

State's black colleges: Differences beyond race

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BATON ROUGE — There is some talk developing of just closing down Louisiana's black colleges and merging them with the white institutions.

The talk, of course, has developed since the tragedy and earlier demonstrations that led to the police-student confrontation at Southern University here.

Gov. Edwin W. Edwards, frustrated and perhaps somewhat bitter over the turn of events, suggested that if the students don't want to use the facilities for education then they might be put to other uses.

He has called on the Division of Administration for financial information about expenditures at the predominantly black colleges where unrest has been the byword for the past three weeks.

Earlier merger effort

Several years ago when the federal government was promoting integration at all levels of education, considerable effort was expended to start a merger of black schools with their white counterparts.

There are two basic problems confronting blacks in such a situation. Many black students, undereducated in their precollege years, might not be able to make it through Louisiana State University while they could through a less demanding black institution. Black faculty members would not have the same prestige in a white institution that they have in black schools.

There are black militants who insist on maintaining a separate system for identity purposes. But they want to run the show.

Gov. Edwards, who received a strong vote from the black community in his race for governor, feels he has expended every effort to set up machinery for resolving black grievances.

Edwards disappointed

Although he insists it was not his doing, there seems little doubt that at least his aides were responsible for giving in to one crucial student demand at Southern in New Orleans when Dean Emmett Bashful professed his resignation to prevent the kind of confrontation that occurred in Baton Rouge.

When Edwards appeared before the Board of Education to urge rejection of

Bashful's resignation, he obviously was dejected that the students had not returned to classes and restored the campus to normalcy while their grievances were being worked out by a 23-member committee.

Rolling of heads

Bashful purportedly was induced to offer his resignation in exchange for another job in the education system, but there are re-

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ports that considerably more pressure may have been applied, including the threat of revealing student affidavits alleging misconduct.

Students have sought the resignations of both Bashful and Southern President Dr. G. Leon Netterville. The demands have placed state officials, even though they may recognize the legitimacy of many of the grievances, in an untenable position. They feel they cannot merely turn the hiring and firing and running of the institutions over to students.

Perhaps more than any other group or agency, the State Board of Education is responsible for whatever deplorable conditions exist at the black institutions—academically and physically.

Cooling-off period?

The board, charged with the responsibility of operating all state colleges outside the LSU system, has been content to let the black institutions float along on a different basis from their white counterparts. The idea apparently has been that they provide an outlet for blacks in the state to achieve an education that they might not otherwise get. But there is the question of whether they are actually getting an education.

Many of the grievances voiced about conditions at the Southern campus seem petty, but are the kind that should have been taken care of before it became necessary for the governor to handle them.

The thrust of the students' arguments against the present administrators is that they did nothing to correct the grievances, forcing them to seek other methods.

The Thanksgiving holidays may provide a cooling-off period and an opportunity to set things back on a course toward resolution.

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