Apparel*, Melissa Sanchez’s *Sonia Flew*, the transgender-themed theater piece *Home* and the six-hour historical epic *The Kentucky Cycle*.

Singleton has also done commercials and voice-overs, and she can sing, having appeared in musicals such as *Rent* and *Passing Strange*. Improv is also in her wheelhouse. At Musical Improv Boston, she has helped whip up three-act musicals on the spot (“so challenging and a ridiculous amount of fun”).

In addition, she coolly played Condoleezza Rice in David Hare’s *Stuff Happens* (a box office smash for the Zeitgeist Stage Co.) and hotly played Storm, the weather-commanding X-Men character, in the satirical *Superheroine Monologues* (“also a ridiculous amount of fun”).

In her online profile for StageSource, a networking site for the theater community in Boston, Singleton singles out her Wade Fellowship experience. She first learned about Harold Wade ’68, and Amherst’s history of African-American students, at her own first-year orientation. “That was a very important thing for us to be told that first week: ‘These are the people who came before you, and you should know that these are some of the things that happened, and you may encounter racism while you’re here. You probably will. It hasn’t left the campus.’”

During her 1990–92 fellowship, Singleton came to campus and spoke about the busi-



ness of being a theatrical professional, “because that’s not something that we talked about in the major when I was there,” she says. “I wanted them to know you really need to think about it as a business like any other.”

Singleton has hosted alumni-mentoring events for students in Boston, too. But the Wade experience is closest to her heart: “I was just very proud of being chosen and being thought of as someone who could carry that mantle.” K.W.

the premier feeder school for black students to Amherst. For *Black Men of Amherst*, which he conceived at the College but researched and wrote mostly during his postgrad years at Harvard Law, Wade set to tracing the affiliation.

This steered him to Dunbar's foundational influencer, principal William Tecumseh Sherman Jackson (Amherst class of 1892), who began steadily recommending Dunbar's top students—Drew, Hastie, Houston and more—to his alma mater. Wade lionized the man in *Black Men of Amherst*: Teachers like Jackson “instilled in their students a spirit of competitiveness and a desire for perfection unrivalled since. The result was phenomenal, as generation after generation of high achieving blacks came from Dunbar.”

Trevor Bryan says that Wade's findings about W.T.S. Jackson spoke volumes to his classmates. “Harold really dug that info up. I don't think anybody knew about the principal's role. That was unique.” Wade's classmates were also galvanized by what he was unearthing because it coincided with 1966's historic election of Massachusetts U.S. Sen. Edward Brooke, a Dunbar alumnus. “Edward Brooke was fresh in our minds,” Bryan says. “Here was this first black senator since Reconstruction—and he was influenced by an Amherst guy!”

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#### THE HISTORIAN

UPON GRADUATION, Wade got accepted to Harvard Law and began climbing a ziggurat of opportunities. He spent one summer working in the office of Sidney Davidoff, an aide to New York City Mayor John Lindsay. Another summer, he became a researcher with the nonprofit Resources for the Future, at which he wrote a report on the Model Inner City Community Organization led by civil rights activist (and Dunbar alum)

Walter Fauntroy. It hired black architects and engineers to build homes and stores in D.C. While at Harvard, Wade also taught in its new Afro-American studies department.

More internships, then a clerkship, then Wade laid into being an aide to the powerful. He interned at the New York law firm of Breed, Abbott and Morgan and, after law school, clerked in the court of Judge Barrington Parker (also a Dunbar alum) in D.C.: Parker would go on to preside over the trial of John Hinckley, the would-be assassin of President Reagan.

Studying like a fiend at Harvard, bricklaying a striking résumé, Wade still took time out to research *Black Men of Amherst*, sifting through archives, tracing leads. Because the Amherst registrar didn't categorize students by race, Wade corralled current students to go through all the *Olio* yearbooks, page by page, looking for black faces, recalls Ammons, who shared the legwork with Kenneth Glover '74. (Note: Frost Library is working to make more copies of *Black Men of Amherst*, now out of print, available to the community.)

Wade also delved into the Amherst-Dunbar pipeline while he was in D.C. But his hometown was calling (how telling that his favorite song was John Coltrane's dreamy “Central Park West”). After graduating from Harvard, he

came back to his old Springfield Gardens neighborhood, where he was asked to help chair the scholarship committee of his home parish, the Springfield Gardens United Methodist Church. He took a job with Mayor Lindsay's commissioner of the Economic Development Administration, and then was plucked up by Deputy Mayor Gibson, who also hailed from Queens—and, months later, would deliver Wade's eulogy at Wade's church.

Those six years after graduation, this opinionator-tactician-author-historian kept in solid touch with his Amherst friends. “He was a loyal alumnus, and anyone who liked Amherst was a friend of his,” recalls Frank Motley, the former assistant dean. At one alumni event in Manhattan in the early 1970s, Wade's mother made a big pot of chili for all who showed up. By 1974, Wade was in love with a young woman he was thinking of marrying. His work was meaningful. He was making a name for himself. He was giving back to his community.

To celebrate his upcoming birthday and mark this prime time in his life, Wade decided to take a vacation to Barbados, to visit his extended family and rest in the sun.

Just before he left, in June of that year, he had lunch with David Glass, his Amherst classmate and fellow Queens native. They talked about the Mets and jazz, shared New York's political scuttlebutt. Wade had finished the first draft of *Black Men of Amherst*.

“He became very animated talking about it,” says Glass, his voice oscillating happy-to-sad at the recollection: “I could see this was something that meant a lot to him. I truthfully had no awareness how many prominent black men had graduated from Amherst. What a brilliant idea for someone to take this on and research it. As he got up to leave, I said I'd buy him lunch next time—and that I wanted him to sign a copy of the book when he got back.”

A few days later, Wade was idly walking in the shallows off a beach in Barbados. There had been a recent storm, as a friend later learned, which had knocked over a sign warning that the shallows gave way to a sudden drop-off. Like many African-Americans who, because of segregation and discrimination, had little access to pools or beaches, and who also bore the legacy of fear of the water from forebears who were never taught to swim, Wade too had never learned to swim. He drowned the day before his 26th birthday.

It was a tragedy, and it is hard to stand even all these years later.

*Black Men of Amherst* was published posthumously and reviewed in *The New York Times*, which called it “really two books, both fascinating.” On one level, the review said, “it is the history of a series of extraordinary men” of the past. On another, it is the story of Wade and his peers, caught between old and new philosophies of civil rights activism.

But let us end with the words of the remarkable young man himself, writing in his hard-won book, his gift to the ages: “In a fair and just society this history of black men at Amherst would be unnecessary. One must deal with the *Is* and not the *Ought*, however; hence my black history.” ●

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*Katharine Whittemore is Amherst's senior writer. She wrote the Fall 2017 cover story on the College's military veterans.*

Wade Fellow Profile  
JUNIUS WILLIAMS '65

## The Activist

Once named among *Ebony* magazine's "100 Most Influential Blacks in America," Junius Williams '65 became an indispensable change-maker in Newark, N.J., and the youngest president ever of the National Bar Association, the country's oldest association of African-American lawyers.

His incline to influence was steep. In segregated Richmond, Va., he grew up "with the knowledge that white is power, and up-tyness had its consequences," he writes in his 2014 book *Unfinished Agenda: Urban Politics in the Era of Black Power*. Williams arrived at Amherst in 1961 with a full scholarship but felt unprepared for what he calls the "process" of higher education, in comparison to most white, wealthy peers. "My problem was that I had to learn the process and master it at the same time, while my classmates had only to master it."

To that end, he studied six hours a day, six days a week, and tried to fit in. "The smile was both my offense and my defense," writes Williams of his time here, when he became the first black student at Amherst to join Alpha Delta Phi. In 1963 he traveled to the March on Washington. In the winter of 1965 he helped organize a conference on civil rights—even calling up Malcolm X to come and speak. (The leader said yes, in spite of the modest honorarium, but his plane was fogged in that day, and he missed the event.)

That spring, Williams joined students from Amherst, Smith and UMass to head to Montgomery, Ala., to march on the state capitol, on the front lines with the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. In South Carolina, the police pulled over the car—they were trying to head off college kids journeying south in solidarity—and the



black students hid under blankets as Fred Aronow '67, who is white, thought fast and lied that they were on their way to Florida for a beach vacation. Williams and Aronow were both later arrested at the march.

Williams was the second Wade Fellow, serving in 1979–80—which meant he often spoke to students about the implications of the 1978 U.S. Supreme Court case in which a white student sued the University of California for denying him admission. "I told them that affirmative action was not over but that it was going to be harder, because racism was on the rebound," Williams recalls. "They were interested, because this was their future. They knew the games that would be in play with their lives, and Amherst was just the first step, but not the last, to get to some kind of professional advancement and security."

Before Yale law school, Williams went to Newark to help mobilize African-American residents on issues of housing, schools and police abuse. He later launched the Newark Area Planning Association, which fought

against the city's gentrifying urban renewal plans. He became executive director of the Newark Housing Council and then signed on as campaign coordinator for Kenneth Gibson, Newark's first black mayor.

In 1973, Williams opened his own law firm, later working on Jesse Jackson's presidential campaign. At the National Bar Association, he appeared in front of the United Nations to present a paper analyzing the fledgling constitution of Zimbabwe. The paper became the U.N.'s official position.

Over the decades, Williams has kept up his advocacy, gone on speaking tours, taught and written his book. "I would love to be a Wade Fellow now, because I have a lot more to offer than I did in 1979," says Williams, in sight of a framed Wade Fellow event poster in his office. "People like me, who came through the movement, we know how to survive. I have always been able to rebound, fall down, rebound and go on from there. That's the skill set that African-American and brown people of all descriptions need to have." K.W.