

NOTHING WITHOUT A DEMAND: BLACK POWER AND STUDENT ACTIVISM ON
NORTH CAROLINA COLLEGE CAMPUSES, 1967-1973

By
Michael D. Welker

Honors Essay
Department of History
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

March 28, 2014

Approved:

Primary Advisor:

Print

Signature

Second Reader:

Print

Signature

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Introduction:
Black Power, Student Activism, and the Birth of the Black Campus Movement

For seven remarkable months in 1968 and 1969, black students in North Carolina wielded power unlike anything they possessed before or since. Across the state, they took over buildings, led strikes, made demands, and left officials fearful of disastrous violence. It was a highly tense and uncertain time. The same sequence of events that would have students teargassed and beaten by police would create a new academic discipline and, briefly, a new university; the same sequence of events that would raise minimum wages for cafeteria workers would lead to the death of an innocent student. Despite constant tension, students, administrators, and citizens began to recognize new possibilities for higher education's power and purpose. These new possibilities came from what seemed an unusual place: the confluence of student activism and the emergent Black Power philosophy.

When Southern universities began to desegregate in the 1950s, they saw only a slow trickle of black matriculants. Court-ordered desegregation had offered the nominal promise of equality, but students on those campuses felt isolated and unwelcomed, and they faced Jim Crow segregation in the cities and towns nearby. Dissatisfied with the status quo and determined to change it, students were at the vanguard of the civil rights movement during its peak in the 1960s. Famously, it was four students at North Carolina Agricultural & Technical College in Greensboro who launched a nationwide movement of sit-ins when they insisted on being served at a Woolworth's lunch counter in February 1960. The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) was born two months later at all-black Shaw University in Raleigh. SNCC and other student groups would play key roles in marches, sit-ins, boycotts, and other public protests throughout the decade. By the late 1960s, black students entering colleges and universities had spent the majority of their lives in an America forced to realize its obligations to

its minority populations. Those students heard the calls for inclusion and equality, but their youthful impatience left them frustrated with the slow pace of change.

In 1966, after being arrested for the twenty-seventh time during a march in Mississippi, beleaguered SNCC leader Stokely Carmichael proposed a new ideological turn for the civil rights movement. "I ain't going to jail no more," Carmichael said. "The only way we gonna stop them white men from whuppin' us is to take over. What we gonna start sayin' now is Black Power!" Carmichael explained that blacks needed to stop allowing themselves to be defined by white people. Instead, he argued for institutions that black people built and controlled, for pride in the black identity, and for the recognition and embrace of black history and culture. To any force that stood in the way of those ends, Carmichael said that blacks would have to tear them down.¹

Carmichael was far from the only black leader to call for a new approach in this era. Earlier in the 1960s, Malcolm X had advocated for a complete separation of blacks and whites in America. Malcolm believed that many blacks who favored integration were effectively Uncle Toms, hoping to bring themselves up by interacting with society's dominant white race. He advocated instead for racial pride and self-determination, insisting that blacks must have the power to define their own culture, their own history, and their own communities. Malcolm was also one of the earliest black leaders in that era to make a strong case for a global black struggle, which foreshadowed the Pan-Africanist currents of the Black Power movement. Carmichael once wrote that Malcolm "knew where he was going before the rest of us did." After Malcolm X's death in 1965 and Carmichael's call for Black Power the following year, Bobby Seale and Huey P. Newton organized the Black Panther Party in California's Bay Area. The Panthers believed

¹ ""Black Power" Speech (28 July 1966, by Stokely Carmichael)." *Dictionary of American History*. 2003. Encyclopedia.com. (March 20, 2014). <http://www.encyclopedia.com/doc/1G2-3401804839.html>.

that they carried on Malcolm's legacy, and they upped the ante with a strong commitment to violence. As the Panthers grew in influence, their willingness to use violence to promote black nationalism became a key element in the public image of Black Power. The influence of Malcolm, Carmichael, and the Panthers spurred the rapid growth of Black Power as a popular alternative approach to race relations in the United States.²

These ideological thrusts of Black Power emerged around the same time that activism on college campuses became more militant. In the mid-1960s, white student activists, most famously at the University of California at Berkeley, adopted disruptive tactics such as strikes, building takeovers, and sit-ins in protests against censorship, the Vietnam War, and more. Black Power historian William Van Deburg has suggested that black students drew inspiration from those protests, which proved that even "relatively small cadres of well-organized, deeply dedicated activists" could successfully shut down colleges and universities. Given that many newly-desegregated universities had minuscule black populations, this made student power attainable. At historically black colleges, the same fact meant that tiny groups of more militant students could affect the entire campus community.³

Several early protests offer examples of how black students merged Black Power philosophy and disruptive protest tactics in the late 1960s. In March 1968, hundreds of students at all-black Howard University executed a building takeover that would serve as a template for takeovers nationwide. For almost a week, students gathered inside and around the building in support of a list of sixteen demands that included an African American studies program and reform of the university's administration. The students' strategy of confrontation, list of demands, and use of media coverage to promote their cause would be influential in subsequent protests

² Van Deburg, *New Day in Babylon*, 2-11.

³ *Ibid.*, 67.

elsewhere.⁴

Within weeks of the Howard takeover, Columbia University in New York City was the site of student protests against the construction of a university gym on the site of Morningside Park, a public park frequented by community members from the neighborhoods of Morningside Heights and Harlem. Initially, white students from Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) and black students from the Student Afro Society (SAS) aligned against the university, but when students took over Hamilton Hall at Columbia, SAS members tried to exclude whites. Black students emphasized the park's importance to the mostly black neighborhoods near the campus and criticized the gym as an imperialist project. Influenced by Black Power, SAS members claimed that the white protesters, however well-intentioned, could not properly understand the park's significance and pushed for black leadership in the protest. The SAS commitments both to separatism and community issues offered another dimension to the black campus movement.⁵

The most notable and influential early protest in the movement took place at San Francisco State College in 1968. Members of the Black Student Union and the Third World Liberation Front organized a five-month student strike primarily targeted at establishing a program in ethnic studies. After the school suspended a popular black campus leader affiliated with the Black Panthers, students issued a set of demands to the college's president, Robert Smith. Black studies was not a new idea at San Francisco State, where for two years, students had been developing courses on black life in the school's Experimental College. But the strike took student agitation for a program to a new level. When a student rally turned into a violent confrontation with police, San Francisco State's campus shut down. The strike continued as protesters criticized administrators and fought regularly with white students and police, and

⁴ Biondi, *The Black Revolution on Campus*, 34-39.

⁵ For a full account of these events, see Stefan Bradley, *Harlem vs. Columbia University: Black Student Power in the Late 1960s*, University of Illinois Press, 2009.

Smith eventually resigned amidst the turmoil. His replacement as president, S.I. Hayakawa, held firm against the students' radical approach, and students refused to accept his few concessions. Ultimately, in March 1969, the strike ended when Hayakawa offered a black studies program and some affirmative admissions and financial aid policies. Though Hayakawa won public praise for his strong line on the activists, San Francisco State's black students proved their firm dedication to their cause and emerged with several key victories. Black students across the nation had a model for what was possible to achieve in protests; campus administrators saw a worst-case scenario of violence and institutional paralysis. San Francisco State's example showed that black student power had the potential to be a real force in higher education in the 1960s.

Pioneering demonstrations at Howard, Columbia, and San Francisco State set off a period of activism that the historian Ibram Rogers has referred to as the black campus movement. The movement reached across the nation, from elite Ivy League schools to historically black colleges and universities, from flagship state schools to small, regional institutions. For a brief time, black students carved out influence by combining the organizing strategies of the "classical" civil rights movement, the confrontational and disruptive tactics of campus protesters in the mid-1960s, and the philosophical goals of Black Power. Aiming to persuade (if not force) universities to address black student and community concerns, students attained real power in shaping higher education.

Faced with student unrest on academic and community issues, universities had a sensible response: anyone who came to a campus to be educated had to buy in, on some level, to that school's mission and academic frameworks. Members of the campus community were to research, teach, and learn in the pursuit of objective knowledge. There would be academic freedom on campus, and students and scholars would accordingly feel no restraint or coercion in

the exercise of that freedom. Change in the university would also come on those terms. Schools would not be forced to create new programs, disciplines, or modes of inquiry; instead, proposals would be evaluated on their merits and judged on how they would contribute to a larger search for truth. As for community issues, universities' academic focus seemed best suited to research and recommendations, rather than direct outreach and involvement. These sentiments reflected a conservatism that made universities resistant to the sweeping changes advocated by black students. Weighing students' vision for education against the education they had known, faculty, administrators, and other decision-makers resisted many proposed reforms.

The debate between activist students and traditionalist academics indicated a significant disconnect in an understanding of the university's mission and students' roles within it. Both sides recognized, however, that universities could serve as a space to debate the meanings of freedom, equality, and citizenship. As William Van Deburg has written, "If knowledge was power, then institutions of higher learning were academic jousting fields upon which key societal power relationships were decided." By making a strong claim that black students deserved a say in the education they received, activists could transform the way universities viewed their work and their student populations. Academic freedom in the university environment allowed students the opportunity to make that claim, but it also allowed campus authorities to push back and insist on caution and compromise in the implementation of any new programs.⁶

A thin but quickly expanding historiography on the black campus movement has illuminated the ways in which activists created change within the university. Most literature, until recently, has focused on localized accounts of black student protest at individual campuses. Some of the schools that have been studied include Jackson State University, the University of Illinois, Rutgers University, Columbia University, the University of Pennsylvania, and Cornell

⁶ Van Deburg, *New Day in Babylon*, 69.

University.⁷ By focusing on individual cases, historians have tended to atomize the movement and examine it through the lens of each school's own unique context. Generally in these accounts, student demands and protest strategies originated out of local concerns and were not directly shaped by concurrent national trends.

Other takes on the black campus movement have worked to synthesize both thematic and practical elements of individual campus protests into one large analysis. William Van Deburg's authoritative history of the Black Power movement, *New Day in Babylon: The Black Power Movement and American Culture, 1965-1975*, offers a brief overview of the black campus movement, sketching out shared characteristics and demands from protests across the nation. In *From Black Power to Black Studies: How a Radical Social Movement Became an Academic Discipline*, Fabio Rojas produces a sociological analysis of the movement, posing the creation of black studies programs as an institutionally-defined response to activism on campuses. Noliwe M. Rooks also examines the creation of black studies programs in *White Money/Black Power: The Surprising History of African American Studies and the Crisis of Race in Higher Education* and argues that black studies was shaped more by white philanthropists than black student activists. Martha Biondi's *The Black Revolution on Campus* and Ibram Rogers's *The Black Campus Movement* both offer accounts that, in contrast to Rojas and Rooks, grant a great deal of agency to Black Power student activists. Both Rogers and Biondi argue that students at a variety of campuses across the country were successful in revolutionizing higher education by promoting racial critiques of institutional practices and highlighting the absence of supports for

⁷ The works about these schools are, respectively: Joy Ann Williamson, *Radicalizing the Ebony Tower: Black Colleges and the Black Freedom Struggle in Mississippi*, Teachers College Press, 2008; Joy Ann Williamson, *Black Power on Campus: The University of Illinois, 1965-75*, University of Illinois Press, 2003; Richard P. McCormick, *The Black Student Protest Movement at Rutgers*, Rutgers University Press, 1990; Stefan Bradley, *Harlem vs. Columbia University: Black Student Power in the Late 1960s*, University of Illinois Press, 2009; Wayne C. Glasker, *Black Students in the Ivory Tower: African American Student Activism at the University of Pennsylvania, 1967-1990*, University of Massachusetts Press, 2001; Donald Alexander Downs, *Cornell '69: Liberalism and the Crisis of the American University*, Cornell University Press, 2012.

black students.

All of this literature engages with a number of key questions about race, activism, and higher education: How do students come together to advocate for change? Why did Black Power leaders like Stokely Carmichael and Malcolm X have such resonance with students? What tactics were most effective in catalyzing reform in the academy? What made black, African American, or ethnic studies programs so critical to student protesters? To what extent should students be able to control their educational destiny? What obligations do colleges and universities have to underrepresented students? What were administrators' interests during the movement, and how did those interests shape institutional responses?

This thesis touches on all of these questions in order to speak to a larger one: What characteristics of institutions of higher education explain the types of changes that followed the black campus movement? By synthesizing events at multiple campuses while keeping a fairly narrow focus on the state of North Carolina, this work will shed light on how students at three schools—elite, private Duke University; the state's leading public school, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill; and the state's top historically black college, North Carolina Agricultural & Technical University—organized themselves, created power, and won limited concessions that would have never seemed possible in the old dynamics of higher education.

Using an existing network of experienced organizers, students across the state led protests, building takeovers, strikes, and the creation of an independent black educational institution, Malcolm X Liberation University. Along the way, student activists faced tough negotiations with administrators and state officials. Their victories were both tempered and enabled by bureaucratic processes, as institutionalization limited student control while ensuring that proposed reforms would be durable. Students ultimately succeeded in incorporating the

study of black culture and identity into higher education, and to a lesser extent, they prompted institutional self-critique on race relations. To do so, they sacrificed elements of black separatism, solidarity, and institutional control that animated the Black Power movement, as universities held that change must square with the traditions of higher education, chief among them academic freedom for all.

This thesis unfolds in three parts. Chapter 1 looks at the formation of an activist network in North Carolina and studies their early use of demands, building takeovers, and other demonstrations. The chapter explains how and why the black campus movement took root in North Carolina. Chapter 2 examines official responses to student protest, both from campus administrators and law enforcement officials. The chapter emphasizes campus leaders' strong interests in maintaining both order and academic freedom, while showing how processes guided by those interests frustrated student activists. Chapter 3 tells the story of Malcolm X Liberation University, an activist-run school created in response to a slow and unsatisfying negotiation process about black studies at Duke University. MXLU's life and death reveal the difficulties of creating an entirely independent educational institution, especially when compared with the process of developing curricula in black studies at established campuses. The thesis concludes with a brief reflection on the legacy of the black campus movement for higher education in North Carolina and nationwide.

Chapter 1: **Demands**

The Black Campus Movement in North Carolina

When Stokely Carmichael, a civil rights icon and leader of the Black Power movement, came to North Carolina in the fall of 1968, he made a case for violence. “We want to state now affirmatively that we are *for* revolutionary violence,” Carmichael declared at the University of North Carolina (UNC-CH) on November 21, a dramatic message to the overwhelmingly white crowd of 6,700. But Carmichael’s definition of violence was broad: he explained that it could come in forms political, economic, social, and cultural. Further, he claimed that white America had committed many of these forms of violence against blacks through its control of powerful institutions. In Carmichael’s view, institutionalized violence oppressed blacks, and for America to rid itself of that violence and oppression, it needed systems that would “speak to the needs . . . [and] the basic desires” of its marginalized populations. According to Carmichael, the oppressed black man “is stripped of his culture, is stripped of his language, is stripped of his history, stripped of his self identity, and is forced to hate himself.” Asserting that “black people [were] fighting for their humanity,” Carmichael told the students that if America’s institutions would not change, they would need to break them down to bring dignity, autonomy, and freedom to the nation’s minority populations.⁸

The next month, Carmichael took that philosophy to North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University⁹ (NC A&T) in Greensboro and added a call to action. At UNC-CH, Carmichael mostly spoke about the limitations of liberalism at a campus with a reputation for embodying it. But at NC A&T, speaking to 4,000 black students, Carmichael raised the stakes,

⁸ Stokely Carmichael, Address at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, November 21, 1968, folder 22, Records of the Chancellor: J. Carlyle Sitterson, 1966-72.

⁹ The former North Carolina Agricultural & Technical College, mentioned in the introduction, was redesignated as a university in 1967.

telling his audience that they should not only “be willing to die for freedom but . . . willing to kill for it as well.” He saw violence as an instrument of power: when asked a question about the previous month’s election, Carmichael replied, “I didn’t vote. I stayed at home and cleaned my guns.” There were no moral judgments in Carmichael’s definition of violence, only the assertion that institutional control entrenched power and, in turn, power legitimized violence. These principles defined Carmichael’s philosophy, and they deeply resonated with the emergent generation of black student activists.¹⁰

As one figurehead of the nascent Black Power movement, Carmichael served as an intellectual icon for many black students in North Carolina. When he spoke on the campuses of UNC-CH, UNC-Charlotte, and NC A&T late in 1968, he gave voice to the concerns and frustrations of black students on those campuses. Headlines after his speeches emphasized radicalism and violence, but the substance of his remarks revealed a firm belief in the value of community, culture, and self-worth in the black world. It had not been a full generation since universities desegregated, and black students—still a small minority on many campuses—frequently felt alienated and isolated. Carmichael offered a vision of a world in which blacks controlled their own systems of power and influence. That vision resonated with the young black students because it reflected the ideological aims of a growing national movement of Black Power-minded student activism.

In North Carolina, that movement emerged most strongly on the campuses of Duke University, UNC-CH, and NC A&T. Black students at these three campuses—an elite, conservative, private institution; the state’s leading public university; and a historically black college—each faced their own unique challenges as they began to organize around issues on campus and in the community. However, it is important that those differences not be atomized

¹⁰ Chafe, *Civilities and Civil Rights*, 182.

and that they instead be viewed as aspects of larger trends of activism at the time. Three key conditions led North Carolina's black students to advocate for change on their campuses: the limits of desegregation, the larger black campus movement, and the presence of a network of student organizers informed by the Black Power ideology.

When the process of desegregation began in the 1950s, few authority figures thought of how to support new minority students adapting to an alien college environment. Black students in the state's historically white colleges were particularly challenged. Universities remained disproportionately white in the decade following desegregation, with some schools less than 1 percent black in the late 1960s. This left blacks socially isolated at UNC-CH and Duke. Further, black students felt that their cultural identities were disrespected, given some continued white student and faculty resistance to desegregation. Few courses on black life and culture existed, and the proposition that more should exist was a dubious one for many academics. Universities also failed to provide for other black student needs, such as academic remediation, tutoring, and other forms of academic guidance. Personal needs were also unmet. For instance, Duke's black students complained that the school did not have a barber who knew how to cut black people's hair.

Though the challenges of desegregation were most evident at white schools, historically black colleges like NC A&T were also affected by continued white dominance in higher education. Students resisted paternalistic discipline policies shaped by white trustees and complained that courses on black history and culture were lacking. In general, students at schools both historically white and historically black felt that colleges permitted their presence but never embraced them. Students also recognized that their schools were uninterested in responding to the concerns of blacks in the community. Left to fend for themselves, this absence of support

shaped the missions, agendas, and demands of black student groups and inspired their activism against campus authorities.

Though the complicated racial politics of the South gave a distinct shape to the activism in that region, the black campus movement in North Carolina employed shared tropes and models of activism seen in protests nationwide. Beginning in 1967 in California and extending into the early 1970s, a wave of black campus activism rolled across America, employing similar methods and striving for similar goals. A student strike at San Francisco State in 1967 sparked a movement that would spread to hundreds of campuses, whether they were state universities, elite private institutions, or historically black colleges. Shared methods and agendas suggest that campuses modeled their iterations of the movement after one another. Activists also drew from the Black Power philosophy's emphasis on black identity and institutional control. That ideological underpinning inspired student demands and actions.

One factor that was fairly unique to the movement in North Carolina was the presence of a strong, well-connected network of young black activists who shared philosophies and experiences. These networks were led by charismatic figures such as Nelson Johnson in Greensboro and Howard Fuller in Durham, who had cut their teeth organizing in black communities in the mid-1960s. These leaders worked with other youth in the state and steered them toward Black Power. When organizers took their work to college campuses, they recognized that universities often failed to provide adequate support for both minority students and nearby minority communities. Though organizers clearly drew inspiration from events nationwide, the networks present in North Carolina represented a practical mechanism uniting black students and allowing them to coordinate tactics, strategy, and goals. More, they offered social and emotional support. When one activist group enjoyed successes, its methods spread to

other campuses; when one activist group met resistance, other groups joined it in solidarity. This unity allowed the black campus movement to flourish across the state.

Origins in Organizing

In 1965, Howard Fuller, a young black militant from Wisconsin, traveled to North Carolina. Fuller was a new hire in the North Carolina Fund, an organization created to run experimental anti-poverty programs in North Carolina. Fuller's job was to lead the Fund's new team of community organizers. Over the next few years, Fuller's sensibilities as an organizer and his fiery rhetoric on the stage made him the most recognizable black activist in the state. He also brought controversy: as one of the first prominent figures to advocate Black Power in North Carolina, many people feared his radicalism. Fuller's ideological turn came primarily out of frustration. "The black people have to realize that blacks and whites are about different things," he once remarked. "In a society that has proven it has no concern for your dignity and worth . . . you're butting your head against the wall." During his time in North Carolina, Fuller would teach his philosophy to young organizers like Nelson Johnson in Greensboro and Preston Dobbins in Chapel Hill, who would in turn carry the message to the state's college campuses.¹¹

Two of the North Carolina Fund's programs provided Fuller with inroads to North Carolina's campuses. One was Youth Educational Services (YES), a tutoring program staffed by students and young organizers, both white and black. A number of future black campus leaders, including Nelson Johnson, started out as tutors with YES after it was launched in 1965. The other was the Foundation for Community Development (FCD), a program with which Fuller worked closely. In 1968, the FCD brought interns to Greensboro, Fayetteville, Durham, and several other cities. Unlike the integrated YES, the FCD took much of its political inspiration

¹¹ Tom Bailey, interview, July 9, 1977; "Howard Fuller: Controversial But He Wants to Be Flexible," *News & Observer*, December 14, 1969; Fergus, Devin. *Liberalism, Black Power, and the Making of American Politics*, 21.

from the Black Power movement. When black community workers became alienated from YES, they tended to gravitate toward Fuller and the FCD. In 1968, Fuller and Johnson began to coordinate the interns through an organization called the Grassroots Association of Students (GAS). When the interns moved to their own separate corners of North Carolina, GAS worked to maintain connections across the state. GAS and its forerunner programs in the North Carolina Fund provided networks through which black activists would later collaborate and spread ideas.¹²

On campuses, black students coalesced in social organizations that would eventually turn to activism. At colleges nationwide, minority students created these organizations initially because they felt a need for social supports in an unfamiliar and unwelcoming environment. At Duke, for instance, most black students had grown up in segregated communities, and they found that the transition to a desegregated but predominantly white institution was difficult. “We came up in all-black churches, all-black schools, all-black communities, all-black everything,” said one Duke student, “and then came here. And everything was all white.” No one at Duke University seemed to understand or respond to black student concerns, so the students formed their own community in an organization called the Afro-American Society (AAS). The AAS began as a social group, but members also engaged with the black community in Durham through their relationship with Howard Fuller. The students witnessed Fuller’s efforts to organize the black community for change, and they began to consider how they might undertake similar work at Duke.¹³

At UNC-CH and in Greensboro, activism was more central to the origins of student-

¹² Nelson Johnson, interview, October 24, 1978; Tom Bailey, interview, July 9, 1977; Preston Dobbins, interview, December 4, 1974.

¹³ Bill Turner, interview, January 23, 1985; Tom Campbell, interview, February 8, 1985; Janice Williams, interview, February 13, 1985.

driven black organizations. In Chapel Hill, Preston Dobbins brought his organizing experiences to campus following a stint with YES. When Dobbins began to attend meetings of the campus chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), he deemed it “a bullshit group” that failed to engage with the needs and interests of blacks in Chapel Hill. Dobbins crashed one meeting with a group of like-minded students and successfully motioned to reconstitute the NAACP as the Black Student Movement (BSM). As the new organization’s president, Dobbins moved to establish the BSM as a voice for both Chapel Hill’s black students and black community members.

In Greensboro, Nelson Johnson followed a similar trajectory. As a YES tutor, Johnson had been concerned that the integrated organization encouraged whites to organize the black community, so he left to work with the FCD under Fuller’s tutelage. Inspired by his experiences there, Johnson founded the Greensboro Association of Poor People (GAPP), a Black Power-aligned organization that pushed community control and black institution-building. Though he worked to unite blacks from a variety of social stations and ideological positions, Johnson took a particular interest in college students at NC A&T because he recognized the school’s significance in the community. In 1968, Johnson enrolled at NC A&T and focused on organizing students around community issues.

The organizing background of the movement’s leaders was key to the formation of North Carolina’s black activist organizations. After working in some of the poorest, most disadvantaged communities in the state, organizers like Dobbins and Johnson saw how little the universities spoke to minority communities’ needs. In light of that, the movement leaders resolved to bring transformative change to campuses. As veteran organizers, they knew how to

set the process of change into motion.¹⁴

Early Activism: Orangeburg and the Assassination of Dr. King

The new student groups faced an early and severe test in February 1968. On February 8, an anti-segregation protest at South Carolina State University in Orangeburg turned bloody when police fired into a crowd, killing three students and injuring almost 30. Howard Fuller and Nelson Johnson brought together representatives from the Grassroots Association of Students to plan a response. The students returned to their individual campuses and staged demonstrations on February 15. Nine cities in the Carolinas and Virginia saw protests. The largest protest came in Greensboro, where a small group of students at NC A&T created an effigy of the governor of South Carolina and marched downtown, with other students and community members joining in along the way. Nelson Johnson estimated that thousands of people ultimately swelled the crowd, remarking that “when I looked back [at the other marchers], I couldn’t see the end of the line.” In Chapel Hill, a similar march was more modest, with 60 students walking from campus to the local post office, a frequent site for protest. In Durham, students from North Carolina College, Duke, and local high schools gathered with hundreds of community members at Five Points, an intersection near a North Carolina Fund office. That protest turned violent when authorities blasted participants with fire hoses, and marchers responded by clashing with officers, throwing bricks, and lighting fires. The responses to Orangeburg provided the first indication that Fuller’s student acolytes had the organizing skills to galvanize large public protests.¹⁵

The assassination of civil rights icon Martin Luther King Jr. in April appeared to offer another opportunity for unified student activism, but instead each campus had its own unique

¹⁴ Nelson Johnson, interview, October 24, 1978; Tom Bailey, interview, July 9, 1977; Cecil Bishop, interview, October 13, 1977; Lewis Brandon, interview, July 1978; Howard Fuller, interview, January 8, 2014.

¹⁵ Nelson Johnson, interview, October 24, 1978; Williams, *It Wasn’t Slavery Time*, 45-49; “Demonstrations in Nine Southern Cities Protest Orangeburg Deaths,” *The Lexington Dispatch*, February 16, 1968.

response. Black students at UNC-CH and Duke showed little interest in demonstrations organized by whites. The BSM was invited to participate in a memorial procession through Chapel Hill but refused, while the AAS at Duke also declined to be involved in a post-assassination vigil. Though the Duke vigil turned into a major protest with 1,500 people, one AAS member defended the decision not to participate, remarking that blacks “didn’t kill Dr. King. We had nothing to feel guilty about.” At both schools, black students doubted white mourners’ sincerity and respect for King and accordingly minimized their involvement. In contrast, NC A&T nearly exploded after the assassination. Students and community members in Greensboro chanted “Black Power” in the streets, while on campus the Black Liberation Front (BLF), a radical organization filled with Black Panthers, raided the ROTC building to find weapons. BLF members fired shots on campus until officials called in the National Guard to end the shootings. To calm the campus, NC A&T President Lewis Dowdy subsequently halted classes and sent students home. The lack of a black presence in protests at UNC-CH and Duke and the violent incidents at NC A&T each indicated two emergent themes in the state’s black activist movement: a skepticism about white motives and an impassioned militancy in black activism.¹⁶

Catalysts: Negotiations at Duke; Stokely Carmichael at UNC and NC A&T

In September 1968, Duke University reached out to the Afro-American Society in hopes of responding to issues faced by black students. Dean William Griffith put AAS leader Chuck Hopkins in charge of creating a committee of students, faculty, and administrators to discuss black student concerns. At the committee’s first meeting in October, Hopkins framed the conversation with the observation that a black student on a mostly-white campus had three

¹⁶ Williams, *It Wasn’t Slavery Time*, 45-49; Harry Jackson, memo to Douglas Knight, Barnes Woodhall, et. al, May 27, 1969, folder 18, Allen Building Takeover Collection; Kornberg and Smith, “‘It Ain’t Over Yet’: Activism in a Southern University,” 112.

options: “accepting the educational structure as it is and seeking his real self outside of it; [rebellious] at the lack of himself in the educational structure with extreme expressions of militancy; [or attempting] to have some of his own ideas and culture . . . incorporated into the overall structure of the educational institution.” The committee seemed to favor the third tactic. Hopkins and the other black students made a variety of requests: some small, like having a black campus barber; some functional, like increased recruitment of black students and the hiring of a black advisor; and some symbolic, like sponsoring Black Culture Week, ending the playing of “Dixie” at public functions, and, most significantly, creating a black studies curriculum.¹⁷

Any optimism at the outset was short-lived. One Duke faculty member lamented that the black students exhibited “studied mock aggression” in discussions. He also complained that the students did not sufficiently understand how the university was organized and administered and that they were not willing to speak about their demands “in terms of the possible.” Students had their own frustrations; AAS members felt that Duke’s faculty and administration did not understand that it was “part of their responsibility” to provide a supportive environment for black students. The university agreed to some of the AAS requests, including the sponsorship of Black Culture Week, but students nonetheless grew aggravated with the committee and Duke administration.¹⁸

In Chapel Hill, the Black Student Movement faced its own problems with administrators. The university’s refusal to help finance Stokely Carmichael’s lecture angered BSM members. Because Carmichael was invited by a student organization, rather than the university itself, the school declined to pay any part of Carmichael’s \$1,500 fee. Upon hearing this decision, the BSM planned to pay Carmichael by charging admission to the event, but a campus administrator then

¹⁷ Frank L. Ashmore, “History of Afro-American Relations Prior to February 13, 1969,” folder 5, Black History at Duke Reference Collection 1948-2001 and undated.

¹⁸ Louis Budd interview, March 1, 1985; Bill Turner, interview, January 23, 1985.

prohibited them from doing so. BSM members believed they could have raised \$7,000 if they charged admission, but they collected only \$700 in donations. Feeling that the school had deliberately attempted to undercut the BSM and the event, the students were primed to react. Beyond their financial frustrations, Carmichael's strong posture underscored the necessity of black action and inspired students to launch protests against the administration.¹⁹

Carmichael's lecture was also a catalyst at NC A&T. The media portrayed Carmichael as an enormous influence on young blacks in Greensboro, and although Nelson Johnson believed that influence was overstated, he did concede that Carmichael "crystallize[d] some points" about racial inequity and the importance of black community building. Johnson said Carmichael's lecture "gave a little push to what was happening" in Greensboro and encouraged the growth of the activist movement there. Intellectually, Carmichael's message also aided Johnson's efforts to expand students' consciousness of issues facing the black community. Up to that point, students had been concerned primarily with campus issues, but Carmichael made a much broader case about how and why to build power in black communities everywhere.²⁰

Demands Made and Rising Tensions at UNC-CH

Following Carmichael's lecture in Chapel Hill, the Black Student Movement compiled a list of grievances regarding the university's policies toward minorities. On December 10, 1968, the BSM presented Chancellor Sitterson with a document describing the school's poor treatment of minorities and laying 23 demands on the administration. The document charged the university with "perpetuat[ing] educational inequality," being "totally unconcerned" with the black community in Chapel Hill, and making only "token, symbolic" changes in response to prior grievances from the black student community.

¹⁹ J. Carlyle Sitterson, letter to William C. Friday, December 16, 1968, General Administration/Consolidated University: Presidents, Office Records (William C. Friday files), Subgroup 1, Series 7, Subseries 1: Student Services.

²⁰ Nelson Johnson, interview, October 24, 1978.

The BSM's demands were similar in many respects to those that emerged from the AAS two months prior. The BSM felt that the university should create more inclusive admissions and financial aid policies to boost minority enrollment and retain minority students, and they asked that a program in African and African American studies be developed. Students also looked beyond campus concerns and asked the university to support Chapel Hill's black community by developing low-income housing and providing better working conditions for non-academic employees. The BSM made proposals both broad ("substantial financial aid" for black students) and specific (a payment of \$7,000 to the BSM to make up for funds lost from Stokely Carmichael's lecture). The demands constituted an expansive vision of what the university could do for blacks on campus and in the larger community, and they would be echoed at other North Carolina schools within a few months.²¹

In late January, Sitterson delivered an extensive, point-by-point reply to the BSM's demands. The statement indicated his desire to be "responsive" to the needs of black students without offering "unique treatment" to any one segment of the population. He then pointed to a number of areas where the university had already begun to act. He argued that the university had been particularly progressive on working conditions for university employees, paying a minimum wage above the federal standard and actively recruiting minorities for non-academic positions. To the demand for an African American studies curriculum, Sitterson claimed that a variety of courses concerning black history and culture were already available for students. Sitterson also absolved himself of responsibility in some areas where he said he did not have authority, such as admissions policy and economic development in Chapel Hill. Sitterson's reply was by no means dismissive, but students took it as an example of the administration's

²¹ Black Student Movement, "The Demands of the Black Student Movement," December 10, 1968, folder 14, Records of the Chancellor: J. Carlyle Sitterson, 1966-72.

intransigence and unwillingness to support blacks.²²

In an official statement, the BSM argued the case for discrimination “which leads to the equality of all people,” contending that the university had to do more than provide the same treatment to everyone in order to ensure that minority students could succeed. The BSM also asserted that the university had more power than Sitterson was willing to acknowledge. The statement accused Sitterson of hiding behind “the myth of institutional neutrality” when he claimed that the university had limited influence on community development, and the BSM further said he had misunderstood or “consciously evade[d]” some of the demands. The BSM then restated many of the grievances.²³

Privately, BSM members expressed a “need to force the institution to change—by any means necessary.” In an internal document, BSM leaders argued that if the university did not stand for change, it stood for the status quo, and, by extension, for the continuance of injustice and inequity. Colored by separatist sentiments in the Black Power movement, the statement asserted that if the school would not be more progressive on black students’ issues, the students did “not need the university as an institution.” In the fashion of the most radical Black Power activists, the students proclaimed that they were prepared to create a university of their own, tailored to the needs of black students. By this point, students were fully immersed in the goals and language of the national black campus movement, and they were prepared to adopt its protest methods as well. They indicated as much in early February, when 100 students entered the university’s administrative office in South Building and occupied it peacefully for ten

²² J. Carlyle Sitterson, statement in response to Black Student Movement demands, January 24, 1969, folder 14, Records of the Chancellor: J. Carlyle Sitterson, 1966-72.

²³ BSM statement on the Chancellor's Reply, n.d., folder 14, Records of the Chancellor: J. Carlyle Sitterson, 1966-72.

minutes.²⁴

Transitioning from Campus to Community Issues at NC A&T

Students at NC A&T combined their demands with a building occupation on the morning of February 5. Representatives of the school's Student Government Association led a group of students to the Dudley Building, an administrative facility on campus. The students announced that they would occupy the building until administrators addressed their list of demands, which was mostly composed of minor proposals like the abolition of pop quizzes and roll calls in class on non-test days. Despite the narrow scope of some of the demands, the protesters at NC A&T, like those at Duke and UNC-CH, also insisted that more of the school's course offerings be "black-oriented." It seemed as true at all-black NC A&T as it did at mostly-white Duke and UNC-CH that black students wanted to study "blackness" in an academic environment. That deep desire was shared across campuses, even when specific demands differed.²⁵

In contrast to the drawn-out debate at UNC-CH, the situation at NC A&T was handled efficiently and smoothly by the end of that night. NC A&T President Lewis Dowdy worked with faculty representatives and the students to reach agreements on each of the demands. The narrow demands were easily addressed, while Dowdy made a commitment to examine the possibility of introducing more black-oriented coursework. Dowdy's willingness to negotiate spoke to his reputation as a sympathetic friend to his students. Students generally trusted Dowdy to be responsive to their ideas and feelings, and even the more skeptical students conceded that Dowdy was not an "out-and-out [Uncle] Tom" like other black campus administrators who "run the most

²⁴ Black Student Movement, statement on the Chancellor's reply to BSM demands; Black Student Movement, "BSM DEMANDS: STAGE TWO, THE CHANCELLOR REPLIES (or) On our way to SF State?", folder 14, Records of the Chancellor: J. Carlyle Sitterson, 1966-72; "UNC Whites March in Support of BSM," *Daily Tar Heel*, February 7, 1969.

²⁵ Lewis C. Dowdy, memo to Members of the Board of Trustees of North Carolina Agricultural & Technical State University, February 6, 1969, Box 104, Addresses and public papers of Robert Walter Scott, Governor of North Carolina, 1969-1973.

backward reactionary stuff.” Students might have expected that Dowdy, who answered to white trustees, would have resisted their protests, but instead he was open to black student concerns to a degree that white campus administrators never were.²⁶

Despite the successes of the Dudley Building occupation, Nelson Johnson was working to refocus NC A&T’s students on community issues. GAPP typically dealt with economic problems like labor conditions and access to housing. Johnson sought inroads that would connect his work with GAPP to the student activism on NC A&T’s campus. With the help of student leader Willie Drake, who had success organizing his peers around campus issues, Johnson worked his way into campus life. When Drake helped get Nelson Johnson elected as NC A&T’s Student Government Association vice president in the spring of 1969, the connection was solidified: one of Greensboro’s most influential community organizers held an influential office in NC A&T’s student body. Johnson had realized there was a capacity for activism on campus, but that to tap into it, he would need to integrate himself into that space. In his new role, Johnson felt he would be able to deepen student interest in GAPP’s community issues. The foundation had been set for a new phase of student activism in Greensboro.²⁷

The Allen Building Takeover

No North Carolina campus exemplified the demand and takeover models of protest quite like Duke University. By February, frustrations were growing. Progress was negligible on negotiations with the university administration, while at the beginning of the spring semester, sixteen of Duke’s 101 black students had withdrawn or been suspended for academic reasons. The time was ripe for a bold student protest on campus, one that would draw inspiration from

²⁶ Ibid.; Carolyn Mark, interview, October 10, 1974; Lewis Brandon, interview, July 1978; Nelson Johnson, interview, October 24, 1978.

²⁷ Lewis Brandon, interview, July 1978; Nelson Johnson, interview, October 24, 1978.

prior events in Chapel Hill and Greensboro.²⁸

One area where Duke had been supportive of students was in the planning of Black Week, a celebration of black culture scheduled for early February. During the “Beauty of Black” event, President Douglas Knight announced that a black advisor would be appointed and that Duke would launch a remedial summer program meant to benefit black students. AAS leaders speculated that Knight was merely hoping to deter a large protest: Chuck Hopkins told Duke’s student newspaper, the *Chronicle*, that “when Knight feels that something is imminent. . . he comes up with a few concessions.” Indeed, the day after announcing the policies, Knight stated that “it would be a great error” if a building were seized on campus. He did not know that the AAS had planned just such an event.²⁹

Early on the morning of February 13, a large group of Duke’s black students climbed into the hold of a U-Haul truck and waited as it approached Chapel Drive in the heart of Duke’s West Campus. When the truck rolled to a stop, the students—carrying food, water, clothes, books, cameras, and playing cards—burst out and rushed to the Allen Building, the administrative center of the university and home of Duke’s Central Records Office. Students forced employees in the building to leave, then barricaded the doors with boards, ropes, and couches. Once the building was secured, the student occupiers made their first contact with *Chronicle* staff. Student spokesman Chuck Hopkins listed their demands, claimed that they had kerosene, and said that if administrators entered the building, “these records are going to go.”³⁰ Hopkins then called Dean

²⁸ Don Yannella, “Race Relations at Duke and the Allen Building Takeover,” Honor’s thesis, Duke University, 1985. 21.

²⁹ Black Week Calendar, (n.d.), folder 1, Allen Building Takeover Collection; “Knight approves a few black demands,” *Chronicle*, February 4, 1969; “Afros decry lack of action by Knight,” *Chronicle*, February 5, 1969; “Knight warns against campus revolt,” *Chronicle*, February 5, 1969.

³⁰ It was later found that this was not the case. See Clark Cahow, interview, October 1984.

William Griffith to read him the Afro-American Society's list of demands.³¹

As had been the case at UNC-CH and NC A&T, the primary request on the Duke students' list was the establishment of a program in African American studies, and the students released an extensive proposal for such a program in the *Chronicle* on the following day. Beyond that, they sought improved social and academic conditions for blacks across campus. Students demanded a black dormitory, advisor, and student union; financial assistance for black students; and revised admissions policies. Hopkins said that the AAS had tired of negotiating through "the so-called 'proper' channels" and had decided that the radical action of seizing the building would produce substantive change. Overall, the content of the demands, the justifications for them, and the methods used to highlight them were consistent with what had come from the AAS's peers in Chapel Hill and Greensboro.³²

Ironically, President Knight was in New York City seeking funding for a black studies program when he heard about the takeover. He rushed back to Durham to help sort out the situation. Meanwhile, Provost Marcus Hobbs asked to negotiate the demands with the occupiers and was denied. At 3:30 that afternoon, Hobbs issued a one hour ultimatum for students to leave the building. Like Sitterson in his reply to the BSM, Hobbs noted areas where the administration had responded to black demands, including the hiring of a black advisor and the creation of an African American living-learning group. The students remained unmoved. Half an hour later, Knight convened a faculty meeting to discuss the university's response. Some faculty hoped that he would announce plans to negotiate, but Knight revealed that he had already made the decision to bring police officers onto campus to recover the building. "You know what has been

³¹ Clark Cahow, interview, October 1984; "Blacks leave peacefully," *Chronicle*, February 14, 1969; Harry Jackson, memo to Douglas Knight, Barnes Woodhall, et. al; Tom Campbell, interview, February 8, 1985; Yannella, "Race Relations at Duke.," 30.

³² "Proposal for a Black studies program," *Chronicle*, February 14, 1969; "The Black Demands," February 13, 1969, Folder 3, Allen Building Takeover Collection.

happening on other campuses,” Knight said, referring to the wave of similar building takeovers at colleges across the country. His response indicated that administrators viewed the event as one more copycat protest in the larger black campus movement.³³

As word about the police spread, fears of a violent confrontation grew. White students, some sympathetic and some simply curious, gathered on the quad during the day. Some students, worried that police would use tear gas or mace, passed out lemons and Vaseline. Inside the building, the black students—who had a police radio and heard plans to retake the building—felt their resolve weakening and conferenced with Howard Fuller on what to do next. Fuller advised the students that “the guard’s going to come in here, they’ve got weapons, [and] you all are going to be dead. . . because their adrenaline is pumping and they’re armed for combat.” The occupiers were persuaded to leave, and just before 5 p.m. students on the quad formed a human tunnel to shield the protesters as they emerged from the building and dispersed. Within an hour, police had entered, gassed the building, and restored it to Duke administrators.³⁴

The police presence riled the students gathered on the quad, almost all of whom were white. When hostile, jeering crowds blocked in the officers who had retaken the Allen Building, police shot tear gas into the throng. Furious students raged back against the authorities. Tear gas canisters flew through the air as masses of students and officers merged in the confines of the quad. Police cars plowed through the crowds, and students both black and white were pulled off the vehicles. Even Duke Chapel was gassed after students forced open the doors in search of refuge. The chaos lasted for over an hour. At 7:30 p.m., police reentered Allen Building to

³³ Minutes of the Duke University General Faculty Meeting, February 13, 1969, Folder 3, Allen Building Takeover Collection; Marcus E. Hobbs, memo to Douglas Knight, February 17, 1969, Folder 4, Allen Building Takeover Collection; “University to meet most Afro demands,” *Chronicle*, February 17, 1969.

³⁴ “Whites help blacks in Allen,,” *Chronicle*, February 14, 1969; Howard Fuller, interview, January 8, 2014; “25 Injured In Clash of Students and Police After Black Seizure of Duke Campus Building,” *Durham Morning Herald*, February 14, 1969; Janice Williams, interview, February 13, 1985.

regroup, while a furious crowd of students assailed a police car, smashing its windows and headlights. Though the police were prepared to go back outside and protect their property, anxious administrators prevented the officers from returning to the quad. A short time later, police exited through a rear door and the crowds dispersed.³⁵

At the end of it all, five students had been arrested: three for assault on an officer, one for interfering with an officer, and one for illegal possession of tear gas. It was reported that as many as 45 people were taken to the Emergency Room at Duke Hospital, two of them policemen. A hospital official stated that one officer was “lucky to be alive.” The campus community was shocked by the violence it had witnessed, but the dark turn of the day’s events fostered white student sympathy and increased black militancy. “I am morally incensed,” declared one young, white professor as the riot wound down, “that these people gassed you people—the students to whom this goddamn university belongs!” The protest and the subsequent riot had strengthened student solidarity, and an administration on its heels could no longer afford to ignore students’ growing power.³⁶

Conclusion

In the wake of the Allen Building takeover, Duke University faced a crisis with resonances throughout the world of higher education. A wave of dramatic and sometimes violent black student protest had reached North Carolina, and as a result, some of the state’s most prominent campuses witnessed demonstrations, demands, and takeovers. Protest methods from across the country were adopted and put into action by a network of experienced student activists. Agitated black student groups used public demonstrations and aggressive posturing to advance

³⁵ Tom Campbell, interview, February 8, 1985; Harry Demick, interview, February 12, 1985; “Police and students clash on main quad,” *Chronicle*, February 14, 1969; Student flier, n.d., folder 4, Allen Building Takeover Collection.

³⁶ Harry Jackson, memo to Douglas Knight, Barnes Woodhall, et. al, May 27, 1969, folder 18, Allen Building Takeover Collection; “25 Injured in Clash of Students and Police After Black Seizure of Duke Campus Building,” *Chronicle*, February 14, 1969; “Police and students clash on main quad,” *Chronicle*, February 14, 1969.

an agenda informed by the Black Power ideology and the larger wave of black student protest. The most important tenets of that ideology were the ideas of community control and black identity. From black studies programs to financial assistance for black students to university involvement in the community, student protesters sought resources that would support and dignify black populations both on campuses and in nearby communities. When institutional authorities would not help in that work, student activists were willing to challenge the legitimacy of those institutions through both attention-grabbing gestures and dedicated organizing efforts. It was an approach advocated by leading Black Power activists across the nation, who believed that when white America would not provide, black America would strike out on its own.

That ideology took hold in a context of deep frustration felt by black students who had come of age during the peak of the civil rights movement. At Duke and UNC-CH, black students saw how desegregation left them isolated and alone in a mostly white space. At NC A&T, students recognized the shortcomings of an education that failed to empower them. For all of the theatrics and high-minded ideology, students still responded to the oppression they felt with requests as seemingly insignificant as a black barber and the elimination of pop quizzes. On a fundamental, human level, these students felt alienated from the institutions that held so much power over their lives, and these protests attempted to claim some measure of their own power. Their bold cries for acceptance, dignity, and inclusion could no longer be ignored.

Chapter 2: **Official Responses to Student Protest**

Academic Freedom and Campus Disorder

Douglas M. Knight's term as president of Duke University began in 1963, during the same semester when Duke's first black undergraduates came to campus. It ended six years later, during the same semester a group of black students seized control of Duke's central administrative building. On February 13, 1969, a frantic Knight responded to the crisis by calling in police, hoping they could restore order, but the police presence on campus led to a violent clash between students and officers at the heart of campus. Police clubbed, gassed, and chased a crowd of almost 2,000 Duke students, while students taunted officers, threw rocks, and destroyed a patrol car. As the riot wound down, the campus remained on edge, and it was up to Knight to lead Duke through the subsequent turmoil. A variety of pressures both inside and outside of the university community would force Knight's resignation the following month.

While students occupied the Allen Building, Knight consulted with advisors to Governor Bob Scott, who had taken office the month before and pushed for firm responses to campus disorder. Scott's staff warned Knight that if he as president did not act swiftly and decisively to contain the Duke protest, similar incidents would take place at campuses across the state. Mindful of that external warning, along with internal pressure from Duke's conservative Board of Trustees and personal fears for the safety of his family, Knight made the call for law enforcement. Students and faculty criticized the decision, but Knight was thinking about the prospect of violence on other campuses—and his own job. Given the pressures he faced, he stood by the choice to bring in outside authorities.³⁷

The Allen Building takeover placed Knight in a difficult and unenviable position

³⁷ Fergus, *Liberalism, Black Power, and the Making of American Politics, 1965-1980*, 21.

common for college administrators of the day. Knight and his peers in colleges across the country faced dozens of similar protests and demonstrations, which they inevitably saw as linked. When incidents came to their own campuses, there were no simple decisions for administrators. If they offered weak responses and capitulated to student demands, officials put their jobs and public image at risk. If they attempted a strong response by bringing in law enforcement, expelling students, or shutting down campuses, they frequently received public plaudits but did little to alleviate tensions with students. Some skillful administrators were able to walk a fine line between addressing student concerns and maintaining order on campus, but campus environments were so tense and so volatile that even the most able leaders could be thrown off by unexpected incidents.

North Carolina's college leaders responded to incidents on their campuses with varying degrees of success. At Duke, in the aftermath of the Allen Building takeover, Knight lost a publicity battle on two fronts, with a Board of Trustees fearing he had given too much in negotiations with protesters and a student population crying that he had not given enough. In Chapel Hill, UNC System President Bill Friday and Chancellor Lyle Sitterson ran a skillful inside-outside strategy, in which Friday deflected external criticism by standing firm about the expectations of the law in regards to student protests while Sitterson negotiated with students to defuse tension on campus. At NC A&T, Lewis Dowdy had success working directly with students, but he was often marginalized by the will of white public officials in Greensboro and state government.

These university leaders shared an interest in maintaining order, but they also sought to preserve academic freedom on their campuses. Because they typically came from within academia, administrators tended to believe that universities should handle their own problems

through established internal decisionmaking channels. Sometimes, those internal mechanisms failed to appease students, but the extreme alternative, involving outside authorities, only seemed to escalate situations to the brink of violence—or past it. In North Carolina, incidents throughout the spring of 1969—beginning with the Allen Building takeover—were often worsened through outside authorities’ heavy-handed handling of situations. Amidst protests, strikes, and riots in Chapel Hill, Greensboro, and Durham, Scott insisted that he would stand firm in the face of campus rebellion. In May, when Greensboro Mayor Jack Elam called in the National Guard to deal with a protest that turned violent, everyone’s worst fears were realized in a shootout that would claim the life of an NC A&T student.

For students, the slow pace of deliberation was rarely satisfying, but the threat of force or its exercise was far more alienating. Further, though there were some instances where protests became clear law enforcement issues, force and violence were incapable of resolving student concerns. The administrators who most successfully satisfied student demands were those who kept dialogue open and offered concessions where it was possible to do so. Those administrators had the advantage of knowing how to translate sometimes nebulous or ill-defined student demands into workable policies and programs. Students accomplished the most when they were open to following the university’s norms and when administrators were willing to engage them in discussion.

Ultimately for some students, no amount of negotiation would be satisfactory. Because many activists had spent years agitating for change, only to be frustrated by bureaucracy or suppressed by law enforcers, these black leaders grew ideologically opposed to the idea of participating in the university environment at all. To improve black students’ situation and alleviate their concerns, these dissenters sought independence from the university, rather than the

exercise of academic freedom within it. This approach had a major impact on the trajectory of the black campus movement. It is why students in Chapel Hill and Greensboro would facilitate black university employees' labor strikes; it is why students at Duke University would leave to begin their own school; and it is why a group of students at NC A&T would take up arms against the National Guard. By the spring of 1969, student dissatisfaction had moved beyond institutions' failure to act: it came instead from the structure and governance of the institutions themselves.

The Aftermath of the Allen Building Takeover

Late on the night of February 13, Duke students voted to commence a strike in protest of the university's decision to bring in police during the Allen Building takeover. Many students skipped classes the following day, while over 100 peers from Chapel Hill marched on Duke's quad that afternoon in support of the Allen Building occupiers. The Afro-American Society convened a meeting on the afternoon of February 15. After a brief discussion among more than 1,000 attendees, one student suggested a march to Knight's home. Howard Fuller then stood before the crowd and made the final decision. "We're going over to Dr. Knight's," he declared. "You all want to go?"³⁸

When the protesters reached his house, a shocked Knight insisted on dialogue. He defended his decision to bring in police, but admitted that the choice had been made in the face of "a great deal of pressure." Though he was disappointed that the students had once again resorted to a bold public demonstration, Knight agreed to negotiations with Howard Fuller, members of the Afro-American Society, and select Duke administrators. The group met that evening and hashed out resolutions for many of the issues, and Knight announced the outcome the next day. Knight said that progress had been made on some small issues, but the largest

³⁸ "Students' Strike Begins at Duke U." *New York Times*, February 14, 1969; Harry Jackson, memo to Douglas Knight, Barnes Woodhall, et. al, May 27, 1969, folder 18, Allen Building Takeover Collection.

takeaway was his affirmation that Duke would pursue the development of a program in black studies. A core student demand, dating back multiple years, had at last been answered.

Knight remarked that though the negotiations seemed to turn the school in a new direction, the students' grievances had in fact "been concerns of the university for months or even years." Despite this claim, Duke's student newspaper, the *Chronicle*, reported that the only area where the university did not concede was amnesty for the Allen Building occupiers. Knight insisted that Duke had already been working on many of the issues presented by black students and that many of his concessions were not new; even so, complete capitulation became the dominant narrative in press accounts, thanks in large part to the *Chronicle*'s initial coverage.³⁹ Moving forward, Knight found it hard to shake the increasingly popular perception that he had been steamrolled by Fuller and the student protesters. He had already lost a public relations battle with students during the Allen Building riot, and he lost another in the eyes of the public with his perceived willingness to surrender to student demands.⁴⁰

Sitterson and Friday React at UNC-CH

In Chapel Hill, Chancellor Lyle Sitterson and UNC System President Bill Friday recognized that the events at Duke would have an impact on black student activists at UNC-CH. Students had conducted several peaceful demonstrations in early February, but after the incidents at Duke, administrators' concerns about more aggressive protests grew. In an attempt to defuse any potential tensions, Sitterson and Friday agreed to a February 18 meeting with campus administrators and student representatives. Upset that their initial demands were not being given

³⁹ This was precisely what the building occupiers had intended. *Chronicle* staff were highly sympathetic to the cause, and they had been tipped off the night before the takeover that the AAS would be engaging in a major protest the following morning. AAS members wanted the *Chronicle* to be the first point of contact for any major media outlet seeking information about the takeover and its aftermath so that the story could be told on the most favorable possible terms for the protesters. For more information, see Tom Campbell, interview, February 8, 1985.

⁴⁰ Douglas M. Knight, statement, February 15, 1969, folder 4, Allen Building Takeover Collection; "1000 confront Knight." *The Chronicle*, February 16, 1969; Douglas M. Knight, statement, February 16, 1969, folder 4, Allen Building Takeover Collection; "University to meet most Afro demands." *The Chronicle*, February 17, 1969.

“proper consideration,” the BSM told Sitterson that he had until February 21 to officially recognize the Black Student Movement as a student organization, to acknowledge their right to make demands, and to agree to consult black students during any negotiations of the demands they had presented in December. At a rally that week, one student leader swore that if the BSM was not accorded more respect, “our tactics will change from reform to revolutionary.”⁴¹

Sitterson attempted to strike a conciliatory tone in responding to the latest set of demands from the BSM. “I have the greatest respect for [the BSM’s] sincere and proper interest in the welfare of black students,” Sitterson said in a statement on February 19. He added that “all black students have very valuable and special contributions to make in our continuing search for solutions to University problems.” His statement officially recognized the BSM as a student organization, highlighted the formation of a committee to consider the development of an African and African American Studies program, and announced new efforts to direct resources to the recruitment of minority students. Sitterson used his authority within the university to offer concessions that he hoped would placate the black student activists.⁴²

Sitterson worked closely with President Friday, who released a statement of his own on February 19. While Sitterson’s statement was intended for the students and meant to show the university’s willingness to negotiate, Friday’s message was directed outward, toward the public and state officials. Friday affirmed the university’s tradition as a “free and open institution” that welcomed feedback and criticism from students and the public, but he also asserted that changes on UNC system campuses would only come through democratic processes. Citing a 1965 statute that made obstruction of public buildings a misdemeanor, Friday announced that the university

⁴¹ “UNC-CH Agrees to Meeting on Black Student Demands,” *Greensboro Daily News*, February 18, 1969; “UNC Campus Quiet, Relaxed,” *News and Observer*, February 22, 1969; “‘Revolutionary’ Tactics Promised by UNC Blacks,” *News and Observer*, February 19, 1969.

⁴² “UNC Campus Quiet, Relaxed,” *News and Observer*, February 22, 1969; J. Carlyle Sitterson, statement, February 19, 1969, folder 19, Records of the Chancellor: J. Carlyle Sitterson, 1966-72.

would uphold the rule of law. He acknowledged that the state's citizens expected the university to reflect a "society based upon respect for the law," and he concluded his statement with the firm promise that "this obligation will be met." Friday sent a clear message that he, Sitterson, and the other system chancellors would maintain control of their campuses and that external interventions were both unnecessary and unwelcome.⁴³

Whether because of Sitterson's conciliatory approach or Friday's firm stance on points of law, the students' February 21 deadline came and went without incident. On the day of the deadline, BSM leaders reported that they were "generally satisfied" with Chancellor Sitterson's statement. They had not managed to equal the perceived victories of the Duke protesters, but they made distinct progress and established their right to negotiate. With UNC-CH beginning to engage on issues of curriculum, admissions, and recruitment of minority students, the BSM's protests were set to transition to a new phase.⁴⁴

Gov. Scott's Philosophy on Student Protest

As the situations at Duke and UNC-CH played out, Gov. Bob Scott staked out his own approach to the handling of campus disorders. Just days after his office had quietly advised Douglas Knight to contain the protests at Duke, Scott began to outline publicly his philosophy on student protest. On February 15, Scott declared that "for as long as I am governor, it will remain the central function of the teacher to teach [and] the central function of the student to learn," and added that, while it was true that students could not be moved by force alone, "there is no substitute for firmness on our part" when disruptions occurred. Above all else, Scott saw campus protests as a law enforcement problem, and as the state's chief executive he felt an obligation to

⁴³ William C. Friday, statement on student protests, February 19, 1969, General Administration/Consolidated University: Presidents, Office Records (William C. Friday files), Subgroup 1, Series 7, Subseries 1: Student Services; Link, *William Friday*, 145.

⁴⁴ "UNC campus quiet, relaxed," *News and Observer*, February 22, 1969. Link, *William Friday*, 145.

ensure that all laws were enforced.⁴⁵

On February 20, Scott's office issued a memorandum outlining procedures for response to student demonstrations. With the premise that protests "must not jeopardize public order," the memorandum gave law-enforcement officers wide authority to intervene in campus security issues. Under the guidelines, campus administrators were obligated to notify the governor's office and the local sheriff or chief of police whenever a disruption occurred. When law enforcement arrived, university officials were to allow officers to arrest protesters and retake any occupied buildings. When explaining his guidelines to the Board of Trustees of the UNC System, Scott placed the university system on par with any other state-run institution by saying that "officers would not have to confer with the head of the Art Museum before moving in" if a disruption occurred. His philosophy prioritized law and order while de-emphasizing the notion of academic freedom, and he dismissed any belief that universities would operate independently of the law. It was a frustrating stance for college administrators, but with the weight of the law behind him, Scott had the authority to become increasingly active in the handling of campus protest.⁴⁶

The Foodworkers' Strike in Chapel Hill

Though black student leaders at schools across the state had made progress on campus issues, their backgrounds in community organizing also called them to tackle problems of labor and inequity. Those leaders saw the plight of campus cafeteria workers—almost always black and working in poor conditions for low wages—as one way to connect university issues to

⁴⁵ Bob Scott, speech before Jaycee Banquet, February 15, 1969, Box 91, Governor's File, Governor Robert W. Scott Papers, North Carolina State Archives.

⁴⁶ Governor Bob Scott, "Procedures relative to the seizure of buildings and disturbances on the campus of State institutions of higher learning," February 20, 1969, folder 16, Records of the Chancellor: J. Carlyle Sitterson, 1966-72; "University Board Endorses Scott's 'Disorders' Memo," *News and Observer*, February 25, 1969; "Scott Asks 'Firmness' in Campus Disorders," *Greensboro Daily News*, February 16, 1969, Link, *William Friday*, 144-149.

broader concerns surrounding race and labor. Beginning in late February, the Black Student Movement at UNC-CH allied with cafeteria workers to help them plan a strike and advocate for improved working conditions and higher wages.⁴⁷

The foundation for the strike was set in early 1969, when a group of cafeteria workers sought guidance from the BSM. Facing a \$1.60 minimum wage, regular verbal abuse, and no opportunities to advance into management, the black workers felt as if they were treated “just like a bunch of slaves,” and they wanted to protest to the university administration. Given their concerns and needs, the cafeteria employees thought that the BSM would be a logical partner for a protest. When the workers suggested a strike, the BSM helped them develop a strategy and pledged strong support. On February 23, the plan was set into motion: employees reported to work that evening, but as soon as the cafeteria at Lenoir Hall opened, they walked out while BSM members banged trays on tables and countertops. This opening salvo led cafeteria management and university officials to seek a meeting with the striking workers.⁴⁸

The BSM supported the strike in a number of ways. Members offered themselves up as spiritual confidantes to the cafeteria workers, while other persuading students not to eat in the dining halls. They also provided practical assistance. They helped the workers hire civil rights attorney Julius Chambers, rallied other students and faculty around the cause, and helped set up a soul food cafeteria so the workers could feed students and earn money during the strike. BSM leader Preston Dobbins and the workers insisted that the black students would not lead the strike, and Dobbins deterred white radicals from employing more disruptive methods. The deliberate choice to minimize white influence spoke to the BSM’s commitment to Black Power, as they

⁴⁷ William H. Chafe, *Civilities and Civil Rights*, 183-5.

⁴⁸ Ashley Davis, interview, April 12, 1974; Elizabeth Brooks, interview, October 2, 1974.

believed it necessary for the black workers to stand up for themselves.⁴⁹

That said, the BSM was unafraid to provide physical strength on behalf of the workers. They frequently entered Lenoir Hall during meals and deliberately interfered with service. On March 4, their tactics led to a scuffle with angry white students. After the confrontation, BSM members worried that white student frustration might turn into violence against the cafeteria workers. To deter any physical retaliation against the workers, BSM members reentered Lenoir Hall during dinner service later that evening and silently marched through, flipping tables and throwing chairs as they went. They had not discussed the plan with the cafeteria workers, but the BSM was determined to put up a strong defensive front. They had never intended to employ force in the strike, but their demonstration nonetheless stoked concerns that the strike might turn violent.⁵⁰

Debating Black Studies at Duke

After the Allen Building saga had come to an end, the major issue at Duke became how to implement the curriculum in black studies. The emerging academic field was the subject of contentious debates at colleges nationwide. Students clashed with academics in negotiations, frequently crying for “relevant” education and advocating for community-based educational programs. For students, the justification for black studies as a discipline was that black students could get a better understanding of the issues facing minority communities while also developing the skills necessary to serve those communities. For university faculty, black studies was best understood as a culturally-minded extension of existing disciplines such as literature, history, and sociology. Historian Fabio Rojas has written that the idea of creating community-oriented

⁴⁹ Ashley Davis, interview, April 12 1974; Elizabeth Brooks, interview, October 2, 1974.

⁵⁰ Ashley Davis, interview, April 12, 1974; “50 Negroes Stir Havoc at UNC,” *Winston-Salem Journal*, March 5, 1969; J. Derek Williams. *It Wasn't Slavery Time*, 113-7.

programs “explicitly violated the mission of elite education at research universities,” which made those programs a tough sell to campus administrators. According to Rojas, the black studies movement failed to take hold in many colleges and universities because protesters “fail[ed] to understand [the university] as an organization, rather than merely another arena for mobilizing and agitation.” Confronting the complex institutional norms and governance structures of the university, students who came in proposing new methods struggled to get their requests met. Such was the case at Duke University.⁵¹

Since the fall of 1968, a committee led by Duke professor J. Harris Proctor had contemplated the development of a program in black studies. On March 5, 1969, the committee released its report, finding that it was “necessary. . . desirable and feasible” to institute a major in black studies and offering recommendations on how to get the program going. Though the report appeared to have good news for the black students, the Afro-American Society was troubled by one recommendation: that the program be initially administered by a committee “exclusively of faculty members.” After spending months agitating for a voice in the development of black studies, students were outraged by the committee’s call for complete faculty control of the program.⁵²

Students rallied that day and called for Proctor’s committee to be replaced by a committee of five black students and five faculty members. Howard Fuller suggested that Duke was in a dire situation. “The administration has until Monday,” Fuller declared. “Duke University has to decide if it wants to have black students or not.” In a speech that evening, President Knight noted that though the committee had recommended initial faculty control, it also said that “the first order of business” would be identifying “the role and position of black

⁵¹ Rojas, *From Black Power to Black Studies*, 128-9.

⁵² “Proctor report on Afro-American studies.” *The Chronicle*, March 6, 1969.

students in the decision-making function.” Knight expressed disappointment in the students’ reactions. He saw it as a “tragic irony” that students would act out in such a manner when many faculty members questioned students’ ability “to participate responsibly in the hard process” of decision-making. For Knight, ideas were to be judged on their merits, not by the force that backed them, and he insisted that this was central to the integrity of the university and to the principle of academic freedom. The students were uninterested in Knight’s concerns. Sensing that they had been slighted again, they asked whether they had any reason to remain in a university that did not respect student voice.⁵³

Scott Intervenes at Duke and UNC-CH

Because of the BSM’s march through Lenoir Hall and the student outcry about black studies at Duke, the specter of violence on campus was raised again, and Bob Scott was prepared for the worst. Scott stepped in on March 5 to handle the brewing trouble, announcing that four National Guard units would be standing by in Durham and that five squads of highway patrolmen to be were stationed in Chapel Hill. Scott also issued warrants for the arrest of the students involved in the Lenoir Hall incident. If ever there was a time for violence to break out at North Carolina’s colleges, that day seemed to be the one, and Scott was prepared to make good on his promises to maintain order on campus.

On Monday, March 10, 23 black undergraduates at Duke announced that they would withdraw immediately, to be joined by another 17 students at the end of the school year. That night, over 1,000 people joined a peaceful torchlight march in Durham to support the students. The next night, however, a second march devolved into violence. Rioters broke windows, attacked a city bus, and fought police after plans for a march to Duke’s campus fell apart. Six

⁵³ “Blacks may leave if committee not revised.” *The Chronicle*, March 6, 1969; “Why Blacks Need Student Power,” n.d., folder 7, Allen Building Takeover Collection, Duke University Archives; Knight, Douglas M. “ACEC Draft,” speech, March 7, 1969, folder 7, Allen Building Takeover Collection, Duke University Archives.

students also were arrested for attempting to set fire to Duke Forest. Durham Mayor Wense Grabarek called for a curfew the next day, which would be enforced by the National Guardsmen sent in by Governor Scott. Though two firebombings were reported and 26 area students were arrested for violating the curfew, the night of March 12 passed without major unrest.⁵⁴

With the city fearful of further violence, Duke's Undergraduate Faculty Council prepared to vote the next day on the supervisory structure of the black studies program. The faculty proposed a committee of five faculty and three students. The Afro-American Society countered with a committee of five faculty members, four students, and one other mutually agreed-upon member. When the proposals came to a vote, Duke's faculty rejected the AAS offer. After another march that evening, the black students scheduled a press conference for the next day to announce plans for a new school called Malcolm X Liberation University. Fuller and the students insisted that the new school would not be "a publicity stunt," but would instead offer a "first-rate and practical" education that was "not at present possible at Duke." Fuller and the AAS believed that Duke faculty and administrators were wholly unwilling to hear student voices, and they saw also that the city and state would crack down on them whenever their protests grew too large. They were weary of challenging institutions, and they had decided it was time to build their own.⁵⁵

At the same time, Governor Scott was determined to bring the strike in Chapel Hill to a close. On the morning of March 13, he ordered Chancellor Sitterson to clear Manning Hall, which the striking workers and the BSM had used as the site for meetings and for the soul food

⁵⁴ "1,000 Join Parade Here Supporting Black Group Dropping Out of Duke." *Durham Morning Herald*, March 11, 1969; "Violence Erupts in Wake of March." *Durham Morning Herald*, March 12, 1969; "Negroes, Duke Near Compromise; Guardsmen, Police Enforce Curfew" *Durham Morning Herald*, March 13, 1969; "Use of Fuller's Car By Students 'Beyond Intent.'" *Durham Morning Herald*, March 14, 1969; "UFC defeats compromise proposal." *The Chronicle*, March 14, 1969.

⁵⁵ "UFC defeats compromise proposal." *The Chronicle*, March 14, 1969; "Black students in exile start Malcolm X school." *The Chronicle*, March 14, 1969.

cafeteria. He also sought the arrest of all students involved in the March 4 Lenoir Hall incident. During the day, university administrators worked to evacuate the building while highway patrolmen began to gather outside. By midafternoon, the workers and students—counseled by Howard Fuller, playing the same role he had played at the Allen Building a month before—made the decision to leave. The patrolmen herded a crowd of 2,000 onlookers onto the quad, and though the situation was fraught with the potential for violence, no serious incidents occurred. Seven students sought for their involvement in the events at Lenoir turned themselves in without protest. Scott had successfully followed through on his commitment to enforce the law on campus, but in doing so, he brought UNC-CH closer to violence than it had been at any point during the 1968-69 school year.⁵⁶

The next day, Scott again reaffirmed his hard line on student protest. In remarks to the UNC System Board of Trustees, he said that under his watch, the university system would operate without regard to student protesters. He criticized administrators for “indecision, delay, and vacillation” and dismissed the notion that a conciliatory approach could help prevent “probable” violence and demonstrations. Despite his public proclamations, Scott privately asked Friday and Sitterson to determine the costs of an across-the-board 20-cent raise in hourly wages for non-academic employees. When Friday confirmed that the university system budget could withstand the raise, Scott approved salary increases for university personnel and announced the decision on March 21. Highway patrolmen had ended the occupation of Manning Hall, but concessions to laborers were the only way Scott could end the strike.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Williams, *It Wasn't Slavery Time*, 125-126, 207-214; “UNC building vacated by students, strikers,” *Greensboro Daily News*, March 14, 1969.

⁵⁷ Bob Scott, Remarks to the Executive Committee of the University of North Carolina, March 14, 1969, William Friday, letter to Bob Scott, March 20, 1969, General Administration/Consolidated University: Presidents, Office Records (William C. Friday files), Subgroup 1, Series 7, Subseries 1: Student Services.

The Foodworkers Strike and Greensboro Uprising at NC A&T

Though Scott's firm stand had delivered a blow to student protesters at Duke and UNC-CH, the governor could not stop a separate food workers' strike from emerging at NC A&T on March 13. Nelson Johnson, who had been determined to bridge the gap between campus and community, saw labor conditions for cafeteria workers as a potentially unifying issue. Johnson figured that students' proximity to the cafeteria workers (and the fact that some NC A&T students worked across town in UNC-Greensboro's cafeteria) would allow them to see the struggle of Greensboro's laboring classes firsthand. He also had an eye on the strike in Chapel Hill. Though the strikes were separately planned and had different targets (NC A&T, unlike UNC-CH, contracted with a private food service provider), Johnson drew on the student activist network in North Carolina to discuss strategies during that period.⁵⁸

The activists in Greensboro used a combination of large public demonstrations and a sustained boycott of NC A&T's cafeteria to pressure food service managers. The boycott consumed most of the strike organizers' energies. With 4,000 students participating, Johnson and his companions dedicated their time to securing food from community members and local grocery stores. Protesters' success in sustaining the boycott was a testament to the strength and solidarity of the coalition Johnson had brought together. Beyond the simple feat of organizing the boycott, the most notable single incident in the strike was a march to NC A&T President Lewis Dowdy's house on March 15. Roughly 2,500 students participated in the march, which devolved into a violent clash with the police. Just days after the riots in Durham and the near-riot in Chapel Hill, law enforcement had again intervened in a peaceful protest that would turn dangerous and volatile. The police response did not deter the strikers, and cafeteria workers won

⁵⁸ Nelson Johnson, interview, October 24, 1978.

a newly-negotiated contract in early April.⁵⁹

With the end of the strike in Greensboro, a temporary quiet took hold of the state's campuses. Activist work was exhausting, and some students were burnt out and dejected after long struggles against campus administrators and law enforcement. Scott's interventions had set a strong precedent, and in Durham and Chapel Hill, officials had contained further violence and protests. Greensboro seemed different. The violent march during the foodworkers' strike was but one indication of how volatile the community could be. It never took much for organizers to lose control of protests and demonstrations when radical, militant figures got involved. Activists and authorities in Greensboro would see this problem re-emerge with tragic consequences in May of 1969.

Nelson Johnson and other GAPP organizers spent much of the spring working with local students at Dudley High School, just blocks from NC A&T's campus. One of the students was Claude Barnes, a GAPP volunteer who, in April, announced his intent to run for student body president on a Black Power platform. After Barnes declared his candidacy, Dudley administrators barred him from appearing on the ballot. Barnes and his supporters boycotted the election, but on May 2 he won as a write-in candidate, receiving around 400 more votes than the runner-up. Outraged at Barnes's exclusion, Dudley students spent the next three weeks picketing and holding walkouts with the support of students at NC A&T. In multiple incidents, crowds of protesters entered the high school building to disrupt classes and encourage other students to walk out; Dudley was twice dismissed early due to the disruptions. Owen Lewis, a white school district representative responsible for handling the disturbances, rarely hesitated to bring in law enforcement, and students from both Dudley and NC A&T were arrested for trespassing and disturbing a public school. Like many white officials at the time, Lewis assumed that protesters

⁵⁹ Chafe, *Civilities and Civil Rights*, 183-185; Nelson Johnson, interview, October 24, 1978.

had a proclivity for violence and disorder, and he preferred to cut protests off as quickly as possible. He also repeatedly refused meetings with protesters and community members. Protesters felt ignored and disrespected, and their frustrations grew as law enforcement became more involved.⁶⁰

On May 21, following two days of tense picketing, police came to Dudley's campus after an observer reported that one of the protesters had a weapon. When officers arrived, students hurled rocks at them, and the police responded by dispersing the crowd with tear gas. Protesters fled the gas and eventually made their way to NC A&T's campus. That afternoon, Greensboro Mayor Jack Elam called Governor Scott to request assistance from state military personnel. With angry crowds throwing rocks at white motorists, vandalizing property, and setting fires across the city, Scott ordered National Guardsmen into Greensboro. Elam believed that Greensboro police were worn down after weeks of protest and hoped that fresher Guardsmen would be able to contain the situation.⁶¹

The arrival of 150 National Guardsmen on NC A&T's campus instead led to a shootout between students and authorities. Within three hours of the Guard's arrival, there were reports of sniper fire coming from Scott Hall, a campus dormitory. When law enforcement began to return fire after midnight, the campus quickly transformed into a war scene. Hundreds of Guardsmen and police were on hand, while posses of blacks and whites roved around to observe the conflict—or participate in it. NC A&T student Willie Grimes was in one of those groups. Grimes and his friends ventured out from campus to get food at a nearby restaurant. As they walked, a

⁶⁰ North Carolina Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, *The Trouble in Greensboro: A Report of an Open Meeting Concerning the Disturbances at Dudley High School and North Carolina A&T State University*, March 1970, in Willie Grimes/Scott Hall-National Guard-May 1969 Incident Records, Folder 1; "Former Dudley student was lightning rod of Greensboro Rebellion." *Greensboro News and Record*, 1999; "Student Leaders Blame Police, School Officials." *Greensboro Daily News*, May 25, 1969.

⁶¹ *The Trouble in Greensboro*; Jack Elam, interview, c. 1975; "The 50-Hour Ordeal: Greensboro's March to Three Days of Virtual Warfare." *Greensboro Daily News*, May 26, 1969.

bullet hit Grimes in the back of the head, sending him to the ground. His companions rushed to lift him into a car and sped to nearby Moses Cone Hospital. Doctors pronounced Grimes dead on arrival. Through all of the protests and tense situations on campuses in North Carolina to that point, no student had been killed. When that tragedy finally struck, it took the life of an innocent student with no real ties to the activist movement on campus. The identity of Grimes's killer remains unknown.⁶²

With gunfire and vandalism raging on into the morning of May 22, Elam declared a state of emergency, imposed an overnight curfew, and called for another 500 Guardsmen to enter the city. That afternoon, President Lewis Dowdy announced that his campus would be closed and vacated by 6 p.m. the following day. Scott came to Greensboro for a briefing and began planning a sweep of Scott Hall with Elam, the state attorney general, the director of the State Bureau of Investigation, and the leaders of the National Guard troops, all of whom were white. At 6:30 a.m. on May 23, Dowdy—who had never been consulted about the decision to sweep the building, despite his past successes in negotiating with students —was notified that Guardsmen were preparing to move in. Students were then given 15 minutes' notice to leave the building. At 7 a.m., Guardsmen entered Scott Hall, taking students from the building and searching for weapons, shooting the locks off doors when necessary, while a helicopter flew over campus, shooting tear gas on the students below. More than 200 students were taken into custody during the sweep, but law enforcement found only two functioning weapons. Authorities suspected that most of the weapons and ammunition were furtively removed from the building during an

⁶² *The Trouble in Greensboro*; "Witnesses Describe Grimes Death: Students' Signed Statements Recall a Night of Violence." *Greensboro Daily News*, July 7, 1969; "Coroner Says Grimes was Shot Only Once." *Greensboro Record*, May 26, 1969.

overnight pause in gunfire.⁶³

The gunmen in the Scott Hall incident were never identified, but it seems unlikely that Johnson and his allies in GAPP would have been involved in the shootings. Some believed that the resistance came from a contingent of Black Panthers led by NC A&T student Eric Brown, whose radicalism and penchant for violence were well-known. Though the gunmen's identities were not known, officials were quick to criticize outside agitators for their role in the conflict. Charles Dunn, the SBI director, noted that "outsiders will leave and leave the local ones to get in trouble," and Scott added that "hard-core militants" had used the Dudley election to create confrontation. A local judge issued an order barring Claude Barnes, Nelson Johnson, NC A&T's student body president Vincent McCullough, and Durham-based Howard Fuller from Dudley's campus. In their public statements about the incidents, Johnson and McCullough refuted the idea that they were outsiders. Johnson said that nothing about his three years organizing in Greensboro made him an "outsider," while McCullough turned the argument back on Governor Scott. "What does Governor Scott think he is?" McCullough said. "[He is] stirring up the National Guard, the police, and the Highway Patrol. Why, he's the ringleader of outside agitators." For Greensboro's young activists, state officials' attitudes were an absurd distortion of the reality of the situation. To those activists, white authorities had cracked down on protests that began peacefully, wreaking violence and destruction, rather than give a fair hearing to the views of the black community. But in this instance, unlike every other campus incident in North

⁶³ *The Trouble in Greensboro*; "Youth Dead, City Under Curfew - Four Shot in New Violence." *Greensboro Daily News*, May 23, 1969; "A&T Campus Is Cleared After Extended Violence." *Greensboro Daily News*, May 24, 1969; "City Tense, Quiet with Curfew Lifted." *Greensboro Daily News*, May 25, 1969; "Police Evaluate What Did Happen In City." *Greensboro Record*, May 26, 1969.

Carolina in 1968 and 1969, there had been a deadly toll as a consequence.⁶⁴

Conclusion

The Greensboro uprising highlights the major disconnect between student protesters and the authorities who responded to them; activists sought a voice, and officials sought order. For a time in the spring of 1969, it seemed impossible for those interests to coexist. When protests ratcheted up on campuses, college administrators tried to contain incidents through institutional channels and by engaging students in discussion and debate. These methods could sometimes placate students (and were obviously far more likely to do so than the threat of arrest or violence), but when tensions rose and protests bled out into communities, law enforcement could not be prevented from getting involved. Administrators saw their authority undermined as police and state officials intervened, seeking order through the application of the law. That use of legal and physical force could contain protests, but it could not remedy the alienation that students felt. As much as students disliked slow negotiations with university administrators, peaceful discussion was far preferable to the tear gas, clubbings, or gunfire that they endured when they engaged in demonstrations.

Over time, the protesters realized that there were fundamental, irreconcilable differences between their aims and those of the state's academic leaders and elected officials. The gap between students and institutional forces was perhaps best exemplified by Duke's debate over black studies. The issue of community-oriented content in the curriculum was significant in its own right, but the real sticking point was student voice in what would be taught. Students felt that their exclusion from the conversation denied their right to self-determination, and that they had been shut out of decision-making processes at a white-dominated institution with

⁶⁴ Claude Barnes, interview, September 27, 2002; "Scott, Dunn Put Blame on Agitators." *Greensboro Daily News*, May 23, 1969; "Scott Raps Militants For Violence In City." *Greensboro Daily News*, May 24, 1969; "It'll Take Time To Clean Up." *Greensboro Daily News*, May 26, 1969.

immense influence over their lives. Despite the students' calls for an equal voice, Duke was a university, and with that identity came a host of rules, norms, and precedents that would not be set aside because of the pressures of an upstart group. When dialogue failed, students took to direct action, only to be shut down by law enforcers' intervention. As a consequence, students turned toward the separatist strain of the Black Power ideology. If institutional powers would not move for the activists, the activists would have to build their own institutions, and, as the turmoil of that spring in 1969 fell away, black campus activists in North Carolina set themselves on a new path. They would no longer push for change from within: they would instead create an educational institution for themselves. In doing so, they would satisfy demands for cultural relevance and self-determination that had for so long been denied.

Chapter 3: **Malcolm X Liberation University**

The Black University

Malcolm X Liberation University's opening in Durham on October 25, 1969 marked the culmination of a protracted struggle of young black activists against North Carolina's colleges and universities. After years of demanding change, Howard Fuller, Nelson Johnson, and other black activists in North Carolina had tired of higher education's glacial bureaucracy and the law's violent force. They turned instead to a new project: the creation of an independent black educational institution. Hundreds of community members, many in traditional African garb, gathered for the opening celebration. MXLU had captured the attention of national figures, including Malcolm X's widow Betty Shabazz, who spoke at the event, and Stokely Carmichael, who wrote that the day was "one of the most important events that have taken place in our struggle." Crowds marched across Durham, chanting "Power to the people! Black, black power to the African people!" When a white engineer in a passing train sounded his whistle to interrupt the ceremonies, several attendees jumped aboard and demanded that he pass in silence. Nothing would detract from the celebratory mood as Fuller and his supporters commenced a bold new experiment in black education.⁶⁵

MXLU was one example of a "black university" created as an outgrowth of the black campus movement. The separatist elements in the Black Power movement suggested that education of, by, and for the black community should be the end goal, but activists nationwide had found that that transformation was nearly impossible within universities, though there were some exceptions. In 1968, students at City University of New York forced their administration to introduce an open admissions policy by arguing that higher education was a "right of postwar

⁶⁵ Progress report on MXLU, November 15, 1969, folder 3, Cleveland L. Sellers papers; "Opening of Malcolm X U. includes all-day ceremonies," *Chronicle*, October 28, 1969; "'Liberation' university opens," *Milwaukee Courier*, November 2, 1969.

U.S. citizenship” for all, including minorities and the working class. On the west side of Chicago, students and community members successfully convinced leaders at Crane College that the school had an obligation to better serve its majority black student body. The activists proposed that the school hire a black president, increase its number of black faculty, and implement a black-focused curriculum. The college’s administration openly welcomed the suggestions, and the school set out on a new course under the name of Malcolm X College. Most campuses, however, saw incremental change managed by white authorities, frequently in the form of black studies programs. For Fuller, that outcome was dissatisfying: even if black students could secure an academic program or some other concessions, they still would not have an independent black educational institution.⁶⁶

When confronted with student demands, especially in regards to a black-focused curriculum, universities typically attempted to craft their responses in ways that would be consistent with the norms of higher education. This approach offered both opportunities and threats for activists. On one hand, administrators knew how to create programs that would be sustainable and allow for the free intellectual expression of “blackness” within the university environment. On the other, new policies and programs were frequently perceived as watered-down or compromised versions of the initial student demands. Tradeoffs were necessary for student demands to be granted the protection of institutionalization, and for activists like Fuller, that exchange was not worth sacrificing ideological purity.

In some instances, activists’ hardline stances on self-determination inspired the creation of independent black schools. One example was the Nairobi Schools of East Palo Alto, California. Community members in East Palo Alto decided to design a new school system after a Stokely Carmichael visit during which he told integrationists that he did not “understand why

⁶⁶ Howard Fuller, interview, January 8, 2014; Biondi, *Black Revolution on Campus*, 116, 107-8.

you would be working this hard to send your children's minds to be educated by people who have oppressed you for 400 years." The Nairobi Schools educated minority students exclusively from early childhood to college age. The program's Pan-Africanist curriculum stressed that the struggle for black liberation was global, and taught nation-building skills that would be helpful for blacks everywhere.⁶⁷

Self-determination was central to the existence of institutions like the Nairobi Schools, Malcolm X Liberation University, and their peers. With the power to choose an intellectual or philosophical course, the leaders of these schools exercised a freedom that up to that point had been denied to blacks in higher education. Curricula at these schools taught pride in the black identity, revealed "objective" knowledge as politicized with a Eurocentric bias, and focused on "relevance" both in teaching practical skills and developing a consciousness of black communities. In the colleges and universities these activists left behind, there was no existing space for those emerging approaches to black education, which made the creation of black universities an important part of the black campus movement's evolution. Moderate interpretations of Black Power might suggest that white institutions could be remade to be "blacker," but in cases like that of MXLU, that work was foregone in favor of the development of an independent black-controlled institution.

At the same time, Fuller and others at MXLU found that an institution founded on a controversial, separatist ideology would face enormous logistical barriers in its operations. It seemed obvious that MXLU would have to be careful in framing its mission and purpose if their programs were to secure funds from white benefactors,⁶⁸ but the school's organizers were

⁶⁷ Biondi, *Black Revolution on Campus*, 221-226.

⁶⁸ Some have argued that white financial or institutional support ultimately had the effect of contaminating the hard separatism of Black Power in the creation of black studies programs and black universities. Both Fabio Rojas's *From Black Power to Black Studies* and Noliwe M. Rooks's *White Money/Black Power* discuss the role of white

surprised by the extent to which the black community resisted the project. In their activist zeal, MXLU's leaders mistakenly assumed broad support for their program. If a school taught about black identity, it would need to acknowledge competing views about what it meant to be black in America and globally. If it called knowledge political, it would have to grapple with its own political motives and their implications. If it called for relevance to the community, it would need to understand and be a part of the community. MXLU's program was just one vision for black education, and its competition with other views complicated the school's operations throughout its brief existence.

The New University Searches for Stability

Despite threats to the contrary, no black students left Duke University in the spring of 1969 when they were denied equal representation on the committee to create a black studies program. Even so, Malcolm X Liberation University continued to develop. On Saturday mornings during the spring, students and community members from Durham gathered together for discussions of topics related to the black experience. In early May, planners conferenced to lay out the vision for a permanent, independent institution. Two weeks later, those organizers released a proposal for the university, claiming that it would “provide an ideological [and] practical methodology for meeting the physical, social, psychological, economic, [and] cultural needs of Black People.” The proposal declared that the school would be based on “self-determination and the undying love of black people” and would teach topics as varied as community organizing, economics, and self-defense. Students in the two-year program would spend their first year learning about black civilizations, languages, and history. In their second

philanthropists at the Ford Foundation in shaping black studies programs, finding that though Black Power-influenced activists made the demands, responses and implementation were shaped by whites, who typically favored integration. Devin Fergus makes a similar argument about MXLU specifically in *Liberalism, Black Power, and the Making of American Politics, 1965-1980*. He claims that funds from liberal white benefactors, notably the national Episcopal Church, “helped contain MXLU, even as critics assumed Black Power ran amok over it.”

year, they would be trained in technical skills. It was a program unlike anything that could have been achieved at Duke or any of North Carolina's other colleges.⁶⁹

Howard Fuller and other university leaders decided that the ideological bent of the new university would be Pan-Africanist, explaining the struggle of blacks as a global movement. At the time, two dominant strains of Black Power philosophy existed: globally-minded Pan-Africanism and U.S.-focused nationalism. The tension between the two emerged at MXLU, and the ultimate decision to focus on Pan-Africanism affected many aspects of the university's operations. It defined the type of student the school would recruit, the type of faculty the school would hire, and the type of courses that would be offered. Most fundamentally, it determined what the school's purpose would be: to prepare students for the work of nation-building both at home and in Africa—wherever the black struggle for liberation took place. Though few written accounts of the university's development exist, Fuller has said that the decision to focus on Pan-Africanism created internal debates that plagued the school throughout its existence.⁷⁰

Fuller emerged as the driving force behind MXLU. The self-styled “Head Nigger In Charge” made the case for the school in public forums and led its operations behind the scenes. Over the summer, Fuller decided to leave the Foundation for Community Development to focus on the school's fall opening. By that point, there was significant interest: the school had received 65 applications for admission, many of them from North Carolina, but some from as far away as Massachusetts and Mississippi. Even so, the school was in a perilous financial situation, with only \$850 in donations. Fuller prepared grant applications to a number of organizations, including the national Episcopal Church and his former employer, the FCD. The school faced

⁶⁹ Malcolm X Liberation University Fact Sheet, May 14, 1969, Cleveland L. Sellers Papers, folder 3; “Malcolm X U Set To Open Doors Oct. 27,” *Durham Morning Herald*, October 10, 1969; Howard Fuller, interview, January 8, 2014.

⁷⁰ Howard Fuller, interview, January 8, 2014.

added challenges because it was committed to keeping its program ideologically pure. Fuller was firm that the university would not “accept money that was going to have us be who we weren’t trying to be,” but at the same time, he recognized that this position would make it difficult to secure funds. The pool of organizations and individuals who would support a separatist university named for Malcolm X was already small, and it would take a leap of faith for one of that group to offer funding with minimal say in how a donation would affect the school’s curriculum and philosophy.⁷¹

In October, MXLU received a major boost from the national Episcopal Church. The church offered a \$45,000 grant through its Urban Crisis Program, which, with its charge to “help the poor and disenfranchised gain social, political and economic power,” was receptive to Black Power-driven initiatives. Though MXLU met the criteria set out by the Episcopal Church’s national office, the grant outraged members of the Diocese of North Carolina. The response united the church’s liberal members, who believed in integration over separatism, and its conservative adherents, who disapproved of Fuller’s radicalism. One pastor wrote that “it would not have been easy to find two names more calculated to raise the hackles of the white community” than those of Malcolm X and Howard Fuller. Thomas A. Fraser, the bishop of the Diocese, bore much of the public backlash. Despite his insistence that the Diocese was not consulted in the process, dissatisfied church members wrote to him in anger and cut back their donations. To those people, Fuller’s reputation and the Black Power positioning of the university were enough to cast skepticism over the endeavor.⁷²

⁷¹ “Fuller Granted FCD Leave to Push Malcolm X Work; James L. Lee Replacing Him,” *Durham Morning Herald*, July 23, 1969; Progress Report on Malcolm X Liberation University, c. July 1969, folder 3, Cleveland L. Sellers papers; Malcolm X Liberation University Fact Sheet, May 14, 1969, folder 3, Cleveland L. Sellers papers; Howard Fuller, interview, January 8, 2014.

⁷² “Malcolm X School To Get \$45,000,” *Durham Morning Herald*, October 14, 1969; “About that Money to Malcolm X U.,” *Chapel Hill Weekly*, October 22, 1969.

Though the grant did not solve all of MXLU's funding problems, it gave the school the financial security necessary to open at the end of October. Fifty-one students enrolled for the first year, each of whom were charged \$300 in tuition. The hope was that those funds would shore up the school's financial condition, but in actuality most of the students were unable to finance their education and living expenses, creating additional burdens for the school. The school's student population shrank to 19 by the middle of its first year. Whether because of an inability to pay expenses, disciplinary expulsion, or disagreements with the school's educational approach, many of MXLU's first crop of students left the school behind. The school's leadership had strong reason to doubt that MXLU would last long. By the spring of 1970, there had been discussion of moving the school from Durham to a place where community support and funding would be easier to acquire.⁷³

The new university had not fully found its footing, but it was largely successful in executing its stated educational mission in the first year. A democratic Council of Elders composed of administrators, students, and community members governed the university. The school made a strong commitment to limit white involvement in instruction and the operations of the university, instead drawing on local black professionals to serve as teachers and mentors. Eight subjects were taught in the academic curriculum, including black political thought and cultural expression, the colonized mind, community organizing, political economy, and physical development. The school also set up five technical concentrations in communications, engineering, food science, biomedicine, and education. Though some courses were initially ill-defined—starting out as black history or black English, for instance—they still spoke to the

⁷³ Proposal for Malcolm X Liberation University, Spring 1970, folder 3, Cleveland L. Sellers Papers.

school's vision for an education that explored the black identity.⁷⁴

MXLU in Greensboro

By the end of its first year of operation, MXLU was seeking new facilities. A grant proposal from the spring of 1970 said that an anticipated expansion in size necessitated the move, but Fuller and the other leaders of the university recognized other benefits to moving. In a May 1970 meeting, the discussion gravitated toward Greensboro, where it was believed that “the political situation” would be more amenable to the school and where “technical assistance [would] be available through A&T.” Historical accounts of MXLU have stressed how the separatist and Pan-Africanist feelings at the heart of the university’s philosophy rankled some in Durham’s black community, where a thriving middle class tended to advocate integration. In contrast, black leaders in Greensboro were more receptive to the younger, more radical voices like that of Nelson Johnson, who, regardless of his ideological leanings, had proven himself as a skillful and diligent community organizer. Fuller believed that Johnson’s successes in Greensboro promised a more positive climate for the school there.⁷⁵

Fuller’s assumptions would ultimately prove to be miscalculations. Historically, Greensboro’s racial struggle focused on desegregation, most famously in the Woolworth’s sit-ins of 1960. Many of Greensboro’s black leaders looked on Pan-Africanism and black nationalism with skepticism, and they feared how the white community might respond to an open endorsement of MXLU’s program. They also felt that MXLU did not provide a worthwhile education, with one community leader remarking, “None of us could see really how this kind of education was going to help, be useful, or be fulfilling to black young people.” The concerns

⁷⁴ Proposal for Malcolm X Liberation University, Spring 1970, folder 3, Cleveland L. Sellers Papers; Minutes of the Council of Elders Meeting, May 1, 1970, folder 5, Cleveland L. Sellers papers; Howard Fuller, interview, January 8, 2014.

⁷⁵ Fergus, *Liberalism, Black Power, and the Making of American Politics*, 77-78.

about MXLU were never more apparent than when the school made a bid for the 300-acre Palmer Institute in nearby Sedalia. The Palmer Institute was founded in 1901 as a preparatory school for black students. By the late 1960s was in a perilous financial bind. With respect for the school's heritage and a recognition that the campus infrastructure and space would allow the university to grow, MXLU moved to acquire the campus after Palmer closed in the fall of 1971. The school's leaders did not anticipate how forcefully Greensboro's black community would push back against the bid. Even with no other serious counterbids, Palmer's trustees were reluctant to sell to MXLU, and its board chairman resigned when it looked like MXLU would successfully make the purchase. Meanwhile, many Greensboro community leaders, both white and black, scrambled to entice other groups into acquiring Palmer. In the face of staunch opposition, MXLU withdrew its bid. The school was forced to recognize that its stated commitment to the community did not guarantee community support or philosophical alignment.⁷⁶

The Palmer Institute fiasco was not the only incident to highlight public skepticism about the young university's future. The backlash against the Episcopal Church's grant to MXLU was strong and swift: in the fall of 1969, the Diocese of North Carolina received \$160,000 less in donations than expected, which temporarily forced it to stop offering funds to the national church. Though Bishop Thomas A. Fraser tried to defend the church to his diocese after the initial grant, the ensuing financial struggles appeared to wear him down. When he announced the interruption in support to the national church, Fraser charged that the grant undermined "simple management procedures" and left the Diocese in "an impossible position" by not including local input in the grantmaking process. The Episcopal Church would ultimately change some of its grant

⁷⁶ Fergus, *Liberalism, Black Power, and the Making of American Politics*, 80-82; Cecil Bishop, interview, October 13, 1977; "Fuller: Mellowed by New Approach," *Winston-Salem Journal*, n.d.

procedures as a result. When MXLU's grant was up for renewal in 1972, many in Greensboro, both black and white, opposed continued funding to the school. The eventual rejection was easy to foresee, given MXLU's politicized image.⁷⁷

Other grantors shared a sometimes misguided suspicion of MXLU's political leanings. The Cummins Engine Foundation, which took an interest in the school's technical training in engineering and mechanics, gave a \$35,000 grant attached to a series of politically-minded conditions. The rules prevented MXLU from participating in any sort of electioneering, lobbying, or voter registration and required the school to return any money for projects and purposes not laid out in the grant application. Though he agreed to the conditions to secure the grant, Fuller in fact never allowed the university to engage in the sort of activism that led to the school's creation. Though he said that individuals would be allowed to pursue that work, "the university itself would not be involved in political action." If Cummins had actually intended to shape the school's politics with the grant's conditions, those efforts were misguided and indicate just how little was known about the school's agenda outside of its student body and administration.⁷⁸

The school's associations with political activism frequently led to a perception that its students were unruly or misbehaved, but the school actually promoted strong character traits and emphasized strict rules of personal conduct. One student handbook stated that above all, students should display a "positive character which can be outlined as honest, cooperative, and productive." The handbook claimed that to best serve black people, all those involved with MXLU would need to "be in the best physical, mental, and emotional conditions"; it accordingly asked students "to eliminate habits that are detrimental to the success and survival of the

⁷⁷ "Bishop Interrupts N.C. Diocese Support To National Church Unit," *Durham Morning Herald*, January 20, 1970; "Malcolm X University Going to Greensboro," *Durham Morning Herald*, August 21, 1970.

⁷⁸ Fergus, *Liberalism, Black Power, and the Making of American Politics*, 77.; "Malcolm X U Set To Open Doors Oct. 27," *Durham Morning Herald*, October 10, 1969; Howard Fuller, interview, January 8, 2014.

institution . . . such as drinking, maltreatment of brothers and sisters, and abusive language.” The school also made attendance mandatory for all classes and placed male and female students in separate homes to discourage sexual dalliances. Some more rebellious students found the policies onerous, but generally, the rules were accepted.⁷⁹

MXLU Reconsiders Its Image and Philosophy

Recognizing the vast gulf between the public perceptions of MXLU and its actual program, Fuller opened himself and the school to answer press inquiries in the spring of 1972. Aside from the school’s opening, the Episcopal Church’s grant, and the move to Greensboro, MXLU had received almost no press coverage since 1969. Fuller said that he “thought we might be misunderstood” if the press saw the school in its early days, but had since realized that seclusion only perpetuated misunderstanding. “The Palmer thing showed me there was a certain kind of isolation surrounding the school,” he explained to reporters. “It’s not easy for any institution to operate, and when you don’t have the kind of support others have, it makes it more difficult.” Fuller had always expected opposition from whites, but when he saw how the school’s isolation had soured its relationship with Greensboro’s black community, he changed course. As he told one reporter, “There are different ways to get something done. I guess you could say that I decided I might be more effective if I tried things differently.” External pressures had posed too many obstacles in securing financial support. With his new, more open approach, Fuller hoped that he would be able to put MXLU on firmer footing.⁸⁰

By the time the 1972-73 school year began, Fuller had also begun a philosophical transformation that brought longstanding debates about the school’s ideological directions to the fore. Fuller traveled to Mozambique in 1971 to learn more about Africa and spend time with

⁷⁹ MXLU Student Handbook, n.d., folder 4, Cleveland L. Sellers papers.

⁸⁰ “Controversial School Comes of Age,” *Greensboro Daily Record*, n.d.; “Fuller: Mellowed by New Approach,” *Winston-Salem Journal*, n.d.

freedom fighters. His experience was revelatory: for all of MXLU's rhetoric about being a revolutionary university, Fuller realized that "it's one thing to discuss revolution. It's another thing to be in one." In Africa and after his return, Fuller began to see the MXLU model of training students to be Pan-Africanist nation-builders as naive. In Africa, blackness was not the unifying quality that Fuller had believed it to be; he saw firsthand that some African blacks violently oppressed other blacks. When he returned to America, he began to consider alternative views. Some in the school continued to believe in the Pan-Africanist approach, but Fuller increasingly gravitated toward Marxist class analysis and a focus on the black experience in America.⁸¹

Given Fuller's revelations in Africa, it was not immediately clear where the university would move from its ideological roots. In his own life, Fuller publicly distanced himself from the separatist and militant rhetoric that drove the black student movement in its early days. In 1972, he worked with a black-controlled, white-financed organization called the Interreligious Foundation for Community Organizations to secure funds for MXLU. He swore off revolutionary violence, and instead emphasized more traditional, restrained methods of change, such as voting and moral suasion. As Devin Fergus has written, "by 1972, MXLU's president appeared to prioritize nonviolence and negotiating—the very outcomes the school's namesake, Malcolm X, had feared most would result" from black activists' engagement with whites. It was a far cry from the confrontational posture held by the black student activists who had first called Duke's Allen Building by the name of Malcolm X Liberation University in February 1969.⁸²

Following the 1972-73 school year, MXLU's leaders convened to weigh the pros and cons of entering a fifth year of operation. Ultimately, the school's inability to find stable funding

⁸¹ Howard Fuller, interview, January 8, 2014.

⁸² Fergus, *Liberalism, Black Power, and the Making of American Politics*, 88; Howard Fuller, interview, January 8, 2014.

sources and its underdeveloped relationships with the black community in Greensboro left no easy path forward for MXLU. As it had been since the beginning, funding was the largest obstacle; as Fuller has said, “Great ideas are great ideas, but if you don’t have money, they’re just great ideas.” With little other option, Fuller announced the school’s closure at the end of June 1973. He asserted that the school had met its core goals of teaching a black-centered curriculum and giving technical training to black students and added that the school had lasted only as long as it was relevant to the needs of the black community. Fuller recognized that institutions outlived their usefulness when they failed to be dynamic; he also believed that inertia was not sufficient cause to keep an institution alive. If an institution could not serve the people it was intended to serve and could not accomplish the goals it was established to accomplish—and, indeed, if the institution saw its purpose and intellectual foundation eroded—that institution had no reason to exist. By 1973, Fuller had surmised that such a time had come for MXLU.⁸³

Conclusion

Malcolm X Liberation University’s tumultuous history contrasted starkly with the smooth institutionalization of black studies at UNC-CH. In the spring of 1969, after members of the Black Student Movement presented a list of demands to Chancellor J. Carlyle Sitterson, the university began to develop an African and African American Studies curriculum. Raymond Dawson, Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, identified the university’s existing courses related to black history and culture and convened a committee of four faculty and three students to investigate the issue in greater depth. Dawson told committee members that he had chosen them based on their expressed interest in an African and African American Studies program. Two of the student members were BSM representatives; one, Evelyn Lewis, told the *Daily Tar*

⁸³ “Malcolm X Meets Goals and Closes,” *Greensboro Daily News*, June 28, 1973; Howard Fuller, interview, January 8, 2014.

Heel that she believed the committee was “sincere” in its work. The mutual suspicion between Duke’s faculty and its black students had no parallel at UNC-CH.⁸⁴

The committee worked diligently over the next two months, drawing on student input, faculty recommendations, and the experiences of other colleges and universities that had implemented Black Studies programs. The committee outlined four goals that would characterize the program: defining “blackness;” learning black identity; preserving black cultures; and understanding “the third world concept.” The content seemed similar to that offered at black universities like MXLU, but lacked those schools’ commitment to independence and self-determination for black students. The committee drew from the examples of two pioneering black studies departments in developing its proposal: San Francisco State, the site of the first attempts to introduce black studies, and Yale, an academically elite institution that had welcomed the new discipline. Like Yale’s program, UNC-CH’s African and African American Studies curriculum was built around a concentration in established disciplines such as history and English, with core courses in African or African American Studies to provide context. Like San Francisco State’s curriculum, the committee’s plan highlighted the importance of community involvement and the development of concrete skills along with an academic view of black culture. On April 16, 1969, the committee submitted its final proposal, which, in addition to outlining academic requirements, recommended using black graduate students as instructors, pursuing exchange programs with predominantly black colleges, and encouraging students to participate in community service and internships. On May 9, with no opposition, UNC-CH’s

⁸⁴ Raymond H. Dawson to J. Carlyle Sitterson, memorandum, December 13, 1968, folder 13, Records of the Chancellor: J. Carlyle Sitterson, 1966-72; “Dawson Appoints Members to Afro-American Body,” *Daily Tar Heel*, February 7, 1969; Raymond H. Dawson to African and African American Studies Committee, February 5, 1969, folder 1, Townsend Ludington papers.

faculty approved the new program in African and African-American Studies.⁸⁵

The introduction of UNC-CH's black studies program is worth viewing alongside MXLU because it illuminates an alternative process of institutionalizing social change. To be sure, there were many differences between the two experiences. Students in Chapel Hill never agitated as strongly as the Duke students did for representation on their planning committee. Though community engagement never became a central component of the curriculum, faculty at UNC-CH did not openly doubt its appropriateness in an academic discipline. While MXLU was defined by its separatist, Pan-Africanist ideology, UNC-CH's program would examine the black identity and the third world concept from a number of angles, often within frameworks, disciplines, or ideologies already present in the university environment. Compromises were made on both sides throughout the process at UNC-CH, while discussions at Duke were marked by a constant tension that would eventually inspire the creation of an independent school. The most significant difference is obvious: African and African American Studies at UNC-CH has survived, while MXLU has not. The reason for this has much to do with how freedom is defined in higher education.

MXLU saw freedom as interwoven with self-determination: it came from a group's ability to chart a course for itself. Independence from existing institutions of higher learning allowed Fuller and his fellow activists to build the university they believed was right for the black community. In doing so, they made decisions that were challenged or rejected outright by potential funders and even by other blacks. MXLU exercised the freedom to create something new, but because it committed to one ideological direction, the school lost out on the intellectual

⁸⁵ Faculty Committee Report, folder 1, Townsend Ludington Papers; Meeting notes from March 5, 1969, folder 1, Townsend Ludington papers; Bunzel, "Black Studies at SF State" from *The Public Interest*, folder 3, Townsend Ludington papers; Yale University African American Study Group, "A Proposal for a Major in Afro-American Studies," folder 3, Townsend Ludington papers.

diversity made possible by the type of freedom central to traditional academia. That freedom is about inquiry, expression, and thought. It welcomes dissent, nurtures new perspectives, and embraces uncertainty as a matter of course, all within the safe harbor that a college campus can provide. It is impossible to overlook that the university environment provided black studies programs with far more material stability than an institution like MXLU could provide for itself. At the same time, it is worth noting how universities appropriated the idea of the “black university” by molding student demands to the context of higher education. While the old calls for community-based, relevant education and representative decision-making have mostly fallen away, the use of Black Power as an intellectual foundation for social and cultural critique within the academy has been allowed to persist.

Conclusion:
The Legacy of the Black Campus Movement in North Carolina

Late in 2012, an independent investigation of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill's Department of African and African American Studies found that two members of the department had committed academic fraud. Those individuals authorized grade changes and offered courses that failed to provide rigorous educational experiences—in some cases only meeting once or twice. Unfortunately for the department, the ensuing controversy extended beyond the actions of two rogue employees, as some critics used the findings to question the validity of African American Studies as a discipline. Weeks later, newly-inaugurated Governor Pat McCrory invoked the scandal in a comment on the value of a liberal arts education, remarking, "[Students] took Swahili on a night study course where they didn't have to do any work, and they got B-pluses. What are we teaching these courses for if they're not going to help get a job?" Ignoring the real issue—that some courses were effectively nonexistent—McCrory implied that the content itself served no purpose.⁸⁶

McCrory's critique was one of a long line of criticisms leveled at the discipline since it was introduced to colleges and universities in the late 1960s. From the outset, programs struggled to recruit top faculty (and in many cases *any* faculty with a Ph.D.), and administrators found that even black academics were cool to the idea of separating themselves and their work from established academic disciplines. Departments today typically rely on adjuncts and joint faculty and are frequently among colleges and universities' smallest programs. Shortly after the introduction of black studies, programs also emerged in women's and gender studies, Asian American studies, Chicano studies, and more. Critics of these disciplines ask where schools would draw the line for any minority group making a claim for an "area studies" program. More,

⁸⁶ "McCrory: Fund higher education based on results," WRAL.com, January 29, 2013.

those critics wonder why universities should continue to offer and fund programs that do not appear to teach anything other than a critical cultural perspective.⁸⁷

One short answer is that the conditions that led to black studies programs have changed remarkably little in the half century since the height of the black campus movement. Black students remain highly underrepresented in American colleges and universities. At UNC-CH, for instance, it was revealed in 2013 that only 98 black males matriculated into a first-year class of nearly 4,000. At Duke University, black students comprise only 10 percent of the student body in a state that is 21 percent black. These facts say nothing about lower rates of degree completion, higher rates of remedial courses taken, and greater difficulties with affordability faced by minority students. These facts also say little about social conditions faced by minorities on these campuses, though the isolation and ostracization continue. In 2014, black students at the University of Michigan launched demand-driven protests and demonstrations, calling for inclusion and greater representation in a campus they saw as hostile to their identity. The “Being Black at UMich” protests would not have been out of place in 1969, nor would the students’ demands: they included a new multicultural center, increased financial aid for minorities, expanded housing options for students of low socioeconomic status, and increased focus on education about “America’s historical treatment and marginalization of colored groups.” Faced with these demands and national headlines, the administration began to negotiate with protesters.⁸⁸

The slow evolution of race relations on college campuses in North Carolina and

⁸⁷ In *White Money/Black Power*, Noliwe M. Rooks offers particularly thoughtful and insightful criticism about the state of the field. Rooks relates her own experience as the founder and chair of an African American Studies department at the University of Missouri-Kansas City and suggested that her own hiring and the department’s founding were effectively meant to make the school appear more diverse. After completing a three year grant to develop the program, she left the school.

⁸⁸ “Only 98 of nearly 4,000 new first-years are black males,” *Daily Tar Heel*, October 10, 2013; “Being Black at University of Michigan organizers threaten 'physical action' if demands aren't met,” MLive.com, January 26, 2014.

elsewhere speaks to the difficulty of achieving a truly inclusive university environment. There should be no question that if an institution opens itself to a new group, that institution must accept some measure of responsibility for the success of the new group in that environment. For this to be possible, those former outsiders cannot simply be present in a new space: they must also have clear channels through which to help define their opportunities and experiences. This was the central concern of activists in the black campus movement, and the lack of such channels has persisted to the present day. Most current minority students do not participate in the forms of public activism seen in the late 1960s, but so long as they feel marginalized, they will hold grievances with the institutions that created or allowed those alienating conditions. To avoid this, colleges and universities must always be aware of the subtle ways in which they can exclude their underrepresented populations, even when they offer a nominal promise of inclusion.

The story of the black campus movement in North Carolina demonstrates that underprivileged groups, when focused and united, can convince colleges and universities to listen to their concerns, but they cannot always control the means by which change occurs. It was a true accomplishment to have organized and strategized so cohesively that bureaucratic, conservative institutions were persuaded in mere months to raise laborers' wages, introduce new curricula, and make strides in improving campus life for black students. At the same time, this story shows the immense power that those institutions held (and hold) in students' lives. That power tends to maintain itself; it welcomes only the change that it can control. In practice, this meant that student activists' proposals were molded into policies and programs defined by the educational bureaucracy. Housing for black students became Africa-centric living learning communities; open admissions became "experimental" affirmative action policies; "relevant," community-based black education became black studies departments. The strong institutional

critiques that students leveled toward colleges and universities were heard, and activists were successful in the sense that they made administrators reconsider institutional goals and priorities. Their participation beyond that was severely limited.

In most cases, schools meant no malice in responding to protests as they did, and they likely even meant genuine good. The campus administrators involved in North Carolina's protests were all considered moderate, sympathetic liberals, and even Governor Bob Scott, despite his heavy-handedness, was considered a strong advocate for educational opportunity in the state. Regardless of any officials' intentions, their positions disregarded the spirit of self-determination that inspired the black campus movement and made Black Power so critical to it. Even with Black Power's rhetorical and philosophical split from the desegregationist focus of the "classical" civil rights movement, black campus activists found themselves in a familiar power dynamic: well-organized representatives of a minority group asking for established authorities to take them seriously and include them in the determination of their own rights, freedoms, and privileges. Campus authorities were slow to grant that right to self-determination in large part because of how they viewed the principle of academic freedom—the freedom of the university to define its own agenda, to allow its community members to pursue truth without coercion or restraint, and to shield itself from external judgment and critique. With minority students still viewed as "outsiders" on campuses, their activism was the sort of force that administrators believed academic freedom should generally protect against. While open to hearing critiques and willing to consider change, administrators were steadfast in refusing to grant decision-making authority to students.

Howard Fuller and his colleagues came to grips with this when they opened Malcolm X Liberation University, which was perhaps the truest expression of Black Power in North

Carolina's black campus movement. The best way for black activists to control educational institutions, they reasoned, was to build those institutions themselves. For all of their organizing power and attention-grabbing displays, these activists did not fulfill the Black Power call until they had a school that they could honestly call their own. They found, of course, that creating an institution was at least as difficult as (if not more so than) convincing an institution to change, and the experiment petered out within a matter of years. Since MXLU's close and the black campus movement's ebb, black students in North Carolina and elsewhere have been left with a system of higher education that has never fully embraced them. While the intellectual currents of the black campus movement, such as its focus on black culture, have since been legitimated as areas of academic concern, its political goals of representative power in higher education remain unmet.

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