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De'Andre Hardy

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Homecoming 2010, recorded at the Ames Library

De'Andre Hardy: [Recording begins mid-sentence] Okay, sure. My name is De'Andre Hardy. I graduated from Wesleyan in 2000. I was a Business Administration and Sociology double-major. My Sociology concentrations were Race and Ethnic Relations and Human Sexuality. Let's see, oh, with regards to organizations I was a part of, I was chairperson of an organization called Black Men in Action, created an organization here on campus called the Anti-Discrimination Coalition along with another classmate of mine from New Zealand. I was also—I started Wesleyan's chapter of the NAACP the time I was here—a football letter-winner athlete, I was on the NCAA Student Athlete Advisory Board. I was involved—I was Residential Life—actually the first Residential Community Advisor for Dodds Hall, which was a senior RA position. That's all I can think of right now—

Rae Rein: [Interviewer, Class of 2011]: [laughs]…Okay.

Hardy: But it was a lot so…

Rein: I'm just gunna start off with: How diverse was Wesleyan when you attended?

Hardy: Well, not very—

[Both laugh]

Hardy: And to be honest, my class was one of the largest incoming classes just of diverse students, African Americans in particular. I think we had forty-three blacks enter in my class, which was kind of like unheard of at the time, so Wesleyan was, I think, maybe below—around two percent, I think, minority population before our class and I think it jumped it up to four or five but yeah, that was about it, yeah.

Rein: So was it noticeably not diverse?

Hardy: Yes it was, yeah. I think it definitely was, yeah, I think we definitely—our class brought some—just a multicultural kind of flare to the campus and because we just happened to have people who were very involved, the complexion of the campus changed somewhat.

Rein: A lot of the organizations that you started or were a part of like revolved around minority—

Hardy: Mhmm.

Rein: —voice and action, did you feel like that was missing?

Hardy: In some ways, yes. You know, we had the Black Student Union and my thought was I wanted organizations that were, I guess, more inclusive, even by name. The Anti-Discrimination Coalition was started by me or helped by a guy named Andrew Beath and it was kind of a brain child from one of our classes, I think a race and ethnic relations class where we didn't think and didn't feel that there was a resource for students who felt as though they had been discriminated against on the basis of race or an ethnicity, you know, gender, what have you, and, you know, so as a result, we just wanted to create an organization where people could, you know, have a voice and that was something that was missing on campus and we had a few racial incidents while here and so we wanted people to have an environment that was nonthreatening, that they can come and, you know, and kind of get support, so we did feel like we fulfilled a need. Black Men in

Action was more of a social organization but the ultimate goal was to really enhance the multicultural spirit of programming on campus and so we had actually some very successful programs over the course of my time here. Myself and a guy named Jeremy Daniel kind of spearheaded something called Café Du Soir—

[Rein laughs]

Hardy: Which was a—it was an open mic poetry slam—

Rein: Oh sure.

Hardy: And we did it in what back then was called the Green Room, I believe. It's in this old student center and, I mean, it was like every other Friday, it was well-attended. I think we averaged between forty and sixty people, which for a school of this size—

[Rein laughs]

Hardy: Is huge, right?

Rein: That is huge.

Hardy: And then we actually got a reputation at Illinois State's campus where people could come and they enjoyed the environment because it was a poetry slam but you could sing, you can perform, and do whatever, you know, in front of people, so it's great.

Rein: Do you think that there was a lot of integration between majority and minority students?

Hardy: At the time there wasn't and I think that's what we were trying to address with some of these things we were putting together—is—you know, I'm from the very inner city—

Rein: Okay.

Hardy: Of Chicago and—but I actually went to a very diverse high school, so I knew what diversity looked like before I came here and not just diversity on the surface like I knew what true diversity looked like and so, you know, I came from an environment where I was the only black guy in both—two Latino-American organizations, one called SOMOS and one ASPIRA, and so I knew what inclusion felt like and I just—there wasn't much of that, I mean, in really any social aspect on campus. We had sports. I played football and there wasn't a ton of—there was camaraderie and things but there wasn't learning about other cultures, acceptance—there wasn't that—and then on campus there was a huge, you know, scarcity of that kind of thing so…

Rein: Hm. Do you think that has improved or…

Hardy: I do. See, when I was here, Minor Myers was the President and he, I think, preceded the current president, and he had a vision for multidimensional students and so his first goal was diversity, but he didn't focus specifically on race, he wanted Wesleyan's name to get out there, so it was a drive to get students from different states and stuff and that was where it started but he did have a vision and supported diverse initiatives, and I see things that the kids here now completely take for granted—

[Rein laughs]

Hardy: That we didn't have and I do see more in the way of diversity. I've—you know, not only just visually, walking around the campus—yesterday I actually gave a pep-talk to the football team and saw some things there and I think we are moving towards it societally anyway, you know, a place of more integration, so—but it's good to see Wesleyan doing more to, you know, to help things on campus socially in that way.

Rein: Yeah. What are some of the things that students take for granted now?

Hardy: Oh boy…[laughs]…let me begin—

[Rein laughs]

Hardy: Where shall I begin? One: the Ames library. This was not in existence. As a matter of fact, my class helped to raise funds and spearhead efforts for this as well as the Student Center. We actually—guys I was RAs with were on the Student Senate and we spearheaded the idea for a new student center.

Rein: Well, thank you.

Hardy: Yeah, you're very welcome.

[Both laugh]

Hardy: You guys have had the opportunity to, you know, to enjoy the fruits of kind of our labor. We—what we had in Wesleyan was burgeoning and growing. We had Harriet House, which, you know, was the newest dorm on campus. We had all the dorm renovations. We had things like that going on. The Science Center when I came here was four—three or four years old. The Shirk Center was one—a couple years old. So the campus has just followed what it's been doing, which is, from an infrastructure perspective, growing, but the ways in which, you know, it's growing now, it's just—it's above and beyond anything we ever had. This facility, the Student Center, certain things on campus—oh, here's another thing you guys can—

[Rein laughs]

Hardy: You guys benefit from that was our hard work: Wesleyan is a wet campus. It wasn't, it was a dry campus when I came here, and our sophomore year we put together initiatives to change the ruling and my junior year it became a wet campus and so, you know, that's something that some students enjoy, you know, but these are liberties that people think have just always been here and I am very proud—I'm here to support my school—I'm very proud of the fact that I was a part of some of these integral changes, you know, even when people don't appreciate it, it's still good to know that I had a piece of it, you know?

Rein: Yeah, definitely.

Hardy: So…

Rein: You seem very proud of—

Hardy: I am, I am, you know, I just feel like my calling was here, you know, I didn't—had never heard of Wesleyan before I came here and I came here on a recruiting visit for football and my

coach, you know, Coach actually told me, "Just come here on campus and you'll fall in love with this place," and being from the inner city, it's so different from what I'm used to, but I did. I came here and I fell in love with it and I saw a school that supported its students in whatever ventures. I mentioned the NAACP—that was just a—well, an idea between a few students—"Hey, the convention is in Ohio, why don't we see if we can go and if there's something we can bring back to campus from the NAACP." We petitioned the school, wrote a few letters, and got some funding to go, and the school supported it and backed us fully even when we returned, you know, and so that kind of thing is just invaluable to these efforts.

Rein: Let's see…oh, I like asking this question.

Hardy: Uh-huh…[laughs].

Rein: What's your favorite memory from Wesleyan that involved you interacting with people who were different than you in some way?

Hardy: That's an easy one, that's a slam dunk. It was—well, actually I have two—but it was a—I think one that's first and foremost would be Race and Ethnic Relations, the class that was taught by Georganne Rundblad, you know, a tenured professor here now. She brought people together in this class and, you know, it started off being everyone loves each other and then she kind of stripped us down to the core and peoples' feelings and beliefs and learnings and teachings over their lifetime came out and it was ugly and—on a lot of—on every side, but then she took us from the bottom and built us back up, and I'm not kidding you, there is something special about a class and an experience where people leave it and they add and change majors from that class. It wasn't just me, you know, I was a business guy who took this class and I added it as a major after that it affected my life so much, and so I just had—I learned how to listen and how to communicate with other people in the environment that was at times threatening and at times frustrating and it just taught me more patience. I think it gave me a real vision of how we can change society around us and—but it all centered around this class and the experiences I had with other people of other races in this class, so it was excellent. It was great.

Rein: Were there a lot of minority and majority people in the class?

Hardy: In the—there were. It was actually—it was a fairly—you know, large at Wesleyan is twenty-something kids, you know.

Rein: Yeah…[laughs].

Hardy: It was about that and it was a—it was like a—I'd probably say it was a 60:35:5 split where 60% of the majority, 35% actually African American minority, and then 5% of some other minority, so it was a pretty good split, but I think what was most important was not just the racial split but it was a lot of kids from different environments, socio-economic backgrounds—

Rein: Mhmm.

Hardy: So it was truly like a diverse group of people even within those racial groups, so…
Rein: That's cool.

Hardy: Yeah, it was a really—it was really cool. It was like one of those life-altering type of experiences.

Rein: Mhmm. Yeah, that's sort of what the liberal arts experience is—

Hardy: Oh yeah.

Rein: All about.

Hardy: Yeah, definitely. We got that here, I mean, it was a—you know, I got to do everything from photography to, you know, these hardcore sociology and business classes to, you know, just anything you can think of. I kind of got a really multifaceted experience here.

Rein: Mhmm. Somebody I was interviewing earlier today said that—and he was from around the same time as you—said that for a lot of people he was the first like African American they'd ever met.

Hardy: Oh yeah.

Rein: Did you experience—

Hardy: Oh definitely. Throughout that class and other coursework of sociology, you know, I kind of gained a reputation for being a person that was easy to talk to and so it was odd that I would have people in class who felt comfortable—it was flattering—

[Rein laughs]

Hardy: —but they felt comfortable enough to tell me things that, you know, it blew my mind what they would say. Some people had never met a black person in person, some people came to me and told me how intimidated they were by my physical presence when they first met me. I'm not—I'm 245 pounds now, 6'5". I was 315 then.

[Rein laughs]

Hardy: I was a bigger guy and—but, you know, what these classes taught me was to take those things and not, you know, there wasn't offense, there wasn't anger, you know, it was a dialogue-opener and—but I experienced that a lot at Wesleyan, which was a surprise. You know, you just wouldn't think, yeah, that that would be the case and it's probably less the case now, just in ten years there's been changes, but some people, their only experience with blacks have been on television, you know, which is definitely not always a good thing—

[Both laugh]

Rein: Yeah.

Hardy: Unfortunately—you know, unfortunately, so, yeah, yeah, I did see that a lot.

Rein: That's just so surprising to me.

Hardy: Yeah, it's almost shocking. I mean, people think, you know, we've come a long way and people are just like, "Wow, you know, how is that possible that that—?" It is and, I mean, we still have a long way to go but at the very least I'm glad that it's shocking to you because if you were a student here at that time only ten years ago, it may not have been as shocking to you as it is now, so it's a good thing. We're making progress, yeah.

Rein: Definitely. Well, I think that's a pretty good note to end on.

Hardy: Okay.

Rein: I wanted to thank you for coming in and talking to us.

Hardy: Oh, thank you so much for the opportunity.