

“Wherever they’s a fight so hungry people can eat, I’ll be there.”
THE GRAPES OF WRATH JOHN STEINBECK

Students are reviving Yale’s NAACP chapter after an inactive period

BY OLIVIA CYRUS
STAFF REPORTER

Two students are reactivating the Yale chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, or NAACP, after years of dormancy.

The NAACP is a grassroots organization that advocates for civil rights and social justice nationwide, according to the organization’s website. College chapters of the NAACP hold programming such as voter registration events and civil demonstrations to increase social activism on college campuses.

The formation of a chapter at Yale began as early as 1952, according to the News, which reported that undergraduate and graduate students met at Dwight Hall that year to discuss the chapter’s goals. Now, more than 70 years after the chapter’s initial founding, a revived chapter will held its first event, titled “Yale University NAACP Presents: The State of the Community (Re-Introduction of the Yale NAACP),” on Friday at the Afro-American Cultural Center, according to an email from organizers.

“Over the course of last year our e-committee worked directly with the Greater New Haven NAACP Board Members, Youth&College Connecticut State Division President, and National Board Administration to re-charter our Yale Chapter so that we could be recognized at the state, city, and national level,” Johnathan McGee ’28, a leader of the chapter’s reactivation, wrote in the email to more than 50 registered members last month.

Keith Pemberton II ’27, president of the chapter, first learned about the Yale chapter’s dormancy when he got to campus as a first year. An active member of his hometown NAACP chapter in High Point, North

Carolina, Pemberton wanted to make the Yale chapter equally active.

“I saw its impact from a civic engagement, educational programming and voter registration perspective and thought that would naturally continue into the collegiate environment,” Pemberton said. “So that’s when I really began becoming interested in a way to revitalize it.”

He believes that this reactivation will provide a structured space for Yale students and New Haven residents to engage in dialogue across differences. McGee added that in “our political climate” students need a place to discuss their thoughts and opinions on “what’s happening in America.”

Pemberton said the process of getting the chapter up and running began in spring 2024 during his first year, when he held a NAACP membership drive at the Af-Am House to establish that there was interest at Yale.

The next year, during McGee’s first year, the two began having conversations with the Greater New Haven Chapter members to see how they could reassert their presence on campus.

History of the chapter

The Greater New Haven Chapter has long been involved in sustaining an NAACP presence at Yale and in the city as early as the 1920s, according to Yale’s “Shining Light on Truth” research project.

While enrolled at the Divinity School from 1922 to 1923, student Stephen Gill, in the school’s class of 1923, served as a recording secretary of New Haven’s NAACP chapter and sat on the board that helped establish the Dixwell Community House, also known as the Q House.

He later was elected to the NAACP’s board of directors in 1954, underscoring the ties between Yale, New Haven and the NAACP.

When the Yale chapter was being launched in 1952, it was set to be the 85th college chapter of the NAACP. The chapter was largely active in the early 1990s, but interest in the organization decreased during the 2000s due to the graduation of student leaders, according to the News.

In 2007, after a period of inactivity, a Yale chapter was revived and held events including a Martin Luther King Jr. commemoration dinner, which drew 52 student attendees, the News reported. The chapter’s co-president at the time said she hoped the chapter would inspire students to revive ones at other Ivy League institutions that lacked them.

The chapter maintained its presence well into the next decade, co-sponsoring a “State of Black Yale” forum at the Af-Am House.

The chapter later went dormant, though, after several chapter leaders graduated, Pemberton said.

Looking to the future

McGee, in the email to members, described the reinstatement process as “incredibly challenging,” in part due to communication with the national organization and understanding the various details of membership. He recalled a particular moment when he and Pemberton went through each line of the membership packet with the Greater New Haven Chapter members to ensure that all details were completed.

The process was finalized last summer, ensuring that the pair would be able to begin programming in time for Black History Month.



KAREN LIN

At an event on Friday, student leaders reintroduced a Yale chapter of the civil rights organization. The chapter’s history dates back to as early as 1952.

McGee described the chance to bring back one of the oldest NAACP chapters in the Ivy League as “insane to think about.”

“It’s honestly kind of historic and I’m really glad and proud to be reactivating,” McGee said. “This was a long time coming, especially since we’ve just been waiting, and I feel like there are not a lot of public service-oriented clubs on campus, and we need to use the resources that we have and support the legacy that people before us created.”

Flematu Fofana ’28, a registered member of the group, said she is looking forward to the first meeting and making actionable change on Yale’s campus.

“It just feels so great to have another space on campus to be uplifted as someone interested in social justice and policy,” Fofana said.

Ayana Salahuddin ’28, a New Havener, said that she heard about the reactivation via Instagram.

“As a New Haven native, it is very exciting to see Black Yale pouring into the New Haven community with community service,” Salahuddin said.

McGee envisions in the next year beginning to hold voter registration drives across New Haven in advance of the 2026 midterms, holding student demonstrations that align with the organization’s mission and participating in national conventions.

For now, though, he and Pemberton hope the first event will give an introduction to what the chapter is and could potentially be.

“I want people to ask questions about our intentions, how to foster community and how we can pass down information to continue building a legacy,” McGee said.

The NAACP was founded in 1909.

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Black History Month game night features trivia on Af-Am House’s history

BY HANNAH LIU
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Students gathered at the Afro-American Cultural Center for a lively jeopardy night on Thursday evening as part of the Af-Am House’s 2026 Black History Month programming.

The event was part of the Af-Am House’s efforts to create a diverse set of Black History Month events centered around the theme of “Honoring the Past, Rewriting the Future.” According to Af-Am House Director Timeica Bethel, the events are especially exciting because this year marks the 50th anniversary of the first Black History Month

and the 100th year since the first Black History Week.

“Whether you identify as Black or not, there’s always so much to learn about other cultures,” Bethel said. “There are opportunities to have fun, like tonight’s trivia night, and then there are more serious things, like the criminal justice reform panel. Yale is a very rare place where you can do that organically in different physical spaces.”

At the jeopardy night, teams of three to five students — with names ranging from “Choco Drop” to “Shelm” to “Oliver Twist” — competed against each other to answer trivia questions based on topics related to Af-Am House history and Black History Month events.

The event was open to all Yale students. In addition to the games, refreshments and prizes for the teams who made it to “final jeopardy,” students received Af-Am goodie bags to commemorate the night.

“I’m excited to just honestly learn at this point,” Caleb Mangesho ’27 said. “I like to think I know a lot of good general history, but they said it’s all House questions, and I don’t know as much about the House.”

Other events this month included a poetry mental health event with La Casa and a criminal justice reform panel. Many of the events are planned both by Af-Am House staff and student leaders.

“As part of the Student Success Programming Team, we also connect

students with different professional resources and host monthly panels in different sectors that connect black Yale alumni with current students in the graduate professional schools and Yale College,” David Woods ’26 said.

In addition to Af-Am House programming, Yale student organizations have also hosted their own conferences this month, including the Black Solidarity Conference and the National Eritrean-Ethiopian Students Conference, a gathering of Ethiopian and Eritrean students from colleges around the Northeast.

Black History Month programming at the Af-Am House will continue until the end of the month, with keynote speakers Kahlil Greene

’22 and Tuskegee airman Enoch “Woody” Woodhouse ’52 coming on Feb. 23 and a performing arts showcase on Feb. 28.

“If you are interested in history, there’s something for you,” Bethel said. “If you are interested in the arts, there’s something for you. If you just don’t know much about Black culture and you want to get engaged, there’s something for you, right? We try to make the lineup of events and programming as diverse as possible.”

The Af-Am House was founded in 1969.

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Yale chapter of gun safety advocacy group relaunches with rally

BY ANAYAH ACCILLEN AND HAILEY YOUNG
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Yale’s chapter of Students Demand Action collaborated with the Yale College Democrats, the Yale College Council and community leaders on Saturday afternoon to honor people who have died due to gun violence and lobby for future legislation.

The event was the first that was sponsored by the newly revived chapter of Students Demand Action. Its president, Madison Aguilar ’29, said that she revived the chapter after being contacted by the founder of the

organization at Brown, who organized a walkout following an attack that killed two students on Brown’s campus in December.

“We have to remind ourselves that we are not alone. Though we’re a small group here, your action and presence mean more than ever,” she said in her closing statements to the crowd. “We have to remind ourselves that we’re not hopeless.”

Gathering on the New Haven Green, the protest focused on spreading awareness about the ban of “Glock switches,” devices that can convert semiautomatic pistols into fully automatic weapons.

Aguilar’s presentation directed attendees to House Bill 5043, which was introduced by Gov. Ned Lamont SOM ’80 on Feb. 5 to the Connecticut General Assembly. The bill would require safer design standards and mirrors a law passed in California, building on Connecticut’s gun safety efforts following the 2012 shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School.

“Because we’re at an Ivy League school, the assumption is that we’re not affected by these things, or it’s mostly public universities or high schools that are facing school shootings,” Aguilar said. “But that shouldn’t be a reason not to take action towards stopping these things. And as we saw with Brown, these things are very possible in our own communities.”

Aguilar said her decision to revive Yale’s chapter of Students Demand Action was shaped by her experience as a member of the organization in high school, along with the death of her older brother, who was shot and killed near her childhood home, she said.

“I got the midnight call that changed my life forever,” Aguilar said during the rally. “No family should have to receive that call.”

Conor Webb ’28, the vice president of Yale Dems, said he was enthusiastic about partnering with Students Demand Action and drew on his experience organizing events to prevent gun violence.

“We were skeptical at first of the short turnaround. I told her Yale Dems would have the capacity to organize a rally and, more importantly, the grit. Soon, our grief became tenacity,” Webb wrote to the News.

During the protest, community leaders, including recently elected New Haven Alder Christine Kim ’99 echoed Aguilar’s remarks, sharing how her own path to public service was inspired by personal experiences with gun violence.

From seeing news coverage of Sandy Hook in 2012 to recently driving up to Providence to support her nephew at Brown, Kim emphasized the importance of making policy-level changes.

“We need to stop the cycle of pain,” she said. “To take care of each other and make sure this doesn’t happen again — in Newtown, in Providence or anywhere else.”

Yale junior and Ward 1 Alder Elias Theodore ’27 also spoke about the aftermath of Sandy Hook. His school began practicing lockdown drills for the first time, something previously “unimaginable,” but now a routine for many students across the country.

Theodore said it is now time for Connecticut to “step up” and address the issue of Glock switches.

“Connecticut has been a leader on gun violence before. Following the tragedy at Sandy Hook, the state passed one of the strongest gun laws in the country, expand-

ing the assault weapons ban, to strengthen background checks, and we limited high capacity magazines. We must step up again and focus on prohibiting the sale of fire alarms that are readily convertible,” Theodore said at the rally.

Leonard Jahad, the executive director of the Connecticut Violence Intervention Program, described how the issue of shootings expands beyond victims. His team responds to retaliatory violence, works to connect victims and their families with resources and responds to calls in hospitals.

The protest’s theme of policy change in tandem with community effort culminated in a moment of silence to honor the students killed at Brown, which was followed by student chants demanding action.

For Aguilar, the protest is just the start for Yale’s chapter of Students Demand Action, and she said she hopes to organize more opportunities for students to collaborate on raising awareness.

Students Demand Action was first launched as a pilot in 2016 and later became a national organization in 2018 following a shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida.

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Yale’s chapter of Students Demand Action, revived after a December shooting at Brown that killed two students, honored victims of gun violence at a rally on Saturday.