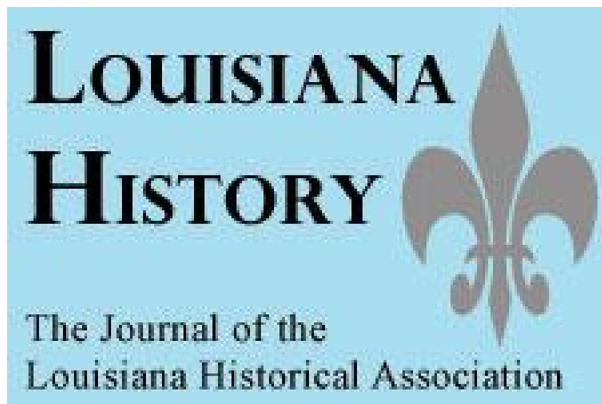

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Author(s): THOMAS AIELLO

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Violence Is A Classroom: The 1972 Grambling and Southern Riots and the Trajectory of Black Student Protest

By THOMAS AIELLO*

The prospects for the Grambling State University Tiger football team and its Southern University Jaguar counterpart could not have been more different in 1972. Grambling was considered a favorite yet again, as it had been the previous year—and as it had been for the bulk of the previous decade. Southern, meanwhile, was in the throes of a troubling down period with no realistic expectations of conference success. Loss followed loss for the Jaguars, who never seemed to get on track. The team managed only two wins and a tie through September and October. Grambling stumbled early with two frustrating losses, but the Tigers regained their composure and by mid-season had a four-game winning streak and a 6-2 record. Still, both teams realized that the measure of the season was taken in November during their annual rivalry contest, scheduled that year as a home game for Southern.

It was another in a long line of frustrating seasons for Southern. It was another in a long line of successful ones for Grambling. The Tigers, noted *Ruston Daily Leader* sports editor

*The author is an assistant professor of history and African American studies at Valdosta State University.

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O. K. Davis, appeared "destined for victories during the remainder of the campaign unless something drastic happens."[1]

Something drastic happened.

On Thursday, November 16—two days before the scheduled rivalry game between Southern and Grambling—students occupied the Southern University administration building. It was the second time they had done so in the preceding three weeks. Administrators called in sheriff's deputies and state police. The governor called out the National Guard. There were approximately 2,000 students in and around the administration building when the police arrived. Almost immediately, the area was inundated with tear gas. Confusion. Screaming. Their eyes red and burning, students began running from the building. There were loud explosions amidst the haze, and when the smoke cleared, two students lay dead in the street.[2]

The murders of Denver Smith and Leonard Brown were an apotheosis, a crescendo. The tragedy had its genesis in the frustration and atavism pervading Louisiana's black college campuses in the preceding weeks, in the preceding years, and in the long history of discontent at historically black colleges throughout the twentieth century. At the same time, the murders were also an opening salvo, a shot across the bow signifying that the conservative administrations of black colleges and the tenuous nature of those colleges in the Louisiana higher education system would no longer be tolerated.

Southern was not alone. In the fall semester of 1972, student protests rocked the campuses of both Grambling and Southern—Louisiana's two dominant public black universities—as students vented their frustrations against administrators who seemed unwilling to stomach civil rights activism or develop a curriculum that would fully address the modern black experience as interpreted by the still-influential Black Power movement. Historians generally classify such protest as being the product of

[1]*Ruston Daily Leader*, October 31, 1972, 7, November 1, 1972, 10, 11; *Louisiana Weekly*, October 21, 1972, 2-6.

[2]*Ruston Daily Leader*, November 17, 1972, 1, 3; "Denver Smith and Leonard Brown," and "Chronology of Events That Led to Death of Students," Smith, Denver and Brown, Leonard Shooting Tragedy, November 16, 1972, box 1, Archives, John B. Cade Library, Southern University, Baton Rouge, La., hereafter cited as Leonard Shooting Tragedy.

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a long history of black student activism, stemming from social inequities and moving into university administration and back relatively seamlessly,[3] or as an outgrowth of the broader student movement, which saw all forms of bureaucracy as suspect.[4] But Southern and Grambling proved that neither of these assumptions hold. The student movement was necessarily influential, as was civil rights. Campus protests in the 1960s, for example, which formed the seedbed for the 1972 discontent, came in response to limits on student activism in the cause of integration. But the protests in 1972 were directed at black officials at the university, specifically dealing with issues the protestors saw as influenced by race and class accommodations. Of course, civil rights was still an overriding factor. The autocratic administrators of Grambling and Southern were, in the eyes of students, tools of the white power structure in the state, who were in turn the authors of the segregationist policy against which their other track of anger resonated. And even when civil rights was not the specific impetus for such campus activism, it was still there, hovering over the proceedings. Sit-ins and other forms of anti-segregation protests, according to psychiatrists Frederic Solomon and J. R. Fishman, gave students the confidence and blueprint to "express publicly the frustration and resentment" that formerly fell silent.[5] And so, student protests at Southern and Grambling—and at black universities in general—were neither the result of a seamless transition from candlelight vigils for voting rights nor an inherent continuation of or dependency on white college radicalism. They were a combination of those realities, additionally feeding from a long history of the contradictory nature of black colleges themselves and the historical frustration black students often expressed at those schools.

Those contradictions were manifest long before the Civil Rights Movement, and the nature of black colleges seemingly had such

[3]See, for example, Joel Rosenthal, "Southern Black Student Activism: Assimilation vs. Nationalism," *The Journal of Negro Education,* 44 (1975): 113-29.

[4]*Ruston Daily Leader*, November 17, 1972, 1; *Louisiana Weekly*, December 9, 1972, 2-3.

[5]Frederic Solomon and J. R. Fishman, "The Psychosocial Meaning of Nonviolence in Student Civil Rights Activities," *Psychiatry*, 28 (May 1964): 99.

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protest built into the system. Black colleges were founded in response to racism, but they weren't necessarily a militant protest against it. Private schools developed because access to better education was not available. Public schools were almost always created by white legislatures to diffuse the potential for integration attempts at white universities, and white southern boards of education generally saw the criteria for selecting the presidents of black universities far differently than those of their white counterparts. Political conservatism and a gradualist approach to civil rights became the dominant qualifiers for such employment. Administrators thus sought to create a socially respectable middle class of their student bodies, one that would protect the reputation and existence of the school itself—allowing students to achieve some kind of financial security after graduation while making them largely unwilling to rock any of the racist boats that the universities depended upon for their survival. But education doesn't work that way. Students who learned more and more about the history, economics, and sociology of their country and their region became more and more frustrated with the status quo. Thus to keep the mechanism in place, southern black colleges developed extremely authoritarian administrations designed to keep such contradictory norms in place.[6]

It was, it seemed to many, a failed idea. As early as the 1920s, student protests against the administration of black colleges occurred at Howard, Hampton, and Fisk. Importantly, these were the country's elite black schools, each located in an urban setting that put students in frequent contact with white society. They could, in a way, see what they were missing.[7] In the 1930s,

[6]Rosenthal, "Southern Black Student Activism," 114; Joy Ann Williamson, *Radicalizing the Ebony Tower: Black Colleges and the Black Freedom Struggle in Mississippi* (New York, 2008), 114; Robert P. Stuckert, "The Negro College: A Pawn of White Domination," *The Wisconsin Sociologist,* 3 (1964): 1; Christopher Jencks and David Reisman, "The American Negro College," *Harvard Educational Review,* 37 (1967): 29; Michael W. Miles, *The Radical Probe: The Logic of Student Rebellion* (New York, 1971), 194-97; and Adam Fairclough, *Race and Democracy: The Civil Rights Struggle in Louisiana, 1915-1972* (Athens, Ga., 1995), 109.

[7]V. P. Franklin has interpreted such early protests of the 1920s as "generated by the cognitive dissonance black collegians experienced when they left the real world of the 'New Negro' and entered the Victorian environment maintained on campus by white and black administrators." V. P. Franklin, "Introduction: African American Student Activism in the 20th Century," *The Journal of African*

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as Joel Rosenthal has noted, white radical activism in the face of the Depression, led most forcefully by the National Student League, provided new fuel for such critiques, as did revelatory, sensationalistic cases like the Scottsboro trial in Alabama. Students at Virginia State protested against the "Victorian atmosphere and the convent-like restrictions" placed upon them. When students at Fisk protested a local lynching and picketed the local segregated theater, Pres. Thomas E. Jones expelled the leader of the protests for actions that were "detrimental to the best interests of the University." Similarly, when the student council president of South Carolina College for Negroes helped organize a post-*Brown* desegregation petition, he was expelled, touching off campus-wide protests that culminated in the expulsion of more students and the dismissal of several members of the faculty and staff.[8] "It must be reported as one of the bitter ironies in the civil rights movement in the South," wrote William P. Fidler, present of the American Association of University Professors in 1965, "that the administrations of some Negro institutions have exercised autocratic control over the actions and utterances of their faculties and students."[9]

American History, 88 (2003): 105; Raymond Wolters, *The New Negro on Campus: Black College Rebellions of the 1920s* (Princeton, N.J., 1975), 29-137.

[8]Quotes reprinted from Rosenthal, "Southern Black Student Activism," 115-18. See also Marcia Lynn Johnson, "Student Protest at Fisk University in the 1920s," *Negro History Bulletin,* 33 (1970): 137-40; W. E. B. DuBois, "The Hampton Strike," *Nation*, November 2, 1927, 471-72; Rayford W. Logan, *Howard University: The First Hundred Years, 1867-1967* (New York, 1969), 120-22; Maurice Gates, "Negro Students Challenge Social Forces," *The Crisis*, 42 (August 1935): 233.

[9]As this brief series of examples demonstrates, such protests continued on both public and private campuses. As James D. Anderson has noted, particularly in the context of early twentieth century activism, the goal of black education, particularly in the minds of those funding the endeavor, was to create a strong, pliant, educated class of black southerners who were unlikely to rock any segregationist boats. To that end, they would uplift the race and ensure that the university would not be seen as a threat to the status quo. William P. Fidler, "Academic Freedom in the South Today," *AAUP Bulletin,* 51 (December 1965): 415; James D. Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935* (Chapel Hill, 1988), 272-73. For further examples of such activism at private and parochial black colleges, see Marybeth Gasman, *Envisioning Black Colleges: A History of the United Negro College Fund* (Baltimore, 2007); Holly Fisher, "Oakwood College Students' Quest for Social Justice Before and During the Civil Rights Era," *The Journal of African American History,* 88 (2003): 110-25.

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There were certainly exceptions. Black faculty at Alabama State organized the Montgomery Bus Boycott, and black faculty at Florida A&M University did the same thing in Tallahassee. While the president of Alabama State was sympathetic, the president of FAMU was less so, but neither dismissed participating faculty members. When students participated, however, university presidents were far less willing to compromise. They were, ultimately, left with little choice. When South Carolina State students boycotted white-owned businesses in 1956, for example, Pres. Benner C. Turner expelled fifteen students in response to board pressure. He kept his job but at the expense of his ability to effectively lead the university. The students' protests turned toward the administration; many burned Turner in effigy on campus. The following year, the president of Alcorn State, J. R. Otis, was dismissed by the Mississippi board of education for not responding harshly to student protests against segregationist sentiments.[10]

Still, such attempts to stifle rights activism seemed quixotic at best. Besides serving as an impetus for original student protests and thus fostering some of the discontent between black college administrations and its students and faculty, the civil rights movement also had a tremendous effect in creating a black consciousness. Universities once castigated as tools of the white establishment became radicalized, as students sought to "decolonize Black colleges, to make them truly relevant for Black people."[11] Black colleges were in a paradoxical position. As Joy Ann Williamson has noted, black campuses "maintained vital resources for sustaining the black freedom struggle." They provided education, leadership, and media outlets, to say nothing of meeting space and a steady stream of eighteen to twenty-two year olds. As the postwar civil rights movement began in earnest, students at historically black colleges and universities

[10]Not all university presidents broke under such pressures. For example, Warmoth T. Gibbs, president of North Carolina A&T, refused to dismiss the students who began the sit-in movement. Adam Fairclough, *A Class of Their Own: Black Teachers in the Segregated South* (Cambridge, Mass., 2007), 376-80.

[11]Quoted in Gasman, *Envisioning Black Colleges*, 121. For an example of such activism transitioning to campus, see Ann Moody's account of her collegiate experience in Mississippi. Ann Moody, *Coming of Age in Mississippi: An Autobiography* (New York, 1968), 222-30.

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(HBCUs) would "co-opt" their universities as staging grounds for the freedom struggle.[12]

Grambling had a less extensive history with student militancy than most of its predecessors, but students still had plenty of reasons to mistrust the powers that be. Prior to LSU's 1950 integration and the Supreme Court's 1954 *Brown* decision, the Louisiana legislature desperately hoped to stem the tide of integrationist sentiment by giving the appearance of equality at black schools. Black primary and secondary enrollment was up in the late 1940s, as was the length of the black school year, which had traditionally been far shorter than that of white students. Funding for Grambling (and Southern) increased heavily in the postwar years, an effort to keep black students happy in their black colleges, lest they attempt to enroll at white ones.[13] Unlike Hampton or Howard or Fisk or Southern, however, Grambling was cloistered in a small black town, and though there was staunch segregation in the parish seat of Ruston, the city of Grambling itself proved a relative buffer to much of its harsher dictates. Still, the campus was not immune from such realities. In 1967, approximately eight hundred students walked out of classes, ostensibly protesting Grambling's overemphasis on the football team and arguing that such aggrandizement hurt its academic mission. Pres. Ralph Waldo Emerson Jones was aghast. Such was the terrain of big-city Southern University, not comparatively mild Grambling State. He asked Gov. John McKeithen for a National Guard presence, and McKeithen responded with eight hundred men. It was a clumsy move. In addition, Jones expelled thirty-one of the dissidents, including the student government's president and vice-president. He publicly blamed outside agitators, "Negro extremists," for radicalizing the student body. The students disagreed. "Like many Southern Negro schools," said expelled

[12]Such trends only continued as nonviolent civil rights gave way to Black Power. The number of students participating in civil rights activism is generally theorized to be a vast minority of the campus population, but such diminishes neither the cause nor the effect of those who did. Williamson, *Radicalizing the Ebony Tower*, 34, 59, 114, 131-32.

[13]In 1947, the state legislature established a law school at Southern, again hoping to protect the white purity of the LSU law school across town. Rosenthal, "Southern Black Student Activism," 114; Stuckert, "The Negro College," 1; Jencks and Reisman, "The American Negro College," 29; Miles, *The Radical Probe,* 194-97; Fairclough, *Race and Democracy*, 109.

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Student Government Association Pres. Willie Zanders, "Grambling is unable to produce the sort of atmosphere conducive to learning that the Southern Negro so desperately needs. That, basically, is the problem, and that is our complaint." The students wanted Jones's resignation, they wanted the expansion of research facilities, but their demands were not specific and the protest was calm. The administration's overreaction only exacerbated what could have been a relatively small problem.[14]

The following year, in 1968, a contingent of dissident students authored a more specific protest—one similar to the 1972 version—chiding the administration for its submissiveness toward the white State Board of Education and seeking curriculum changes that more readily addressed the black experience in the civil rights South. Again President Jones responded by requesting state aid and approving a national guard contingent on campus. Then he expelled twenty-nine students, who sued for readmission. When a Federal District Court ordered the State Board of Education to give the students a hearing, the lily-white body upheld eighteen of the expulsions. Jones, however, was not done. He dismissed three faculty members for their participation in the protests, though the teachers denied any overt actions or even completely agreeing with the protesters' demands. Jones claimed to have evidence, but he never produced it. If Grambling students were waffling on the administration's potential dependency on (if not collusion with) the white state legislature, the 1968 incident seemed a clear validation.[15]

Such faculty collusion was not rare. University students ultimately were aided by faculty members who, freed from having to directly acquiesce to white legislatures who funded their universities, defended both the movement for equality and the right of students to express themselves freely. And faculty members tended to play a much more active role in the protest actions at black colleges and universities.[16] White liberals from

[14]Robert Deitz, "Grambling? A 'Football Factory' Is in an Educational Uproar," *The National Observer*, November 6, 1967, 4.

[15]"Grambling College (Louisiana)," *AAUP Bulletin,* 57 (Spring 1971): 50-2.

[16]Such collusion between students and others against conservative administrations also had a long history. In 1924 and 1925, Fisk University students combined with alumni and W. E. B. DuBois to protest the severe administration of white president Fayette McKenzie, who would resign in

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the Southern Teaching Program, the Woodrow Wilson Internship Program, and other similar recruitment agencies played a role (three in particular at Southern), but black professors, often made militant through their own collegiate experience, participated in even greater numbers, demonstrating yet another disconnect between the administration and the faculty.[17] At Southern in the early 1960s, for example, Prof. Adolph Reed actively opposed the administration of Felton Clark and wrote a widely-published letter to his leader that "there is a dramatic absence of direction and leadership on your part."[18] Professors at black universities, of course, didn't have to actively participate in protests to draw the ire of their administrators. Merely expressing sympathy with the civil rights cause was often enough for dismissal. Howard, for example, released radical professor Nathan Hare, who had been critical of black colleges. In August 1967, Hare described the schools as "caricatures of the most conspicuous aspects of white college trivia—perfunctory learning, grandiose 'hooded' ceremonies, fraternity fanfare, and a panorama of adolescent pursuits." These universities, Hare argued, reflected white attempts to keep their black counterparts in a state of subservience, or to allay slaveowner guilt at the procreation of bastard children. "Today there are more than 100 Negro colleges housing about 150,000 students," he argued.

response to the uproar. "God speed the breed!" said DuBois. "Suppose we do lose Fisk; suppose we lose every cent that the entrenched millionaires have set aside to buy our freedom and stifle our complaints. They have the power, they have the wealth, but glory to God we still own our own souls and led by young men like these at Fisk, let us neither flinch nor falter, but fight, and fight and fight again." Still, there were consequences, as philanthropists responsible for endowing the school withheld money in a counter-protest to the radicalism of the Fisk students and alumni. Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South,* 264-69, 270. For more on the specific relationship between black teachers and the Civil Rights Movement, see Fairclough, *A Class of Their Own*, 357-90.

[17]Much of this activism emanated from the mouthpiece of the American Association of University Professors, which consistently castigated universities who enforced various forms of campus censorship on faculty. Though the association certainly had its failures along the way, its consistency was a clear spur to faculty activism. Williamson, *Radicalizing the Ebony Tower*, 62-3, 81, 84-5.

[18]D'Army Bailey, *The Education of a Black Radical: A Southern Civil Rights Activist's Journey, 1959-1964* (Baton Rouge, 2009), 117.

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"These colleges, in the minds of many of their students, represent in almost every way a total failure."[19]

The Grambling administration did not do much to dissuade the students of that idea. On November 1, 1972, a campus group headed by Student Government Association Pres. Louis Scott presented a list of demands to Pres. Ralph Waldo Emerson Jones and the university administration. The group wanted greater student participation in policymaking. They wanted a say in faculty hiring. They wanted a department of black studies, more comprehensive mail and phone service, and the removal of the school dress code. Finally, they wanted 75 percent representation on university disciplinary committees.[20]

The emphasis on a Black Studies program was telling. The campaign for Black Studies grew out of the Black Power movement and remains one of its lasting legacies. It sought, as historian Peniel E. Joseph has demonstrated, "the utilization of scholarship for the larger pursuit of social justice and a broader, more inclusive democracy."[21] It was education with activism built in, and therefore was in itself a threat to the very stasis school administrators were being pressured to maintain.[22]

The day after Scott made the SGA's demands, however, Jones (known as "Prez") left for Hawaii, en route to a game with the

[19]Hare's criticisms seemed to be validated at Southern the following term. In 1968 John J. Hedgemon, the university registrar, was indicted for income tax evasion early in the semester, and evidence in the trial demonstrated that he fixed grades, gave credit for courses not taken, and allowed illegal late registrations, all for a price. Nathan Hare, "Behind the Black College Student Revolt," *Ebony,* 22 (August 1967), 58-61; *Louisiana Weekly*, August 12, 1967, 2-6, 2-7, November 16, 1968, 1, 6.

[20]*The Gramblinite*, November 3, 1972, 1; *Ruston Daily Leader*, November 3, 1972, 1, 3.

[21]*Negro Digest* ran special issues evaluating the "Black University" each March between 1968 and 1970, reinforcing the Black Power and Black Studies ideals of strengthening autonomous black institutions and awakening the political consciousness of students. Peniel E. Joseph, "Dashikis and Democracy: Black Studies, Student Activism, and the Black Power Movement," *The Journal of African American History,* 88 (2003): 182, 194; Rosenthal, "Southern Black Student Activism," 126-27.

[22]As Vincent Harding argued in 1970, one of the central tenets of this new shift in black universities was "its willingness to define education as being unashamedly political, and to tie black higher education to the struggles of African peoples everywhere." Vincent Harding, "Toward the Black University," *Ebony* (August 1970): 157.

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Tiger football team. There would be no capitulation when the Tigers had a game to play. As Thursday, November 2, wore on, student groups continued to hold meetings and the administration braced for some sort of protest. While Grambling's security force would be in charge of maintaining order on campus, forces from the Ruston City Police, Lincoln Parish Sheriff's Department, Louisiana State Police, and Louisiana National Guard were on alert. When Jones touched down in Hawaii, school officials reached him and Jones sanctioned the security plan.[23]

Shortly after five o'clock, one of the student groups meeting in front of the administration building began removing tables and chairs from the dining hall, using them to form a barricade that blocked the street. Still, there did not seem to be any systematic plan in place. Around nine o'clock, the violence started when a frustrated student threw a garbage can lid through a plate glass window at the student union. Students teemed into the building, looting clothing and jewelry from the student bookstore.[24]

Then the first shot was fired. A student blasted a glass door with a pistol, inciting others to begin destroying all of the glass windows and doors. The director of the student union, A. C. Carpenter, tried to reach the building but was stopped by the makeshift barricade.[25]

The frenzied group then moved to Adams Hall, the women's dormitory. "Wake your dead up!" they shouted. They threw rocks into the dorm's large glass windows before moving on. At some point in the evening, members of the group overturned a Volkswagen.[26] There was no order to the violence, no system. It all seemed so futile.

Grambling security patiently waited for backup and, with twelve units of the state police waiting on the edge of campus, began making arrests. School business manager Kenneth Newman was on the scene. "We've got one of the bravest chief security officers in Frank Phillips you ever want to lay your hands on," he said. "He put on his gas mask last night, and got

[23]*Ruston Daily Leader*, November 3, 1972, 1, 3.

[24]Ibid., 3.

[25]Ibid.

[26]Ibid.

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him a jar of mace, and walked out all between them, and dusted them down." By midnight, twelve students had been arrested and sent to the Lincoln Parish prison camp. The number totaled twenty-five by morning.[27]

By Friday, things on campus seemed calm, and classes went on as scheduled after custodial crews spent the early morning hours cleaning up the glass and debris from the streets. There was one more lone incident Friday night, as a group of students set fire to a small press box annex at the football stadium, but other than that isolated outburst, order seemed restored. The brief revolution had failed. The problem was that the core group of approximately 150 student protesters could not marshal any sort of mass consciousness among a student body of more than 4,000. It left the group impotent, leaving only violence as a last recourse.[28]

But more than anything else, the student unrest at Grambling seemed like an introduction, not a conclusion. The demonstration failed, but the protest, it seemed, was not over.

As some students sat in jail, unable to make the $500 bond, and as others returned home for the weekend, shaken and scared by the violence, the Tiger football team took the field in Hawaii. When the team returned on Monday, Prez Jones in tow, the campus was quiet.[29]

Southern's Jaguars were headed in the opposite direction athletically, nestled in the bottom of the conference with a 2-6-1 record. "This season," wrote Andrew Harris, sports editor for the *Baton Rouge News Leader*, "has not exactly been a bowl of cherries for the Jaguars."[30]

In other ways, however, the trajectory of Southern doggedly turned in the same direction as its northern counterpart. Of course, student activism was nothing new at Southern. Its size

[27]*The Gramblinite*, November 10, 1972, 1, 9; *Ruston Daily Leader*, November 3, 1972, 1, 3.

[28]Kenneth Newman, the school's business manager, estimated the damage to campus at $52,563. *The Gramblinite*, December 1, 1972, 1; *Ruston Daily Leader*, November 3, 1972, 1, 3, November 6, 1972, 1.

[29]The game was a rout. "That's the worst beating I've ever experienced," said Hawaii head football coach Dave Holmes. The final score was 46-7. *Ruston Daily Leader*, November 6, 1972, 10, November 7, 1972, 7.

[30]*Baton Rouge News Leader*, November 12, 1972, 1D; *Louisiana Weekly*, November 4, 1972, 3-8.

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and location gave it a similar profile to Fisk, Hampton, and Howard, making students at the school far more likely to engage in protests. In Rev. T. J. Jemison's Baton Rouge bus boycott of 1953, for example, which Aldon Morris has described as a precursor and model for the more influential Montgomery movement two years later, Southern students actively declined to ride local busses. As the early fifties became the late fifties, Southern students who attended Jemison's Mt. Zion Baptist Church began a series of lunch counter protests at local restaurants in Baton Rouge—this coming years before the so-called birth of the sit-in movement at Greensboro, North Carolina, in February 1960.[31]

But precedent is really beside the point. The Greensboro sit-ins of 1960, unlike those at Southern, sparked a statewide interracial movement in its first weeks, then spread quickly to the rest of the South. When those sit-ins fed back into Louisiana in March 1960, Southern again became a state flashpoint for racial protest. At the same time, however, it became a glaring example of the disconnect between a radical student body and a conservative administration. The State Board of Education warned the presidents of all Louisiana colleges, white or black, to discourage such radicalism through "stern disciplinary action," and Southern Pres. Felton Clark obliged, issuing directives to stem the tide of protest before it even started. It didn't work. In late March, Southern students sat in at a Kress lunch counter, at a local drug store, and at the bus terminal. On March 30, 3,000 students marched to the state capital. Clark responded by expelling the sixteen students arrested in the sit-ins and the one who organized the march.[32]

[31]Aldon Morris, *The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement: Black Communities Organizing for Change* (New York, 1984), 17-25; V. P. Franklin, "Patterns of Student Activism at Historically Black Universities in the United States and South Africa, 1960-1977," *The Journal of African American History,* 88 (2003): 204; Dean Sinclair, "Equal in All Places: The Civil Rights Struggle in Baton Rouge, 1953-1963," *Louisiana History,* 39 (1998): 358.

[32]The original Southern sit-ins ultimately led to *Garner* v. *Louisiana* (1961), which denied the typical southern claim that peaceful sit-ins were examples of "disturbing the peace." *Garner* v. *Louisiana*, 386 US 157 (1961); *Baton Rouge Morning Advocate*, March 16, 1960, 1A, 8A; Franklin, "Patterns of Student Activism," 206-07; "1960's Sit-In's, They Refused to Be Refused: Historical Statement," 1960 Sit-Ins, Archives; "Group Recalls 1960 Sit-In During Reunion Here," 1960 Sit-Ins, Archives; Fairclough, *Race and Democracy*, 266-67. For more on the distinctively black collegiate nature of the sit-in movement, see Ruth

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At this point, the Southern student movement became less about segregation and more about what various African Americans in Baton Rouge were willing to do about it. Clark and the Southern administration had proved to the student body that racial equality was less important than order, discipline, and reputation. Hundreds of students filed paperwork to withdraw from the university, viewing their administration as a shill for the white Louisiana establishment. Of course, it was, in a way. But Clark (along with Jones) was charged with maintaining the viability of a black college funded by a white legislature, and he knew that such protests would upset the already tenuous status of black higher education in a decidedly racist state. University presidents were caught between an activist student body and a raging civil rights movement on one hand, and the necessity of ensuring funding for their universities on the other. So Clark's actions came less from the innate Uncle Tomism with which he was charged than a pragmatism that sought to maintain Southern's place in the system.[33] But if that position was clouded in March 1960, it was completely obscured in April.

After meeting with Jemison and some of the expelled students on April 2, Clark convinced them to urge their classmates to return to school. On April 3, however, he expelled another student. The resulting protest rallies against the administration were large, the anger was real, and almost one thousand students withdrew. The message was clear. University leaders were tainted by their dependency on white politicians. They were an establishment, and just like the broader white establishment, they were hurdles to (if not opponents of) "the movement."[34]

Searles and J. Allen Williams, Jr., "Negro College Students' Participation in Sit-Ins," *Social Forces,* 40 (1962): 215-20.

[33]The extent of the pressure on university administrators to walk a fine line between funding and governance was intense. At a 1960 conference of black college presidents to consider responses to the burgeoning sit-in movement, the group agreed to keep no minutes of the meetings. Such would be far too risky in the heated civil rights climate. Williamson, *Radicalizing the Ebony Tower*, 114; Fairclough, *A Class of Their Own*, 381.

[34]"Timeline of 1960 Sit-Ins," prepared two months following the events. 1960 Sit-Ins, Archives; Fairclough, *Race and Democracy*, 267-68; Franklin, "Patterns of Student Activism," 208. For more on early 1960s Baton Rouge activism, with Southern University as its ideological center, see Bailey, *The Education of a Black Radical.*

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"The movement," however, was a nebulous thing, and as the 1960s bore on, the increased radicalism of the student body led to a proportionate growth in the disconnect between leaders and led, between the administration and its charges. This was not exactly Newton's Third Law of Motion—unequal treatment was always the principal target of student unrest in the 1960s—but the administration's handwringing over continued protests throughout the decade clearly made it complicit in the eyes of many Southern students. Clark expelled more students in early 1962 for participating in nonviolent protests in Baton Rouge, leading to a massive boycott of classes and another round of withdrawals. Protests of swimming pools and businesses in the city in 1963 prompted less action from Southern authorities, probably because they happened during the summer.[35]

In 1968, Leon Netterville replaced Clark as Southern's president, but he was cut from the same authoritarian cloth. And by that time, the Black Power movement had arrived on campus. Renewed protests in 1966 and 1967 had led to the dismissal of three white faculty members seen as abetting the activism.[36] The following year, groups at both the Baton Rouge and New Orleans branches of Southern demanded a Department of Black Studies. Netterville not only refused the request, he refused to acknowledge it existed. In 1969, students on the New Orleans campus replaced the American flag with a Black Liberation flag, leading to a police crackdown and twenty arrests. There followed another boycott of classes and more demonstrations. The

[35]Southern was not alone in expelling student protestors who participated in sit-ins and other forms of civil rights activism. Students at Alabama State, Florida A&M, and Albany State suffered similar consequences. Still, the 1963 protests (and the threat of a boycott) had their effects, leading many white businesses to end their discriminatory practices. Sinclair, "Equal in All Places," 364-65; Franklin, "Patterns of Student Activism," 208; Dorothy Dunbar Bromley and Susan McCabe, "Impact of the 'Sit-In' Movement on Academic Freedom," *Negro Education Review,* 12 (April 1961), 64-9.

[36]The dismissed faulty members were Woodrow Wilson Teaching Interns, participants in a program that brought young, northern (and usually white) academics to black southern universities. Similar instances occurred at Bishop College and South Carolina State. "Academic Freedom and Tenure: Southern University and Agricultural and Mechanical College," *AAUP Bulletin,* 54 (Spring 1968): 14-24.

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National Guard would occupy both campuses for weeks to keep order.[37]

Throughout October 1972, the student body of Southern once again fumed. The spirit of campus unrest had returned to Scotlandville, leading disgruntled students to provide a list of demands to the administration late in the month.[38] Their demands were similar to those of the Grambling students, so much so that it was assumed in Lincoln Parish that the Grambling demands were based heavily on the influence of Southern's list of late October. They wanted changes in the curriculum, changes in the administration, and Netterville's resignation.[39] The university responded on October 24 by agreeing to make some changes and study others, but the concessions were not enough for most of the angry students.[40]

A group calling themselves "Students United" marched to the Louisiana Board of Education seeking restitution. Netterville, they argued, was out of touch and nonresponsive to student needs. The preamble to their list of grievances noted that "it has become incumbent upon us, the students, to move most directly toward eradicating the problems that confront us at this institution; problems we feel are systematically caused to stagger our move into the consciousness of nationhood."[41] The Board was surprisingly receptive, proposing a three-week study of the campus situation at Scotlandville. Though many white southern boards might not have been so acquiescent, the proposal met with anger among the group, leading fifty to walk out of the negotiations. But the investigation went on as planned, and

[37]Raphael Cassimere, "Crisis in Public Higher Education in Louisiana," *Integrated Education,* 13 (September 1975): 10-4; *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, April 3, 1969, 22, April 7, 1969, 12, April 10, 1969, 1, 19, May 10, 1969, 1, 25, May 13, 1969, 5, May 15, 1969, 16, May 20, 1969, 4, May 21, 1969, 9.

[38]Scotlandville, home of Southern University, had originally been a small community outside of Baton Rouge, but it had been incorporated into the growing capital city.

[39]Netterville was a Southern alum, with a master's degree from Columbia University. By the time of his 1969 appointment as president, he had also received an honorary doctorate from Wiley College. "George Leon Netterville, Jr.," Presidents-Netterville G. Leon, Archives.

[40]"The University's Response to Student Grievances As Approved By the University Senate, October 24, 1972," Leonard Shooting Tragedy.

[41]"Students United List of Grievances," ibid.

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State Superintendent of Education Louis J. Michot would ultimately follow the students, addressing the 8,000-member student body at the Scotlandville campus and recommending to Netterville in private negotiations that he resign.

"Students United" responded by issuing the investigatory board a list of twelve possible successors for university president, including the poet Amiri Baraka and radical professor Nathan Hare, who had launched his critique of black colleges in 1967.

Progress was slow, and there was no way the state Board of Education was going to approve Baraka or Hare as president. On Halloween night, twenty-four short hours before Grambling's own stunted protest, 2,000 students stormed the administration building and warned that if officials did not vacate the building, they would "suffer bodily harm." Gov. Edwin Edwards ordered the National Guard to report for duty, and with East Baton Rouge Parish sheriffs and units of the state police, law enforcement helped evacuate faculty and administrators from the campus. "In view of the extent of the disruption and seriousness of the situation," announced Netterville the following morning, "there remains no choice but to close the university as of 12 noon today, for an indefinite period."[42]

The "indefinite period" did not last long, and classes resumed on the following Monday. An unauthorized student meeting in the gymnasium brought four-hundred deputies to the campus, but the meeting broke up peacefully. At Southern's New Orleans campus, unrest continued. The school remained closed. But at Scotlandville, peace seemed to return. Grambling students issued a statement saying that their protest had nothing to do with Southern's.[43]

Two weeks later, the state NAACP held its convention in the student union of the University of Southwestern Louisiana in Lafayette. The principal issue of the meeting was a proposal recommending the unification of Southern with LSU and Grambling with Louisiana Tech. The plan was part of the NAACP's larger national strategy to provide equal education to white and black college students in the former Confederate states, but LSU and Tech were not the only institutions that decried the proposal. Grambling and Southern feared that they

[42]*Louisiana Weekly*, November 4, 1972, 1, 6.

[43]Ibid., November 11, 1972, 1, 8.

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would lose their names, their identity, their autonomy. The administrations of both schools were suffering under the weight of Black Power activism on their campuses, but when push came to shove, the core elements of Black Power arguments suited their best interests. There was, they argued, an inherent benefit in black autonomy. Though the NAACP narrowly passed the measure, Grambling and Southern would continue to reject the idea.[44]

But as Southern officials defended their interests against the NAACP in Lafayette, and both the Tigers and Jaguars prepared for their November 18 annual rivalry football game, events on the Scotlandville campus were once again spiraling out of control. On Thursday, November 16, students occupied the Southern administration building for a second time, and again they were met by sheriff's deputies, the state police, and the National Guard. This time, however, the protest would not end with a whimper.[45]

When the resulting chaos left Denver Smith and Leonard Brown dead in the street, the debate about motive and guilt began in earnest. "The students had small military bombs," announced Sheriff Al Amiss. "The two students were killed by the bombs thrown right by them from a building window." Governor Edwards acknowledged that no weapons were found in the administration building, but clearly sided with Amiss's version of events. "The first projectile fired came from the building where the students were," he said. "Then the officers began to return the tear gas." It was the protest, not the police, that killed the students.[46]

Edwards's very presence at the press conference demonstrated the tension permeating the state capital. Flanked by ten bodyguards, the governor noted that "civil liberties are suffocated at times like these. We have understood that a group of ten students have banded together with the intention of killing me."

[44]Ibid., November 18, 1972, 1, 12; Williamson, *Radicalizing the Ebony Tower*, 131-57.

[45]*Ruston Daily Leader*, November 17, 1972, 1, 3; "Denver Smith and Leonard Brown" and "Chronology of Events," Leonard Shooting Tragedy.

[46]"Chronology of Events," Leonard Shooting Tragedy; *Ruston Daily Leader*, November 17, 1972, 1, 3.

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The cryptic announcement only seemed to validate the state's line that it was the protesters who were the cause of the violence.[47]

"At least 2,000 charged us," Amiss told reporters. The students had "overpowered a campus security guard, and that's where they got their tear gas." He had also seen the bombs. But in another statement, Amiss said, "We retreated back. The victims were shot as we were retreating to get our gas masks on." When pressed on the contradictory statements, Amiss suggested that perhaps the bombs had been filled with buckshot.[48]

"The governor is a liar," said one student, speaking on condition of anonymity. "They were raiding the administration building. I saw them throw double canisters and I saw the students throw them back. We did not have tear gas and we did not have bombs. No one in the administration building was armed. No one."[49] This seemed a far more plausible explanation. Student unrest had been fomenting since October, but no attacks had been reported. The notion that students would conclude that now was somehow the time for violence seemed implausible. The police had the resources to incite the violence. The constant frustration of white officers having to continually quell campus disturbances gave them motive. But in a war of words, the authority of the police (to say nothing of their whiteness) would clearly ensure that any and all officers would be protected.

The following week, Attorney Gen. William J. Guste Jr., opened a special investigation into the deaths of Smith and Brown, headed dually by a white and black assistant attorney general. The FBI, too, would investigate to determine whether any federal laws were broken in the melee. By that time, however, the jaded students were openly accusing Netterville and Edwards of premeditated murder. "They [the Sheriff's deputies] fired once, picked up the cartridge release, put them in their pockets and fired again," charged Fred Prejean, spokesman for "Students United." "We have witnesses who saw this, and yet officers maintain no rounds were fired." Another member of the group, Charlene Hardnett, charged, "We are aware of the fact that Dr. Netterville set the students up for mass slaughter."[50]

[47]*Ruston Daily Leader*, November 17, 1972, 1, 3.

[48]Ibid.

[49]Ibid.

[50]*Louisiana Weekly*, November 25, 1972, 1, 8, 9.

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The disputes, however, were not only between black students and white officers. Rumors had continued throughout November that "Students United" was being fomented unnecessarily by forces that hoped to use the resulting chaos to position themselves for power after Netterville's ouster. The organization and its members were dupes. After the NAACP's Lafayette meeting, Stanley Morris, an assistant professor of physics, charged that there was another group that would clearly benefit from the violence—those who wanted the merger with LSU. The protests were the perfect excuse for the state's white educational power structure to place a white leader at the head of the Southern University system. Circumstantial evidence seemed to validate such concerns. One student reported an incident where flyers were passed through the dormitories for an after-curfew meeting in the school gymnasium, a meeting not called by the leaders of "Students United." Though the gathering did not result in violence, its genesis remained shrouded in mystery.[51]

In response, Netterville moved to consolidate his power. Following the deaths, he fired six faculty members. "By serving as adviser to the dissident students," his letter to the former employees read, "you have been instrumental in promoting activities which disrupted the normal education process of the University." This sort of move was sure to reflect poorly on Netterville, but he stood defiantly by his decision.[52]

Nelson Johnson, president of the national Youth Organization for Black Unity (YOBU), declared that there was another, more insidious force manipulating the student protesters. "White, radical, left-wing groups" had swooped in to bolster their own agendas: "As soon as the smoke cleared, white left-wing groups started parachuting in here trying to maneuver the students, among other things, to declare a massive mobilization on Washington, DC." All this sort of action did, argued Johnson, was refocus students' anger away from their own interests. "We consider such arrogant attempts to use the suffering and struggle of black people for their own ends, as the most blatant form of racism." Nevermind that YOBU, too, was a national organization that swooped in to the Scotlandville campus, or that it, too, was making a name for itself on the back of someone else's tragedy.

[51]Ibid.

[52]Ibid., November 25, 1972, 1, 8, 9.

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But for Johnson, such concerns about YOBU were unfounded. It was a black group. It was playing "a supporting role." And, ultimately, it was "working to clarify the issues and the basic objectives of the students' struggle which is around the question of black education. That question, of course, centers around the re-definition of black education and the restructuring of those institutions that are supposed to provide it."[53]

This was anything, Johnson argued, but another collegiate protest against Vietnam. The broader example of student activism on American campuses was hijacking the message and meaning of black campus protest. The students were situating themselves against the traditionally understood evolution of university unrest. Black education had been problematic long before America's incursion into Vietnam, long before the post-*Brown* civil rights movement had begun in earnest. This was student activism, and it was, at its base, a fight against racism, but it was also a unique coupling of those elements with a long history of black frustration with the curriculum and administration of black higher education.[54]

Meanwhile, the debate about motive and guilt continued. As the investigation got underway, the National Urban League, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, the Southern Conference Educational Fund, and the Community Organization for Urban Politics all issued statements denouncing the killings. So too did the Tulane University Associated Student Body. All demonstrated an abiding skepticism—to varying angry degrees—in the state's claim that Southern students caused the violence. But the moral force of their denunciations was not likely to carry weight among the official investigation.[55]

[53]Founded in Greensboro, North Carolina, YOBU worked to organize students in and around black college campuses through the early 1970s. Joseph, "Dashikis and Democracy," 196; *Louisiana Weekly*, December 2, 1972, 1, 10. The events at Southern in fall 1972 were documented by the University in painstaking detail and printed on December 9, 1972. For a description of all of the events at Southern in fall 1972, see "A Chronology of a Crisis at Southern University," Leonard Shooting Tragedy.

[54]Such frustration didn't lead its adherents to seek an end to HBCUs. Instead they sought a fundamental change in the universities' scope and mission. See Harding, "Toward the Black University," 156-59.

[55]*Louisiana Weekly*, December 2, 1972, 1, 10.

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Such scapegoating was not new, nor was it unique to Louisiana. In response to the February 1968 Orangeburg Massacre, when police fired into an unarmed group of South Carolina State students protesting the segregation of a local bowling alley, South Carolina Gov. Robert E. McNair blamed the Black Power movement and outside agitators (without any evidence) of inciting a riot and thus precipitating the violence. Though three students were killed and dozens were injured, no officers were convicted of the crime. The legacy of such recent events left Baton Rouge—and all of black Louisiana—wondering if a similar fate would befall them.[56]

Guste's investigatory committee included six whites and six blacks who held interviews behind closed doors. In the heated, mistrustful climate of the Southern campus, however, it was unlikely that the jaded students would be very cooperative. Reports began to leak out almost immediately after the investigation got underway that requested interviewees were failing to appear.[57]

While the Guste committee struggled through, destined to find evidence of intentional malfeasance by Amiss or his subordinates ultimately inconclusive, a separate, unofficial investigation by the makeshift Black People's Committee of Inquiry held public hearings with witnesses who were far more cooperative. The group was not local. Led by Berkeley, California, councilman (and former Southern student) D'Army Bailey and Georgia representative and movement veteran Julian Bond, the Committee was designed to use the fame of its members to bring pressure on Louisiana to act. Bailey had been expelled from Southern in 1961 after participating in civil rights protests with his classmates, and his presence lent both gravity to the committee and a reminder of student militancy in Baton Rouge.[58]

[56]Nine officers were indicted and tried in federal court, but all were acquitted. In fact, Cleveland Sellers, a SNCC representative and one of McNair's outside agitators, was the only person involved in the massacre to be jailed. See Jack Nelson and Jack Bass, *The Orangeburg Massacre* (Cleveland, Oh., 1970); Warren Marr, "Death on Campus: The Orangeburg Story," *The Crisis,* 75 (March 1968): 88-90; Linda Meggett Brown, "Remembering the Orangeburg Massacre," *Black Issues In Higher Education,* 18 (March 2001): 22-3.

[57]*Louisiana Weekly*, November 25, 1972, 1, 8, 9.

[58]For more on Bailey's collegiate activism, see Bailey, *The Education of a Black Radical*.

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Even Governor Edwards appeared before the Committee, hoping to salve the wounds of the Baton Rouge black community. He was unsuccessful. "I think you're going to find in the long run that this is just one of those things that happens when people flaunt authority," he told them. Edwards gave reassurance after reassurance that officers would be prosecuted if the official investigation found that they had fired at students deliberately. Deliberately. What Edwards knew, and the Black People's Committee of Inquiry knew, and the Guste committee knew, and the Southern students knew, was that evidence of deliberation in such a setting was impossible to find, barring confession. There was a haze of tear gas. The students were out of control. It was a situation ripe for a violent accident. Edwards's testimony before the Committee was a tacit admission that none of the officers, much less Amiss, would be prosecuted.[59]

Still, Edwards's testimony at an unofficial protest inquiry was a sign that he was trying to stanch the anger. He was a popular new governor, elected in part by Louisiana's black voting bloc, and had no intention of alienating a significant source of his power. The day of his testimony, a group of black students marched to the capitol, that tall edifice poking out of the Baton Rouge skyline, built by Huey Long, whose hand in black education had not been forgotten, and who Edwards considered a personal hero. In the grand tradition of such men of the people, the governor met with the students—surrounded by a wall of bodyguards. Again he misfired. "The so-called student leaders who refused to obey duly constituted authority are responsible. What made it happen was a refusal of a group of students to leave the building after having been ordered to do so by authorities." This sounded suspiciously like a similar message black southerners had received from whites for hundreds of years: If you don't want to be murdered, obey white people. But though the students clearly interpreted Edwards' defiance in a traditionally racist way, Edwards was not a traditional racist. He was a governor, and he was charged with keeping state property safe. "Let it be known right now," he told the students, "from now on there will be no students, black or white, taking over any building in Louisiana." There had been more than $200,000 in

[59]*Louisiana Weekly*, November 25, 1972, 1, 8, 9, December 2, 1972, 1, 10.

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damage at the Scotlandville campus alone. Burning buildings down, he assured them, "is not going to make Southern better."[60]

Unsurprisingly, the Black People's Committee of Inquiry exonerated the students of any role in the violence. The students had not "occupied" the administration building. They were waiting there for Netterville for a previously agreed upon meeting. The police officers incited the violence, and there was ample evidence for prosecution. But they were not the only offenders. Members of the university administration refused to bring medical assistance to the slain students, one of whom most likely could have been saved with emergency care. Furthermore, in direct contradiction to those who believed the incident was itself an argument for merging LSU and Southern, the Committee argued that the tragedy underscored more than anything else the need for complete autonomy. "I'm convinced more than ever that our people are going to have to come to grips with the need to form independent Black educational institutions," said Committee member Owusu Sadaukai. "A lot of things that the students are rhetoricizing about I doubt seriously can ever be attained at a place like Southern." If whites had no hand in the administration or governance of Southern, there never would have been a problem in the first place.[61]

The Committee had no force of law, but members considered it necessary for proper justice. "We must not allow white people to determine what actions are legitimate to be taken in our own behalf," said Sadaukai. "It is legitimate because Black people say it is."[62]

Of course, the problem with this sort of argument was not its logic, but its reach. The vast majority of Louisianians assumed institutions like Southern (and Grambling) to be autonomous and black. Sure, Southern had an integrated administration and was funded by a white legislature. Sure, many in the administration had a history of appeasing to white officials to secure funding. And sure, the university was established as a separate and fundamentally unequal educational center that kept black

[60]Ibid., November 25, 1972, 1, 8, December 2, 1972, 1, 10.

[61]Saudauki (Howard Fuller) also led YOBU, which espoused Pan Africanist ideals and had, by 1972, adopted a Marxist perspective. *Louisiana Weekly*, December 9, 1972, 1, 9; Joseph, "Dashikis and Democracy," 196.

[62]*Louisiana Weekly*, December 9, 1972, 1, 9.

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collegians off white campuses. But the Black People's Committee of Inquiry had no desire to explain the fine points. Rhetorical flourish that criticized the state's most hallowed black institution and the surreptitious cop-out that the attack was legitimate simply because it was black were not going to convince many in power that the Committee's findings were rigorous or unbiased.[63] Such attacks only bolstered Edwards' inaction.

But while the report of the Black People's Committee of Inquiry came as no surprise, the report of the biracial Guste committee certainly did. The group found that the students were killed by a shotgun, not by a bomb. It found that the sheriff's deputies had incited the violence by lobbing tear gas at the protesters. It was not the students' fault.[64]

Edwards took a hard line. He had seen the same evidence as the Guste committee, and he was unconvinced. He disputed the findings at every turn. Violence begets violence. Whatever happened on campus was the result of an out-of-control student protest. Besides, while the committee could determine the source of the tear gas, and while it could determine the cause of the students' death, it couldn't prove willful, deliberate intent. Deliberate.

In his press conference, Sadaukai warned that a "judgment" needed to be made soon, that "Black people be informed before the whole thing is quickly forgotten, which is what usually happens in these cases."[65] He was right. Edwards's obstinacy ensured that a judgment would not be made any time soon, and though Southern would never forget the incident, law enforcement quickly did. Neither Amiss nor his deputies were ever prosecuted for the murder of the two students. They were never prosecuted for professional misconduct—not for dereliction of duty, not for anything.

Two days after the killings, Southern was scheduled to host Grambling for the teams' annual rivalry game. Many wanted the

[63]"Black People's Committee of Inquiry Report," Leonard Shooting Tragedy.

[64]"Report of the Attorney General's Special Commission of Inquiry on the Southern University Tragedy of November 16, 1972," July 1973, Leonard Shooting Tragedy. Southern responded to the Commission's findings and proposed to make suggested changes outlined in the report. "A Response to the Attorney General's Special Commission of Inquiry On the Southern University Tragedy of November 16, 1972," Leonard Shooting Tragedy.

[65]*Louisiana Weekly*, December 9, 1972, 1, 9.

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game to continue. Throughout so many turbulent events in the past decades, football had served as a cathartic outlet, an escape from the struggle of being black in Louisiana. Besides, the Grambling-Southern football game was the most important on the schedule.

While Grambling's campus had not unanimously healed itself after its own November unrest, the violence had stopped. And if the contest was scheduled to be a Grambling home game, it probably would have continued as planned. Even during the tumult on the north Louisiana campus, the Tigers continued to play football. But the game was scheduled for Scotlandville, a campus still in the throes of controversy and death. Officials scrambled to find a solution. Head coach Charlie Bates had suffered through a disastrous first season and looked forward to a measure of redemption against the Jaguars' upstate rival. School officials knew the unifying power of the game and originally hoped it could still be played.

Throughout Thursday, athletic director Ulysses Jones and other administration officials dealt with the consequences of the violence for the campus and for the football team. They first secured use of Baton Rouge's Municipal Stadium, an off-campus venue safely away from the student protests. But that seemed untenable, too. As news of the deaths spread, anger enveloped the whole of the Baton Rouge area black population, and the packed stadium would provide a perfect venue for activists to make a public demonstration. The nightmare scenario for administration officials—white and black—was an angry mob of 20,000 on campus, and the nightmare didn't abate simply because the mob was a few miles across town.[66]

Southern cancelled the game. It cancelled the final game of the season, scheduled to be played in San Francisco against Santa Clara. It suspended classes for the rest of the semester. It pushed back the Jaguar basketball season until January. "I believe," said basketball coach Carl Steward, "that athletes, emotionally, are best equipped to transcend the kind of trauma we experienced on our campus on November 16." When school returned, athletics would return, and the athletes would be ready. "Speculation beyond this point would be dreaming; and I

[66]*Ruston Daily Leader*, November 17, 1972, 1; *Louisiana Weekly*, November 18, 1972, 2-6, November 25, 1972, 10.

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have always said that dreams occur at night and never come true," said Steward.[67]

The violence that occurred at Grambling and Southern was not rare at southern black campuses. Not only did black colleges experience more campus protests per capita than their white counterparts during the Black Power era, but more off-campus authorities were used to police the resulting problems.[68] Of course, southern black colleges were already situated in a tense racial climate, and the scores of white police who appeared on campus demonstrated white southern mistrust of black students and increased the potential for violence. The dynamic of white officers policing black protests not specifically targeted at integration and similar civil rights goals also had a significant history prior to the Grambling and Southern protests of 1972. From the inception of Black Power to the fall semester of 1972, this combination of black students and white police proved dramatically combustible. Mississippi State Police tear gassed and clubbed Alcorn A&M students in 1966, then shot and wounded three students in 1969. A 1967 shootout at Texas Southern left a policeman dead and several protesters wounded. In the infamous Orangeburg Massacre of 1968, police killed three

[67]*Ruston Daily Leader*, November 17, 1972, 1; *Louisiana Weekly*, December 9, 1972, 2-3.

[68]Durward Long, "Black Protest," in *Protest: Student Activism in America*, ed. Julian Foster and Durward Long (New York, 1970), 467. The massive spate of student activism was documented and commented upon ad nauseum by sociologists, psychologists, educational theorists, and historians. For edifying and exemplary treatment of the nature of campus protests, see Jeffrey Alan Turner, "Conscience and Conflict: Patterns in the History of Student Activism on Southern College Campuses, 1960-1970" (Ph.D. dissertation, Tulane University, 2000); Alexander W. Astin, et al., *The Power of Protest: A National Study of Student and Faculty Disruptions with Implications for the Future* (San Francisco, 1975); Miles, *The Radical Probe*; John R. Searle, *The Campus War: A Sympathetic Look at the University in Agony* (New York, 1971); *The Report of the President's Commission on Campus Unrest* (Washington, D. C., 1970); Roger Rapoport and Laurence J. Kirshbaum, *Is the Library Burning?* (New York, 1969). The American Council on Education created the Special Committee on Campus Tensions in 1969, and that group commissioned a series of papers analyzing campus protests in the late 1960s. See David C. Nichols, ed., *Perspectives on Campus Tensions* (Washington, D. C., 1970). Finally, for specific analysis of Black Power's relationship to the student protest movement—black and white—see James McEvoy and Abraham Miller, eds., *Black Power and Student Rebellion* (Belmont, Ca., 1969).

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students at South Carolina State. A North Carolina A&T student died the following year in yet another shootout.[69]

Finally, and most famously, Mississippi police killed two protesters at Jackson State College in 1970. That incident occurred a short two weeks after the national guard murders at Kent State University in Ohio, and the upsurge of student protests that year often places Jackson State in a very different evolutionary line. That placement is not entirely unfounded. Initial protests at Jackson State, like many others in May 1970, began in reaction to the shootings at Kent State. White Jackson's angry response to the protests, however, caused the protests to escalate. Mississippi state troopers responded to the protests by firing more than three hundred rounds into the crowd and into a nearby dormitory, wounding twelve and killing two students. So Jackson State clearly belongs with Kent State, as it also does with black student interaction with the white culture surrounding it. Unlike the protests at Grambling, Southern, and their antecedents stretching back to the 1920s, the violence at Jackson State did not have its genesis in student frustration with the administration or core curriculum of the university.[70]

But the violence at Grambling and Southern certainly did, and the legacy of that violence remained paramount in the years to come. In the spring semester preceding the 1972 protests, E. C. Harrison, Southern's vice president for academic affairs, published a remarkably enlightened study of student unrest at black colleges. His survey of academic deans at those colleges led Harrison to conclusions that many of the activist students would have found either gratifying or disingenuous, depending on the

[69]Rosenthal, "Southern Black Student Activism," 128. See also Bernard Friedberg, "Houston and the TSU Riot," in William McCord, et al., *Life Styles in the Black Ghetto* (New York, 1969), 36-51; Jack Nelson and Jack Bass, *The Orangeburg Massacre* 2nd ed. (1970; reprint ed., Macon, Ga., 1984); "The Siege of Greensboro," *Newsweek*, June 2, 1969, 38; and Robert L. Terrell, "Up From Uncle Tomism: Protest on the Negro Campuses," *Commonweal,* 92 (April 3, 1970), 87-93.

[70]The most comprehensive account of the Jackson State shootings is Tom Spofford, *Lynch Street: The May 1970 Slayings at Jackson State College* (Kent, Oh., 1988). See also, "The Shootings at Jackson State University: Thirty Years Later," *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education,* 28 (Summer 2000): 42-3. For more on the immediate reactive historiography of Kent State and the ensuing campus violence at Jackson State and other universities, see Jerry M. Lewis, "Review Essay: The Telling of Kent State," *Social Problems,* 19 (1971): 267-79.

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level of residual frustration they experienced after the events. To be sure, Harrison's conclusions did not jibe with Netterville's (or, for that matter, Jones's) actions. He argued for "modernization of organizational structure and administrative practices and policies" and defended "an organization in which the faculty and student are involved in the formulation of policies and decisions." Administration officials needed to demonstrate patience. In addition, the community surrounding the university needed to "make a re-examination of their institutions, social customs and laws for their imperfections and inconsistencies. The tendency for adults either to overlook imperfections or to develop an irrational explanation for them is no longer tolerated by today's students who launch attacks on war, poverty, unemployment and racial inequities."[71]

But a year after the protests, Harrison's encomium to cooperation was unable to soothe those most affected by the violence. In early November 1973, the parents of Leonard Brown and Denver Smith filed a civil suit charging that the shootings were a "wanton, willful and malicious conduct perpetrated in concert with state officers and under color of state law in total disregard for the life of an unarmed student attempting to flee in order to avoid any harm to himself." It noted that every board of inquiry examining the case had determined that shots were fired from the general direction of East Baton Rouge Parish sheriff's deputies. And still no arrests had been made. The suit sought damages in excess of $4.6 million, naming Governor Edwards, Netterville, Al Amiss, the State Board of Education, and Baton Rouge Mayor W. W. Dumas, among others, as taking part in a conspiracy to keep the shooter from coming to justice.[72]

[71]For all its liberal conclusions, however, signs of disconnect were still present. Harrison argued that "the administrators [surveyed] manifested little concern for reorganization of the educational program. One possible explanation for this is that changing the educational program was not a great issue among the students." Harrison's own experience at Southern belied this "possible explanation." E. C. Harrison, "Student Unrest on the Black College Campus," *The Journal of Negro Education,* 41 (1972): 118, 120.

[72]*Shreveport Times*, November 8, 1973, 3B. The violence at Southern also had further unintended consequences, as on New Year's Eve 1972, bleeding through the first week of 1973, black Navy veteran Mark Essex went on a New Orleans killing spree, shooting nineteen white residents, including several police officers. Prior to his rampage, Essex sent a letter to station WWL stating that he was avenging "the death of two innocent brothers." See Peter Hernon, *A Terrible Thunder: The Story of the New Orleans Sniper* (New Orleans, 2005).

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The Brown-Smith lawsuit seemed to threaten another possible rift between the students and administrators, but it did not. It vindicated the students, and administrators begrudgingly moved forward with attempts to correct the school's problems. On November 16, 1973—the anniversary of the violence—Southern held a memorial for Smith and Brown. More than 2,000 students packed the gymnasium. Similar demonstrations occurred on Southern's New Orleans campus and at the state capital, where a group of LSU students held a makeshift vigil. Dick Gregory spoke at the Southern gymnasium, encouraging pupils to focus on their studies, lest they not be adequately prepared to fight the injustice of institutionalized racism. "What happened here a year ago is just a warning...of some wrong, that needs to be dealt with and answered. But if you get mad at the warning cough, then you can't deal with the illness." Dedication and hard work would solve these problems in time. "You young people have the heaviest burden for future in the history of this country, perhaps the world. You don't have the luxury of games and the silliness of youth."[73]

In late February 1975, a federal investigation into the deaths of Denver Smith and Leonard Brown ended without indictments. There simply was not enough evidence, announced U. S. Attorney Douglas Gonzales. Southern was understandably outraged. "These killings on the Southern University campus were committed in broad daylight," argued Jesse Stone, president of the Southern University system. "I am very disappointed that the United States government, with all of its vast resources, could not find or identify or gain prosecution of the individuals who were responsible for the tragic deaths that occurred."[74]

Finally, in 1982, ten years after the protests and eleven short days before that season's Grambling-Southern football game, Southern students and faculty gathered for a memorial ceremony for Leonard Brown and Denver Smith. It was the tenth anniversary of their deaths. There was an assembly of hundreds of students, faculty, and alumni. There was a candlelight vigil in front of the administration building. "They died for the right of a

[73]*Louisiana Weekly*, November 24, 1973, 2.

[74]*New Orleans Times-Picayune*, February 25, 1975, 5, February 27, 1975, 6.

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peaceful assembly," said local minister Reginald Pitcher, "and I hope we don't forget what they died for."[75]

In the vast panoply of sociological and historical treatments of the nature and evolution of student protest, it is sometimes easy to forget what they died for—easy to forget the place of the Grambling and Southern protests in the broader trajectory of student activism at black southern universities. The national student movement and the strain of living in the racist South certainly had their place in student frustration, but the protests were directed at administrations deemed unresponsive to student needs. That unresponsiveness, in turn, was—in the eyes of the students—the result of white puppetry. And so, the long history of criticism against the administration and curriculum of black colleges was given impetus by the Black Power movement, the broader culture of student protest, and the inherent mistrust of white authorities present in the black South to create a crucible of anger and discontent during the Fall 1972 semester at Louisiana's two principal black public institutions. The violence that ensued not only left two students dead, but stole focus from the original student critiques that initially sparked the protests. The broken buildings, the injured and arrested, and the legacy of two dead students would cast a pall over the universities that would linger. Administrative, curriculum, and budgetary woes would continue to plague the schools throughout the rest of the century, but the football game between Grambling and Southern would never be cancelled again.

[75]Ibid., November 18, 1982, 2-7, November 23, 1982, 5-6.

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