

Southern: A History of Confrontation

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BATON ROUGE, La., Nov. 18—It had been 2½ years since the nation reacted to the shock of seeing students shot down and killed during a campus protest, but Thursday, on television sets all over the country, it was happening again.

Southern University, where two young black men died this week—enveloped in a fog of tear gas and controversy—is almost entirely black, and it is proud of a history that includes many similar but less tragic confrontations over the years.

Its 12,650 students on three campuses make up the largest black higher education complex in the nation. Louisiana State University's five campuses spend more money per student and are overwhelmingly white.

LSU is governed by its own board of regents while the formerly all-black schools, including the Southern University campuses and Grambling College, come under the same all-white board of education that is responsible for elementary and secondary education in the state.

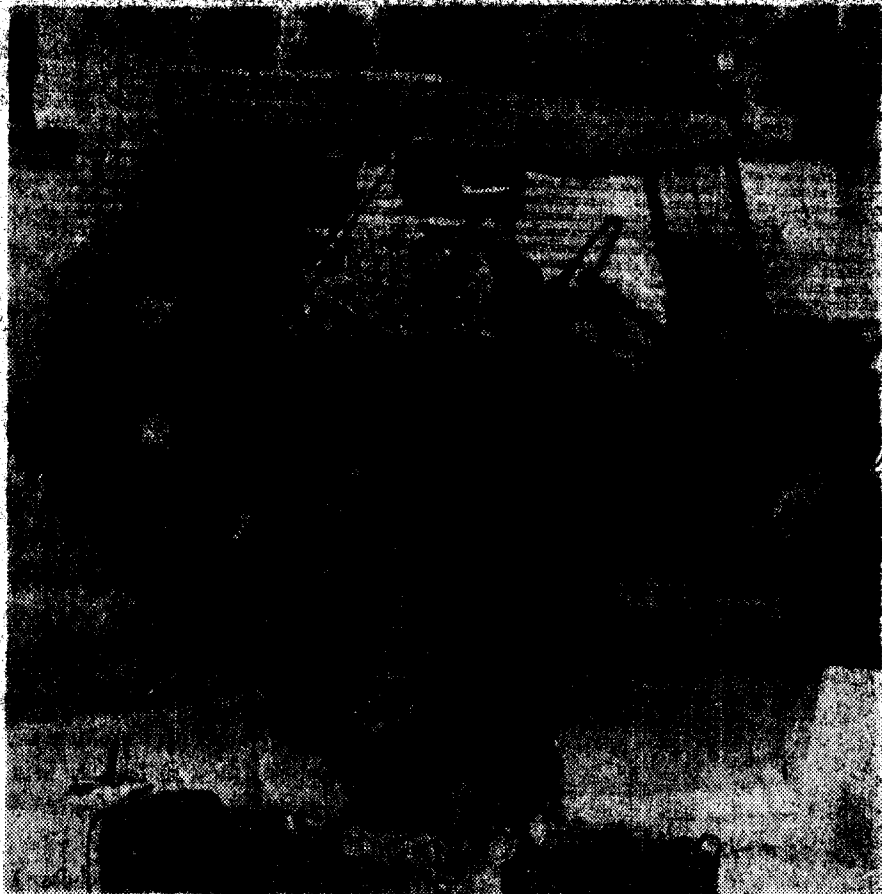
That dual approach to higher education—with inequities in funding—helps explain many of the events that led on Thursday to shotguns, tear gas, screaming students, and the first killings in a campus protest since two died at Jackson State College and four died at Kent State in May of 1970.

"The dual system of education is the real cause of the two untimely deaths," said Louisiana NAACP president Emmett-Douglas. "Louisiana's all-white state education board is the true enemy."

But in Louisiana, the state that waited until five months ago to formally repeal laws that prohibited the mixing of races at social and sporting events, nothing is ever as simple as it might be.

And so there is a great deal more to the tragic mix of this week's events than the still-disputed questions of who killed the two students and whether it was really necessary to call in riot-equipped police and sheriff's deputies, who have rushed onto the campus here so many times in the past month that many are bone weary of it all.

Gov. Edwin Edwards invited in both the state attorney general and U.S.



United Press International

Southern University student Danny Williams sits on bags as National Guard jeep rolls by. Williams' roommate was wounded in shooting on campus.

Department of Justice Friday, saying, "It is obvious there are discrepancies and uncertainties."

Edwards flatly denied Friday morning that law enforcement officers could have shot the two, and then admitted Friday afternoon that they might have after all. He has denied just as firmly that Southern University's troubles are racial in nature.

The troubles pit black student leaders against a largely black faculty and a black school administration, the governor argued, so how can it be a racial dispute?

His argument ignores the 10-year history of often-violent protest at Southern University, a history that parallels many aspects of the black pride movement in the rest of Louisiana and a history of the same issues being raised over and over again.

New to the dispute this year was student concern over unemployment and the general status of blacks in America. Faculty members talk of long conversations with students about whether the school should seek new directions for blacks, and whether institutions with black administrators did not have a special responsibility to do this.

Money, crucial for good education, makes a good example of an old issue.

Students United, the latest in a string of student protest organizations, complained late in September that Southern University did not get its fair share of state appropriations. University president Dr. G. Leon Netterville agreed in a statement Nov. 4.

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SOUTHERN, From A1

"We feel that Gov. Edwards is . . . letting political gain obscure the fact that the state board of education has not met its financial responsibility to . . . any of the black colleges in the state," said a student-faculty position paper issued from Southern University's New Orleans campus. It continued:

"We further believe it was always in the governor's plans to take over the state's black colleges . . . to eliminate black schools which serve as a source of black leaders."

While a spokesman for Netterville agreed that the formerly all-white LSU system spends more per pupil, exact figures were locked in

the barricaded campus and difficult to acquire.

Fred Prejean, one of the protest leaders, said Southern University spends \$1,300 per pupil compared with \$3,900 per pupil for LSU figures that appear to be exaggerated.

State figures show four of LSU's five campuses ranking ahead of the \$1,088 per student given to the Southern University system in state appropriations. The LSU system has a much larger endowment than Southern University, in addition to other funding sources.

Money was only one of many issues this year. But it was raised in similar terms during tear gas and rock throwing protests in 1969, 1967, 1965, and even 1962.

Concerned parents who

jammed access roads to pick up their sons and daughters Friday after Edwards ordered the campus closed and sealed, passed over an arched concrete bridge conspicuous by its newness in the dingy surroundings. The bridge carries traffic over a seedy industrial railroad yard that is Southern University's next-door neighbor.

Southern University got that bridge over the tracks only about two years ago, although sit-ins and marches and tear gasings and arrests dating as far back as the late 1950s included, as part of their demands, building a bridge so that busy switch engines would not tie up access to campus during peak traffic hours.

"Movements for change are sweeping the world, yet the Southern system has remained steadfast in its clearly defined role as a nigger college," said a "call to unity" distributed Nov. 6 among students occupying the New Orleans campus administration building. "Inadequate facilities are no longer acceptable to us. Poor student services cannot be tolerated."

Netterville had made his point two days earlier. "In meeting after meeting . . . we have had to justify our existence as no other state institution," he said. "In spite of the efforts of university officers, alumni, friends, and the state board of education, we have been unable to obtain operating funds commensurate with our mission, uniqueness and potential . . ."

Today, with the campus closed and quiet and East Baton Rouge Parish (county) still under a state of emergency the answers to many crucial questions are elusive.

It is hard to find a student who doesn't say with conviction that Denver Smith, 20, of New Roads, and Leonard Douglas Brown, 20, of Gilbert, were shot by law enforcement officials.

State police say they fired no weapons. Sheriff Al Am-



United Press International

Southern President Leon Netterville talks with newsmen.

iss insists his men fired nothing but tear gas, even though the governor said they may have picked up regular ammunition by mistake.

The governor keeps open the possibility that a student-made bomb may have caused deaths, although the coroner said all fragments in the bodies matched No. 3 or No. 4 Buckshot, and only one fragment inconsistent with a shotgun shell was found on the scene.

The empty shell casings that would help clear up the mystery have disappeared, and no one publicly admits to taking them.

Student leaders, calling it inconceivable that experienced law enforcement officers could make such a careless mistake, are pointing out that any angry deputy could have switched shells deliberately and simply pocketed the spent cartridge.

Frederick Prejean, 26, and Clarence Hardnett, 22, were two of the leaders of Students United, the umbrella protest organization that represented the leaders of all 41 campus organizations.

Almost since the school year began, Students United has been working to prepare its list of demands and then to galvanize student body support behind them.

The tactics ranged from sit-ins, building occupations and classroom disruptions to daily rallies. And for many students, its actions forced a difficult choice between supporting the grievances and preparing for examinations.

The law school tried to solve that dilemma by voting for the movement goals, but against the boycott intended to dramatize them. That didn't work. There were days when law school classes, like most others, were disrupted by boycott supporters.

Edwards and Netterville said weeks ago they could support almost all of the grievances set down in a list seven pages long. The two they refused to accept, they said, were student control of the school, and the firing of Netterville.

To increase student power in decision making, Students United proposed faculty-student-administration councils in all areas of the school.

They originally asked for two student votes to each faculty or administration vote on these decision-making councils, but later modified that to an equal number of votes for each group.

During the weeks of on-again, off-again classes, punctuated by occasional total shutdowns when police and National Guardsmen were summoned on campus, many faculty members voiced similar support.

The grievances were carefully documented and, in some cases, listed department by department. There was a lack of proper equipment and materials, they said, in the biology, psychology, political science and recreation departments. Library resources were obsolete.

Janitorial service was poor, bathtubs in the dorms needed stoppers, and students needed mops, brooms and trash cans in the dorms. Fire extinguishers did not work. The food in the cafeteria, they said, was of poor quality.

"I had some of those same grievances against some of those same teachers when I was a student there," said Jesse Stone, a former dean of the Southern University law school and now the only black among five assistant state superintendents of public instruction.

A boycott on the New Orleans and Baton Rouge campuses for the past three weeks was at times 60 per cent effective, partly because of increasing disruption of classes.

In the past week, however, state officials reversed an earlier policy of conciliation and accused student leaders of taking an all-or-nothing stand.

Edwards emphasized at a Friday news conference that Netterville had called the sheriff's office before Thursday's tragic incident because he had advance information that students planned to take over the administration building.

Netterville remained secluded from the press all day Friday, saying only that all statements would have to come from the governor's press secretary, a policy many found curious in itself.

Saturday, at his own news



Associated Press

Officers gather evidence at scene of shootings.

conference, Netterville said he had no such advance information, and was as surprised as anyone else when students pushed their way into his office. When reporters pointed out that his statement was different from the governor's, Netterville refused to discuss that point any further.

Another discrepancy appeared when Edwards emphasized several times that

Netterville had ordered the administration building cleared of students, the action that resulted in two deaths.

Netterville said he gave no such order, and was even careful to emphasize that while his office was occupied by students, he would not say that the entire, two-story building was occupied.

It raised the question of who was really in control.