

# Settlement Won't Wipe Out

NOV 20 1972

NEW ORLEANS

NOV 20 1972

THREE

## Problems at Southern, SUNO

By JACK WARDLAW

No settlement of the current disputes at Southern University in Baton Rouge and its New Orleans branch is going to make the institutions' problems go away.

Over the weekend, progress was made at SUNO in resolving differences among students, faculty and administra-

tion, and it appears that campus will reopen for classes Nov. 27.

The Baton Rouge campus, where bloodshed last week added to the tension and anguish, is also scheduled to reopen the Monday after Thanksgiving, but under just what circumstances remain a question.

The immediate problem involves the semester's credits for students at both campuses. Students, both the rebel activists and non-protestors, have missed a lot of classes, and doubt has been expressed that the work can be made up.

Over the long run, the problems are even knottier.

They raise the whole ques-

tion of black education and its place in a mixed society. And their roots go deep into the history of Southern and SUNO.

The two were founded at opposite ends of the Jim Crow era, Southern in 1880 and SUNO in 1959. Southern began at the end of Reconstruction as the South was settling into the segregationist system for nearly a century. SUNO was one of the last-ditch efforts by the white legislature to avoid racial mixing at LSUNO, being born about the same time.

Southern went through long years of underfinancing and isolation, tucked away in the suburb of Scotlandville north of Baton Rouge. Under the administration of Gov. John J. McKeithen, it grew by leaps and bounds as he persuaded the legislature to funnel more construction funds into it, and

today it is the largest predominantly black university in the nation, with more than 9,000 students.

SUNO's history, though shorter, has been parallel. It opened in 1959 with a modest few buildings and only 500 students. It shared the growth in the 1960s and, barring a few mudholes, is a modern-appearing campus in an attractive part of town.

But with the modern buildings has not come academic excellence. Several reasons have been advanced for this:

1. The preference of the legislature and the state Board of Education for spending construction funds, as opposed to salaries for faculty and staff.

Cynics suggest this might have something to do with the tendency of construction contracts to get into politics while faculty salaries provide less room for manipulation.

2. The quality of students who enroll. This is not exclusively a black problem. State law forces its colleges and universities to admit any bona fide Louisiana high school

### Analysis

graduate. Students whose academic performance is poor in the first place gravitate to those schools with lower standards. Thus a cycle of substandard education is begun and perpetuated.

3. The problem of attracting adequate faculty. This goes beyond the matter of pay scales. Ambitious scholars tend to regard places like Southern as backwaters and shun them. A pattern develops of such schools' hiring their own graduates as instructors, and another cycle is born.

4. The inability of students to articulate their objections. The students are angry, and

not without reason. They are spending their money and four years of their lives to get a diploma that will be scorned by personnel directors. But when they express their anger, it comes out in burning of flags, demands for administrators to resign, massive confrontations that lead to tragedy, impossible plans for student control of campuses and seemingly nit-picking complaints about poor cafeteria food. All of this costs them public support for a cause that Gov. Edwin W. Edwards and many others believe is, in part, just.

5. A university administration that harks back to the days when black education was a little island unto itself, run by men adept at playing ball with white politicians. This is so far removed from the black consciousness of today's students that communication is a near impossibility. From this come the demands for resignations that state leaders feel they cannot grant under fire, however much they may privately feel that changes need to be made.

The question becomes one

of whether black colleges have a place. There are, essentially, two conflicting arguments.

The con argument, subscribed to by NAACP and others, is that the time for racial distinctions is past. All state institutions are now open to persons of both races; it is an unnecessary duplication of effort to operate both LSUNO and SUNO, for example. Many people, puzzled and frustrated by the student unrest, see abolition of the black campuses as a panacea for solving all the problems.

But there is another side. Sad as it may seem, many students at Southern and SUNO would find themselves

over their heads academically at LSU. The present system, it is argued, at least gives them a chance to better themselves.

One suggestion has been that the vast amounts of money spent on black higher education would be better used in vocational training. But how do you tell a college student he should be in a trade school?

Also involved is black pride in things like the Southern football team and its magnificent band. One can scoff at these as bones thrown to the blacks to make up for short-changing them on education, but is it really politically possible to end them?