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“Movements Come and Go and Are Soon Forgotten”: The Black Campus Movement at Fayetteville State, 1966-1972

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Abstract: Broad surveys of college student activism are impossible without the study of individual campuses. Studies of activism on historically Black college and university (HBCU) campuses in the United States tend to focus on larger more well-known campuses or those in large urban areas. Studies of student activism within North Carolina repeatedly highlight only three of the eleven extant institutions. This study contributes to the historiography of Black campus activism by using nine oral history interviews conducted with university alumni paired with extensive archival research to excavate the ways Fayetteville State University students contributed to the Black Campus Movement. This essay is a narrative of student protests between 1966 and 1972. Ultimately, such protests were grounded in major breakdowns in meaningful communication between faculty, administrators, alumni, and students and in HBCU students’ shared desire to have a say in decisions that affected their lives. Fayetteville State’s student body fully invoked James Baldwin’s notion of critiquing America in that they loved their institution more than any other institution in the world, and, exactly for that reason, they insisted on the right to criticize Fayetteville State and demanded that she rise to the occasion for which she was formed.

Keywords: Black student activism, historically Black colleges & universities, oral history, higher education, Black Campus Movement, North Carolina

North Carolina has eleven of the over 100 historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) in the United States, making the state fertile ground for the study of Civil Rights/Black Power Era student activism at such institutions. While scholars of the era(s) have conducted studies of lesser-known HBCUs during the last decade, most studies focus on exemplar institutions such as Howard, Fisk, Tuskegee, N.C. A&T Universities, and Spelman College. Scholarship specific to North Carolina focuses on Greensboro’s N.C. A&T and Bennett College and Durham’s N.C. Central University as these cities had larger Black populations and economic and voting power. These institutions also have more extensive archival holdings and secondary sources than the other institutions.¹ Repeated studies of these institutions, however, consume smaller cities like Fayetteville and institutions like Fayetteville State. That is, most studies of student activism at Black institutions of higher education in North Carolina mention Fayetteville and Fayetteville State far more than

¹ Bermanzohn 2003; Biondi 2012; Favors in Cohen and Snyder 2013; Chafe 1980; Wolff 1970; Crow, Escott, and Hatley 2002; Benson 2010; Greene 2005; Flowers 2017; Brown 2013; Goldstone in Glasrud and Pitre 2013; and Fuller 2014. Each of these studies foregrounds North Carolina A&T University, North Carolina Central University, or Bennett College or the cities in which these three institutions are located.

they ever discuss either.²

Fayetteville State students participated in Black Power Era activism as part of what historian Ibram X. Kendi conceptualizes as the Black Campus Movement (BCM), yet no substantive study of their experiences exists.³ This study uses archival records and oral history interviews from nine alumni to show how a small institution that never had a yearly enrollment of over 1,500 students during the period under study demanded some say in the curricular, administrative, and social decisions that affected their lives. The BCM encompasses the years between the 1965 assassination of Malcolm X and the 1972 police killing of two students at Louisiana's Southern University. Kendi posits the BCM as the development of an "oppositional space or a place for relevant reforms inside what was deemed the Eurocentric American academy. At the other more radical extreme," he argued, "some activists sought to create black universities—institutions controlled by African Americans to educate them about their experience and give them the tools to empower their communities."⁴

Black Student Activism at Historically Black Colleges and Universities

Studies of HBCU student activism generally comprise one or more of four major categories. First, scholar activists conducted studies that included their own autobiographical experiences as activists, mentors, and college faculty or administrators thereby allowing room for deeper reflection and contextualization of their experiences.⁵ Next, scholars conducted archival studies of student activism during the late 19th and early 20th century.⁶ Third, scholars conducted case studies of individual institutions or cities, thereby expanding macro level scholarship by exploring micro level histories.⁷ Lastly, scholars conducted studies, broad in nature, that centered connections between institutions and movements.⁸

² Bermanzohn mention Fayetteville regarding community activism during the Civil Rights Era and Fuller never mentions the city regarding such activism during the Black Power Era even though he spent a considerable amount of time there organizing students. Crow made only passing mention of cities such as Fayetteville and Elizabeth City that had Black college student led protests as well.

³ U.S. Senate Committee on Government Operations Permanent Subcommittee on Government Investigations. Staff Study of Campus Riots and Disturbances, October 1967-1969.

⁴ Rogers 2011: 176. Ibram Rogers changed his name to Ibram Kendi after publishing this article.

⁵ Moody 1968; Forman 1968; Zinn 1964; Searles and Williams, Jr. 1962: 215-220; Harrison 1972; Wolff 1970; Bermanzohn 2003; Holsaert, Noonan, Richardson, Robinson, Young, and Zellner, eds. 2012; Fuller 2014; and McLeod 2017.

⁶ For purely archival studies of Black student activism at Black institutions of higher education through the early 20th century, see Wolters 1975; Jones 1985; Anderson 1988; Bryant-Brown 2000; Alford 2013; Aptheker 1968; and Author 2020.

⁷ Lefever 2005; Williamson 2008; Greene 2005; Suttell 2007; Benson 2010; Favors in Cohen and Snyder 2013; Moss 2013; Flowers 2017; Goldstone in Glasrud and Pitre 2013; Andrews and Gaby 2015; Bass and Nelson 1996; Chafe 1980; Norrell 1985; Crow, Escott, and Hatley 2002; Brooks 2014; Pitre 2018; Jones 2018; and Kinchen 2016.

⁸ Franklin 2003; Hall 2005; Turner 2010; Favors 2006; Biondi 2012; and Kendi (previously Rogers) 2012.

As previously indicated, most scholarship specific to North Carolina either ignored or briefly mentioned Fayetteville and Fayetteville State.⁹ Several studies, however, did devote some attention to both. John M. Orbell conducted a theoretical analysis of Negro college student participation in civil rights protests beginning with the 1960 sit-ins by surveying several HBCUs administrations. He did not, however, discuss its students in the section he devoted to chronicle Black college student activism.¹⁰ Brian Suttell’s study of the sit-in movement in Fayetteville successfully showed the centrality of Fayetteville State students to the desegregation of the city’s downtown area. Andrews and Gaby exclusively and heavily referenced Suttell’s master’s thesis on Fayetteville State students’ 1963-1964 efforts to desegregate the downtown area in their brief synopsis of Sit-In activism in Fayetteville. Nicole Lewis devoted one chapter of her master’s study of Rudolph Jones’ presidency to the 1960s. As she sought to analyze Jones’ tenure, she dedicated little space to the many instances of student protest during the decade.¹¹ As the scholarship devoted to some aspect of student activism in Fayetteville and at Fayetteville State are all studies of the sit-in movement, there is no existing study on Black Power Era activism at Fayetteville State. This historical study seeks to fill this gap.

Fayetteville, North Carolina & Fayetteville State University

Fayetteville, located in Cumberland County, is the sixth largest city in North Carolina and is a neighbor to the largest military base in the United States—Fort Bragg.¹² The county experienced a population boon sparked by the growth of the base and several annexations of neighboring townships during the 1960s. This population surge significantly increased Fayetteville’s Black population while also drawing the attention of Black North Carolinians from neighboring rural areas interested in leaving agrarian lives. Like most HBCUs, Fayetteville State was first a normal school with a white Board of Trustees that provided the equivalent of a high school education and a teaching certificate in elementary education.¹³ Unlike most HBCUs, Fayetteville State has always had Black presidents/chancellors and, at least through the Black Power Era, an almost exclusively Black administration. This, to some degree, accounted for differences in student protest

⁹ Bermanzohn 2003; Biondi 2012; Favors in Cohen and Snyder 2013; Chafe 1980; Wolff 1970; Crow, Escott, and Hatley 2002; Benson 2010; Greene 2005; Flowers 2017; Brown 2013; Goldstone in Glasrud and Pitre 2013; and Fuller 2014. Each of these studies foregrounds North Carolina A&T University, North Carolina Central University, or Bennett College or the cities in which these three institutions are located.

¹⁰ Bermanzohn 2003 has mentions of Fayetteville regarding community activism during the Civil Rights Era and Fuller 2014 never mentions the city regarding such activism during the Black Power Era even though he spent a considerable amount of time there organizing students. Crow, Escott, and Hatley 2002 has only a passing mention Fayetteville as a city that also had Black college student led protests. See Orbell 1965.

¹¹ Lewis 2012.

¹² United States Census Bureau, Annual Estimates of the Resident Population 2019.

¹³ Fayetteville State began in 1867 as two schools led by two free Black educators. Cicero Harris ran the Phillips (Elementary) School and his brother, Robert Harris, headed the Sumner (Secondary) School. On May 31, 1877, the State Board of Education selected Fayetteville as the city and the Howard School as the location for the first Black normal school in North Carolina. See Huddle 1997.

efforts. While student activists at predominately white institutions and HBCUs organized against white administrations and senior leadership, students at Fayetteville State fought to make their Black institution with a history of Black senior leadership amenable to the needs of the Black community both on and off campus. Transitioning from outward facing sit-in movement activism, Fayetteville State students turned inward during the mid-1960s to use some of the same tactics as they attempted to effect change on their campus.

“I Play it Cool and Dig All Jive”: February 1966

In a movement that was “brewing since December” Student Government Association (SGA) President George Langford submitted a list of demands to President Rudolph Jones with the understanding that the students would strike if the administration did not respond. On Wednesday, February 23, 1966, a crowd of 200 swelled to 600 as students met at the flagpole in front of the administration building. The mass meeting held two purposes. First, the public meeting to discuss and resist the “authoritarian attitude” of the college administration was both a protest action and the official kickoff of a class strike. Six hundred of the institution’s 1200 students signed the SGA petition for the strike. Students verbalized five grievances at this initial meeting. First, they wanted more input in decisions made on campus that affected their lives. Next, they wanted “less stress” on the social lives of female students. Third, they wanted an efficient health and medical care program. They wanted a full-time director for the men’s dorm, and lastly, they wanted a restructuring of the athletic program.¹⁴ Jones told the press that he was aware of the SGA’s demands, but that he simply had not set a meeting the body to discuss them. Further, he said, “There’s always a certain amount of student unrest on any campus. The administration and faculty are eager to know why the students are unhappy and certainly we are willing to make every effort to meet their legitimate complaints.”

In a meeting President Jones called the next evening, he more fully addressed a more complete list of complaints to include those with respect to female students. Jones admitted knowing that there were some problems with male professors, and he indicated that he handled those problems quietly. Jones indicated that anyone with complaints about improper advances should see him. “If nothing else, he said, “I can terminate the faculty member’s contract at the end of the school year. We have even paid people to stay off the campus. There was one we paid like that last summer (1965). We told the police not to let him on the campus.”¹⁵ Langford believed that by the press focusing on only one of five complaints, the strike “petered out” before it could get going.¹⁶ Even though Jones did not commit his response to paper, a reporter in the room changed the tide of the strike by focusing only on the demands related to female students and male professors. While the safety and wellbeing of the overwhelmingly female student body was vitally important, it was not the only charge being made. Student leaders removed it from the list of demands the next day. In any case, the administration met most of the students’ demands and the students returned to class on Friday, February 25. The administration did not punish any student protesters. At the

¹⁴ Stingley 1967: 14A.

¹⁵ New Journal & Guide 1966: 1B.

¹⁶ George Langford, interview with author 2020. See also, Fayetteville Observer 1966: 1B.

time, Langford stated that “the principal objective we are striving for was to be treated more like adults and to have greater participation in campus affairs in policy making. The goals have been accomplished in that our requests have been well received by the administration.” Langford later remembered,

You know, we were really trying to get the administration to engage with us in a more serious way. We felt that the administration didn’t really value our input and they didn’t really include us in any of the policies and decision making that were taking place in the administration. So, we had to protest on the lawn of the institution. It was a major turning point, I felt, in our relationship with the college administration.¹⁷

President Jones acknowledged the concessions students won with their class strike—namely a decrease in the rules governing female students, class attendance, and assembly requirements while cautioning the student body to refrain from abusing their new privileges.¹⁸ Clearly feeling that students did not heed Jones’ warning, the administration reinstated the class attendance policy, with students missing more than three class periods without approval risking expulsion.¹⁹ Students found out of this reversal in a letter Jones wrote to their parents. Alluding to a reoccurring theme in the stories of BCM activism—that graduating student leaders often left gaps in collective student movement memory—Langford reflected, “That was the disappointing part. I was graduating, so I didn’t get to really get to see whether any of those activities were actually implemented by the institution.”²⁰

“That’s the Reason I Stay Alive”: April 3-5, 1968

Prelude to a Takeover

Whether students wrote about protests at other colleges or whether they were referring to something brewing at Fayetteville State, *The Voice* staff published several activism related stories prior to the administration building takeover during the spring of 1968. While reading the student newspaper may be less prevalent now, college students increasingly began to see their paper as an important medium used to work through pressing social, political, and sometimes emotional concerns. As the student body never numbered over 1500 students by the end of the period under review, it is likely that most students read or discussed articles in the student newspaper.

The Voice staff asked sixty-five freshmen about the intellectual and cultural life on campus. Some students discussed a low general morale due to witnessing discord between faculty and administrators. One student referred to this discord as “a coldness.” Some students referenced poor teacher-student interactions.²¹ Editor Laura Gilmore, considering reasons students might protest,

¹⁷ George Langford, interview with the author 2020.

¹⁸ Jones 1966: 1.

¹⁹ Jones 1966: 2.

²⁰ Langford, interview with the author 2020.

²¹ *The Voice* 1967: 2.

argued that they were on the defensive due to existing in an interstitial space where they were neither child nor adult. Gilmore did not provide a definitive answer to her question, but her article shows that she, and perhaps other students, thought about the rationale behind student protest before acting.²²

During the fall of 1967, students asked themselves, “Should a College Student Have Unlimited Freedom?”²³ Carolyn Woodard believed, like many other students, upperclassmen deserved increased social freedom, but that female student should have curfews. While students considered the questions of protest and unlimited freedoms, community organizer and sociologist Howard Fuller (previously Owusu Sadaukai) made the first of several visits to the campus. At the behest of the Social Science Club, Fuller gave a talk entitled simply, “Us.” He urged students to think of the working-class Black community and to critically analyze integration. He connected the underpaid staff worker to the experiences of college graduates who faced racism as they pursued post-graduation employment. He referenced those who went without work because they were “overqualified for one job and underqualified for the next.” He said, “I did not come to [Fayetteville State] to start a riot. I have never gone anywhere to start a riot. But you know I have turned the last cheek. The next time I turn a cheek, I’ll follow it with a right cross.” He closed his talk with the following sentence, “The need for our economic and political leverage can be summed up in two little words. Black Power.”²⁴

The Takeover

On Wednesday night, April 3, 1968, 300 students took over and barred all faculty from entering the administration building. The students set up food and television stations, assigned security guards “to protect female students,” chose typists to produce press releases, set up card playing rooms, and set up tutorial sessions for participating students. In an alloy of the Preamble to the United States Constitution and the worlds of Malcolm X, an unnamed student told the press, “We will use any means to secure a better and more perfect Black education.” Continuing a theme from the Sit-In Movement, student protesters refused to name an individual leader. An unidentified student simply stated that the takeover “was carried out by [B]lack students seeking a better [B]lack education.”²⁵ President Jones, away on business, rushed back to campus. Again, Jones told the press that the protest did not surprise him as such protests were happening all over the country. Sophomore class president and SGA representative Raymond Privott agreed with Dr. Jones. Privott said, “It [the building takeover] was joining in with other schools protesting the normal discrimination all over the nation.”²⁶ While Jones met with a student delegation in his home, thirty students held the building into the next day. The next morning, the students presented Jones with a list of demands entitled the “Dissatisfied Student Body” wherein students demanded improved teacher and infirmary quality, increased funding efforts on the part of the admin, Black Studies courses, no

²² Gilmore 1967: 2.

²³ Woodard 1967: 4.

²⁴ Dickens 1967: 2.

²⁵ Gilmore 1968: 1.

²⁶ Raymond Privott, interview with the author 2019.

mandatory attendance policy for upperclassmen, longer library hours on the weekend, improved campus office procedures, decreased textbook costs, a reconstruction of the athletic program, improved food and canteen hours of operation, improved residence hall equipment, less social constraints on female students, and improved and expanded social events on campus. They also demanded that they not be punished for their protest. Some of these demands were identical to those students made in 1966. Jones cancelled Thursday’s classes and met with student leaders twice that afternoon, while roughly one third of the student body waited in the gym.

“The King of Love is Dead”²⁷

As the impasse continued into the evening, students received word of the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. This news left the students both apoplectic and heartbroken. SGA Vice President Hector McEachern remembered trying “to stop the guys on campus from setting fires.” He said, “I was trying to calm the campus down when Martin Luther King was killed. What I remember was trying to get the student population to remember why King lived, what caused him to die, and to focus on non-destructive solutions to our problems.”²⁸ Sophomore Jacqueline Rendleman remembered parents assuming that students would be safer in North Carolina than in large urban areas such as Washington D.C. and New York City. She remembered that “Some of the parents said, ‘No, you stay down there. This place is in an uproar.’ But North Carolina was in an uproar too.” Rendleman indicated that the institutions proximity to Fort Bragg “kept the campus ok. There were little fires set, little ones. It wasn’t anything major that I am aware of. And so, we saw these troops, these guys all out the window. You could just open your windows and they were there.”²⁹

Exhausted, the student body ended their occupation with half of their demands met and returned to class. President Jones cancelled Friday’s classes as well and ordered classes to resume on Monday, April 8. He told the press that he “would gladly [have met] with the students. I [was waiting for them] to make an appointment.”³⁰ During the next Board of Trustees meeting, Lyons provided a detailed report of all complaints submitted by students and all negotiations. He suggested that the administration work “with the majority of students who desire normal operations at the college to secure their active support in preventing a radical, vocal minority from disrupting normal operations.” He, again, wrote a letter to parents asking for their support in controlling the students.³¹ During the final meeting of the academic year, the faculty changed “Negro History” from an elective course to a required course effective fall 1968.³²

While there was substantial support for the student protests, not all students agreed with the methods. In the May issue of *The Voice*, those opposed to the building takeover shared their

²⁷ Nina Simone, “Why? (The King of Love is Dead),” Track 6 on *Enuf Said!*, RCA Records, 1968, album.

²⁸ Hector McEachern, interview with the author 2018.

²⁹ Jacqueline (Rendleman) Matthews, interview with the author 2018.

³⁰ *Statesville Record & Landmark* 1968: 1; and Prather 1968.

³¹ Rudolph Jones, “Board of Trustee Meeting,” April 25, 1968, Fayetteville State University Archives, Series 4, Box 3. The Board of Trustee minutes for the 1967-1968 and 1968-1969 academic years are intentionally vague.

³² *New Pittsburgh Courier* 1968: 10; and *The Voice* 1968: 2.

thoughts.³³ Freshman Martha Thorne found the protest illogical because the students broke the law, embarrassed President Jones, and neglected to include day student (commuter) voices in discussions leading up to the takeover. Commuter Nancy Harris, only found out about the protests when she arrived on campus and found classes canceled.³⁴ Thorne further revealed that some of the female students said they were forced “under threat of fire” to leave their dorms and participate in the takeover. She and fellow freshman Barbara Wilson opposed relaxing moral rules for women. Pointing to a multiplicity of student organizations and activists, another student felt that the “Black Power advocates interfered with the SGA and officers.” In retrospect, sophomore commuter student Madelyn Bryant, remembers feeling empowered by the student protest efforts. She remembered witnessing the protests leading her to rethink her own agency. She thought, “I can control something in my life? I can speak up? It might not work out the way I want, but I don’t have to sit and just be a robot and do what I’m told. And that was a great influencer for me.”³⁵

Movement Off Campus

As the building takeover concluded, and as the city of Fayetteville reeled after King’s assassination, student activists directed some of their energies off campus. *The Fayetteville Observer* published the Fayetteville Area Poor People’s Organizations (FAPPO) five-point plan to reduce racial tension in Fayetteville. Councilman Johnny Joyce, an open segregationist, read the plan into the record when FAPPO later appeared before the newly created Human Relations Advisory Commission.³⁶ While it is unclear if any Fayetteville State students were among the FAPPO members, a prior voter registration based working relationship between Fayetteville State’s African American Students Organization (AASO) and FAAPO points to the involvement of at least some AASO members.

FAPPO demanded that the city “Remove the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) sign from the US 301 South billboard” as one of its five points. Councilman Joyce deemed such demands “reckless” and a hindrance to “two-way communication.” He further suggested that the commission try to talk to FAPPO, determine if the authors of the five-point plan were locals, study FAPPO’s grievances, and come up with a workable program. Mayor Monroe Evans bemoaned the audacity of FAPPO’s plan. He said, “We have made a lot of progress in the area of white discrimination, but it looks like racism among Black people is worse than it was among white people.” Invoking the outside agitator motif, or the assumption that any overt protests are spearheaded by people who simply do not understand the social, historical, and political culture within a place, this governing body told concerned Black community members that requesting the removal of the KKK sign was “reckless” and “reverse racism” thereby providing an example of the near constant psychic assault

³³ “Protests and the Masses.” *The Voice* 1968: 5.

³⁴ Nancy Harris, interview with the author 2016.

³⁵ Madelyn (Bryant) Gilmore, interview with the author 2018.

³⁶ The Fayetteville City Council formed The Human Relations Advisory Commission in 1968 to “to provide channels through which racial tensions may be anticipated, cooperation sought, and amicable resolutions achieved.” The Commission had a racially mix group comprised of eleven adult community members, two students, and one ex-officio member from Ft. Bragg. See Suttell 2007.

under which Black Fayetteville existed.

As the spring semester ended, two Fayetteville State students attended the first Conference of Black Students (CUBS) at Shaw University. Shaw president, James E. Cheek, conceived of the conference to:

Provide Negro students, nationwide, with the opportunity of coming together to build a movement whose purposes, goals, and objectives would be positive and constructive, and which would enlist the resources, talents, and energies of Negro institutions and organizations in a national program of self-help, self-direction, and self-pride.³⁷

The conference committee invited two delegates from each HBCU’s SGA and featured tales by writer LeRoi Jones (Amiri Baraka), historian Vincent Harding, Charlotte civil rights activist and gubernatorial candidate Dr. Reginald Hawkins, and civil rights activist Julian Bond.³⁸ During the summer, Fayetteville State students Gregory Savoy, Larry McCleary, George Lowery, and B.J. Nicholson joined thirty-five other Black college students in Durham for a community organizing internship program for social science majors supervised by Howard Fuller.³⁹

The student body elected prior Vice President, Hector McEachern, as its new President for the 1968-1969 academic year. In his first message to the students, he urged them to make take slogan, “I’m Black and I’m Proud,” seriously. Black Power, he argued, required Black people to unite and work towards creating their own system.⁴⁰ SGA Vice President Mercer Anderson and Stanford Tucker attended the “Towards a Black University” Conference at Howard University in November of 1968. Those attending the conference sought to “define the structure and mechanics of the [Black] university.” Participants expressed frustration with the “white structure of higher education that debilitates Black people.” The students spoke of the “warmth one felt as one rubbed shoulders not with one’s adversaries from across the nation—and across oceans—but with ‘those of us who have been dehumanized.’”⁴¹ Student activists closed the semester with a “Black Week” held December 10-13. Howard Fuller provided the keynote address. A play, panel discussions on “The Role of the Black Students,” and “Black Man and Religion,” a Black culture program, and a social wrapped up the week.⁴² The Fayetteville State student body was hungry for a racially and culturally relevant education.

“My Motto, As I Live & Learn Is...” February 17-21, 1969

By February of 1969, while student protests erupted at N.C. A&T, Duke University, the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, as well as on campuses across the nation, Jones canceled classes

³⁷ Childs 1968: 1A.

³⁸ News & Observer 1968: 2A.

³⁹ Nicholson 1968: 2.

⁴⁰ McEachern 1968: 2.

⁴¹ *The Voice* 1969: 3.

⁴² *The Voice* 1969: 1.

on the day that Fayetteville State students were rumored to begin a protest of their own. Instead, he scheduled a full day of private student leader led workshops for Monday February 17.⁴³ These workshops, Jones hoped, would allow the campus community to discuss its problems without disrupting the business of the institution. The day began with a mass meeting followed by breakout workshops where students worked to construct a concise list of recommendations. SGA President, Hector McEachern and other student leaders were equally hopeful and saw the workshops as alternatives to “destructive means” of protest.⁴⁴ Negotiations, however, hit a stalemate and the students conducted a class strike from Tuesday February 18 until the administration met or at least addressed most of their demands on Friday February 21.⁴⁵ Jones, again, sent a letter to their parents asking that parents pick their children up or force them to return to class.⁴⁶ At a mass meeting, 413 students signed a petition to return to class on Monday February 24.⁴⁷ A twenty-five-member committee (nine members of the faculty and administration and sixteen students) reached a compromise where the faculty and administration would increase professional development for faculty and instructors, increase pursuit of grant funding for Black Studies research and publications, increase Black literature holdings in the library and book store, lobby for a Black trustee, allow student membership on college committees, implement a Black Studies major replete with classes across the disciplines and fields, and increase efforts to expand the support for students in need of remedial education.

But for the strike ending on the fourth anniversary of the assassination of Malcolm X, the weekend might have been one of rest and rejuvenation prior to recommencing classes on Monday. On a Friday in February, Fayetteville State students, accompanied by police escorts, marched double file from campus into downtown Fayetteville holding signs saying, “We Love Malcolm,” “Black Holiday,” and “Malcolm’s Anniversary.” During the forty-five-minute memorial at the Market House, SGA Vice President, Mercer Anderson and A&T professor, Frank Williams spoke to the crowd while the police diverted traffic.⁴⁸ At some point, someone set fires on campus in the Fine Arts Building and in several trash cans.⁴⁹ The AASO and FAPPO closed out the month by organizing workers at a popular eating establishment, Vick’s Drive-In, and persuading the restaurant’s owners to agree to worker demands for a minimum wage for waitresses and cooks, overtime pay, sick time, vacation time, uniforms, increased food quality, no increase in food prices, better treatment of Black customers, and no repercussions against employees.⁵⁰

Even though student protesters called for Jones’ resignation during their class strike in mid-February, they could not have known they would receive it. Growing weary of the “tensions and strains of his office” that he indicated led to health problems, President Jones announced his resignation effective July 31. The Board of Trustees received his letter on March 4 “several weeks

⁴³ *Fayetteville Observer* 1969: 1B; *Fayetteville Observer* 1969; and Prather 1969.

⁴⁴ Prather 1969: 1A

⁴⁵ *Fayetteville Observer* 1969: 1B.

⁴⁶ Prather 1969: 1A.

⁴⁷ Pharr 1969: 1A.

⁴⁸ Thompson 1969: 1A.

⁴⁹ *Daily Oklahoman* 1969: 40; and *Afro American* 1969: 12.

⁵⁰ *The Voice* 1969: 1.

after recent student disturbances on the campus.”⁵¹

During the week of April 21-25, the AASO planned a “Black Political Education Program.” Black Panther Chico Neblett opened the program on Monday, April 21 with a talk on the quad to a crowd of 300 students. Neblett later gave a workshop on the BPP and Black liberation to a crowd of eighty. Koko Hughes, also a Black Panther, spoke to the female students and stressed their supportive role to Black men in the Black Liberation movement. A student production of the play *Hallelujah Baby* closed out the week.⁵²

On July 14, the City Council glib initial refusal to discuss or grant funding for another local organization, the Cumberland County Community Action Program (CCCAP), led to a week of daily protest marches.⁵³ On Wednesday, July 16, Sunday July 20, and Monday, July 21 the police arrested several protesters for using profanity in public, trespassing, and property damage.⁵⁴ Several buildings were firebombed. The protests continued until the City Council, at their July 28 meeting, voted to provide funding for CCCAP.⁵⁵

Introducing Dr. Lyons

By the time Charles A Lyons, Jr. took the mantle of university chancellor in August, Fayetteville State College was Fayetteville State University.⁵⁶ In October, the SGA sponsored Harold Mincey, Carolyn Newton Stevens, and Gregory Savoy’s attendance at the inaugural Black Students United for Liberation Conference held at N.C. A&T October 2-5. The conference sought “to unify Black schools in North Carolina in a common struggle for total Black education liberation.” Participants developed an organizational structure and key projects to be located at different campuses across the state. The group tasked Fayetteville State’s representatives with creating a Defense Fund project.⁵⁷ Less than two weeks later, Fayetteville State students participated in a statewide Anti-Vietnam War Rally. Virtually every student “boycotted” classes and attended an SGA led assembly where they signed a petition calling for an immediate ceasefire in Vietnam and the withdrawal of American troops. Three history professors held a panel discussion on the origin of the war and its effects on the Black community.⁵⁸ Of the ways the Vietnam War affected their experiences as students, Vedas Neal remembered, “It was a sad time and it made everybody connected to each other. Students were drafted from campus and within six months to a year after they were drafted, you learned of their deaths.”⁵⁹ As the semester ended, Sandra Nelson pondered the still existing Klan billboards on state highways juxtaposed with the state’s increasing pressure for the HBCUs to further integrate. “It [the existence of the billboards] seems to be depicting the very character

⁵¹ *New Journal & Guide* 1969: 22H.

⁵² FBI Files 1969: 35-37.

⁵³ “Fayetteville City Council Minutes” 1969.

⁵⁴ *Gastonia Gazette* 1969: 7.

⁵⁵ *Statesville Record & Landmark* 1969.

⁵⁶ *New Journal & Guide* 1969: 10.

⁵⁷ Stevens 1969: 9.

⁵⁸ United Press International 1969: 1; and *The Voice* 1969: 3.

⁵⁹ Vedas Neal, interview with the author 2018.

of our state. One should wonder whether we are in the heart of Klan Country or if Klan country is in our hearts.”⁶⁰

“Unify Us”: Prelude to a Death March

When Lyons introduced himself to a packed room of Fayetteville State students, during the fall of 1969, someone posted a sign that said, “Unify Us-Don’t Divide Us.” It would not take long for such signs to change. In February of 1970, the state Board of Higher Education approved a bachelor’s degree program in Black Studies at Fayetteville State effective September 1970.⁶¹ The interdepartmental Black Studies major would include, “Courses such as The Afro American Personality, Sociology of the Black Family, Regional Geography of Africa, and Sociology of the Black Ghetto.”⁶² As the semester ended, the student body elected James Nesby SGA President and Carolyn Newton Stevens Vice President.⁶³ Glivian Armstrong served as secretary. James Waters served as judge. Nesby and several other students formed a political party and ran for office as a group because the administration would not recognize the Black Student Union (BSU) as a registered student organization. Nesby remembered:

We were not a recognized school organization, so we didn’t have a place to meet on a regular basis. This went on for a while and it seemed on purpose that we would be promised a room and then we didn’t have it. Then, you had Student Government elections, so we decided to run for it. You had to have a certain grade point average and nobody else in the group had that grade point average to run for president, so I was selected to run. We ran for every spot except for business manager. Prior to that, I was just another John Doe.⁶⁴

As Fayetteville State saw their largest freshman class to date, students expressed their dissatisfaction with the Lyons administration and their overcrowded living arrangements.⁶⁵

In the September edition of the Voice, the editors published a political cartoon that featured Chancellor Lyons riding a wagon with his assistant Mr. Roscoe in the passenger seat. Lyons is cracking a whip against the sides of the horses pulling the wagon. Those horses are labeled with the names of administrators. The picture insinuates that Lyons used his administrators to run the wagon over the university’s faculty and staff.⁶⁶ Offended, Lyons threatened to censor the newspaper. The editorial staff made this threat public and asserted their freedom of the press.⁶⁷ Keeping to

⁶⁰ *The Voice* 1969: 2.

⁶¹ *The Voice* 1970: 1; and *New Journal & Guide* 1970: 10.

⁶² *The Voice* 1970: 3.

⁶³ *Carolina Times* 1970: 4B.

⁶⁴ James Nesby, interview with the author 2019.

⁶⁵ *Carolina Times* 1970: 4B; *The Voice* 1970: 1.

⁶⁶ *The Voice* 1970: 3 and 4; and *The Voice* 1969.

⁶⁷ Evans 1970: 5.

that mission, the staff published various contrasting student reactions to a provocative open letter that Fayetteville State alum and Wilmington dentist, Charles M. Cherry sent to the Board of Trustees, the governor, and *The Wilmington Journal*. Cherry accused the Lyons administration of nepotism, cynicism, admitting unqualified freshmen students, hiring unqualified instructors, creating unnecessary positions, and of pay inconsistencies regarding tenure and rank.⁶⁸ While students seemed to agree with his concerns, many felt that he should not have released them to the press. Other students felt that alumni earned the right to “speak out” and that the students needed “more people like him who are willing to speak out.” In the December issue of *The Voice*, Nesby penned an open letter to the student body urging them to form community with the Black people of Fayetteville. He saw the city’s planning of a Fayetteville State Day or week, for example, as performative. He argued that such displays would not make up for the Fayetteville State alum and “Black man who was passed up for a job in the city due to racism, or the Black man killed by police due to racism, or the racist treatment of Black children in Fayetteville schools.”⁶⁹ Just as community organizer Howard Fuller stressed to students at every campus visit, Nesby reminded the student body that a college education would not save them from some of the same quotidian racist treatment that working class Black Fayettevillians faced.

“Dig & Be Dug in Return”: February-April 1971

The campus protests of 1971 were the first set of actions where students, faculty, and alumni coalesced to affect change at Fayetteville State. To further explicate the context in which students conducted the most troubling set of BCM demonstrations, requires an examination of the broad original positions of each category of participants.

The National Alumni Association (NAA) felt slighted by the Board of Trustees and Lyons before Lyons was ever offered the chancellorship. Seven men were being considered and one of them, Dr. Odell Uzzell was the Chair of the Sociology Department.⁷⁰ Another candidate, Dr. Lafayette Parker, Academic Dean at Winston Salem State College, found out from local newspapers that the Board of Trustees considered Lyons the frontrunner while preparing to give Fayetteville State’s Convocation keynote. This improper release of information embarrassed several members of the Alumni Association. Those offended publicly spoke out against the Board of Trustees’ actions. It appears that the alumni formed support factions for several of the candidates. Even though the Board publicly apologized, the alumni were slow to forget the perceived slight.⁷¹ Lastly, Lyons attempted to create an alumni association while actively ignoring attempted dialogue with the already recognized National Alumni Association. When invited to its December 1970 meeting in Philadelphia, Lyons further angered the NAA by evading questions about campus discord. Prior to Lyons’ arrival, the Faculty Assembly was the recognized faculty body. He not only created a different faculty organization, he amended the Faculty Handbook to reflect this new organization without any input from the Faculty Assembly. This action is important to understanding the ways

⁶⁸ Evans 1970: 5.

⁶⁹ Nesby 1970: 4.

⁷⁰ *The Voice* 1969: 1.

⁷¹ *Carolina Times* 1969: 4B.

in which Lyons deflected faculty critique in the months leading up to the student strike in February of 1971. Many among the small student body were active participants in the protests of 1968 and 1969. As a result, they were aware of the concessions they won through protest and discussions with the previous administration. In addition to their own grievances, those of the faculty, and those of the NAA necessarily affected the students' educative and social experiences. If Lyons did not communicate well with the recognized alumni and faculty bodies, he communicated even less with the student body. As a result, the spring semester of 1971 saw faculty, student, and alumni concerns coalesce and rock the campus in a way that prior protests had not.

The Faculty Assembly publicly aired their grievances with President Lyons in the student newspaper.⁷² Dr. D.W. Bishop, the Faculty Assembly Chair, demanded that Lyons recognize the Faculty Assembly as the legitimate faculty body it was recognized as during previous administrations. The American Association of University Professors (AAUP) agreed. Bishop then drew attention to Lyons' perceived practice of firing anyone who did not agree with him or retreat from disagreement. The faculty argued that good professors and instructors left the institution to escape the toxic environment while many others feared Lyons and refrained from voicing dissenting opinions. When challenged on his authoritarian leadership style, Lyons repeatedly told the faculty that "a participatory democracy was impossible at a place as small as Fayetteville State." The next couple of weeks proved to be a chaotic yet strategic whirlwind of meetings and mass meetings, protests and demands.

During the last week of January, Lyons and several members of his administration visited the two residence halls for men, Vance and Williams, to assess needed improvements. Lyons argued that he chose to do this because prior student protests rendered mandatory assemblies optional thereby erasing a place and time where he could have contact with all students at once. Lyons scheduled visits to the women's halls for the following weeks. Lyons stated that the visits to two residence halls for women, Bryant and Harris, were uneventful on Monday February 1. The next day, however, Lyons found the atmosphere in Joyner and Smith Halls was decidedly "hostile." He said the female students posed accusatory and pointed questions about faculty and administrative issues to which they should not have been privy. Lyons indicated that he evaded the questions.⁷³ Students in the female dormitories argued that Lyons did so by refusing to directly respond to the questions asked. He did not answer "the" question, he answered "a" question," they said. For example, when asked if he and the faculty had a good relationship, he said, "Relationships are a two-way street and I am tired of people talking to me about why this or that." A student asked, "Do you think you are a problem here, and Lyons responded, "I am not a problem to *anyone*."⁷⁴

Between his visits to Bryant and Harris Halls and Joyner and Smith Halls, several SGA members met with Dr. Bishop to discuss the palpable "coldness" they witnessed between faculty and the administration and among the faculty. According to the students, they wanted to know what was going on in their university. According to Lyons, Bishop had nefarious plans to manipulate the students into further disrespecting and maligning the administration. Either way, the students did meet with Bishop, and he did expound on faculty concerns. This meeting, however, coincided with existing student discord. On Wednesday February 3, the SGA called a mass meeting in the

⁷² *The Voice* 1971: 1.

⁷³ Cook 1971.

⁷⁴ Gentry 1971: 5.

Seabrook Auditorium.⁷⁵ Students agreed to take their grievances to the Board of Trustees and the State Board of Higher Education and to demand Lyons’ resignation. Most of the student body signed the following petition:

We the students are in mutual agreement that this institution under your reactionary rule and direction has failed in its overall purpose. The basic aim of this institution should relate directly to the needs and aspirations of the students. The present problems which exist between faculty and administration have lowered the morale of our faculty. We feel that their unhappiness and the frictional and oppressive atmosphere that exists hampers efficiency of the teachers and causes many good and efficient teachers to leave. As the result of these problems, the quality of classroom instruction has diminished, hindering any type of intellectual atmosphere. As a result of student body meetings, discussion, and voting, the FSU students have found it necessary to demand your resignation immediately.⁷⁶

While students were signing the petition, the Board of Trustees sent Bishop a letter requesting that he meet with the Executive Committee at its regularly scheduled meeting on the following day, February 4th. Bishop declined the meeting due to it being called on such short notice. In his absence, the Executive Committee approved a resolution to fire him effective February 5.⁷⁷ With these instructions, Dean Richard L. Fields “acting as agent for the President,” interrupted Dr. Bishop’s history class and announced Bishop’s immediate firing before ordering him to vacate the classroom.⁷⁸

On Monday February 8, the SGA again demanded President Lyons’s resignation. When he did not resign, approximately 75% of the student body refused to return to class and held daily meetings and rallies.⁷⁹ Later that day, approximately three hundred students gathered on the football field and burned the university’s chancellor in effigy. The next day, the students held another mass meeting in Seabrook Auditorium after Nesby met with Lyons to present the student body’s demands while stressing that the demands existed before Bishop’s firing. According to Nesby, Lyons had faculty and administrators loyal to him in the room, namely JC Jones, Dean Fields, the business manager, and Lyons’ assistant. Nesby recounted that Lyons spoke very little, but said, “Students do not hire and fire presidents” and that he would not resign under this kind of protest. Nesby said that Lyons could not “get over the audacity of students even demanding his resignation.” Lastly, Lyons told Nesby that the SGA and other leaders should be ready to “take responsibilities for the repercussions [of their actions].”⁸⁰ As Nesby recounted these details in the mass meeting, the students present considered Lyons’ words a threat. After leaving the meeting,

⁷⁵ Maloney 1971: 1.

⁷⁶ Maloney 1971: 1 and *The Voice* 1971: 3.

⁷⁷ Cook 1971.

⁷⁸ Wright 1971: 1B.

⁷⁹ Wright 1971: 1A.

⁸⁰ *The Voice* 1971: 1.

student marshals led the students on a march from the auditorium, around the dormitories, and back into the auditorium parking lot where the students set Lyons afire in effigy for the second time. In the shadow of the embers, the students marched to Lyons' home chanting, "Lyons must go."

The students agreed to conditionally return to class on February 11 at Nesby's requested.⁸¹ Lyons, however, sent a memo that threatened the students' financial aid and the spring graduation of senior students. He also made several statements, published in the *Fayetteville Observer*, which angered student activists. As a result, over 1200 of the 1400 students recommitted to staying the course and refused to return to class. Lyons' memo stated that he was not trying to pressure students or get them to do anything they did not want to do, he was simply informing them of the consequences of their actions.⁸² This time, the students referred to their protest as "an indefinite sick-in."⁸³

On the night of Wednesday Feb 10, roughly 850 students held another mass meeting in Seabrook Auditorium. Ever egalitarian, Nesby opened the floor for questions from the total student body and then called a voice vote for continuing or stopping the protest. The student body's thunderous applause signaled their vote to continue the sick-in. A bit shaken at the responsibility of it all, Nesby again opened the floor for questions. Hearing none, he reminded students that everything they did would be by vote. The stakes were high, and he wanted to be sure that the students present knew just how high they were. He expressly reminded the student body that they might win their battle, but that they might also face punishment. He further urged students to continue their studies during the sick-in. Finally, explaining their use of the phrase "sick-in," Nesby said the "present atmosphere [at Fayetteville State] is not the best and is causing the sickness." Senior and SGA judge, James Waters closed the meeting with several relevant poems by Langston Hughes. He read, "A Dream Deferred," "Who But the Lord?," "Ghost of 1619," and "Motto."⁸⁴ After the meeting, the crowd burned Lyons in effigy for a third time and marched around the campus in a "show of mass support of student demands" and grievances.⁸⁵

Lyons suggested that the student actions "overstepped the bounds of acceptable protest and permissible actions." Further Lyons alluded to students being harassed into boycotting classes and framed the student unrest as only a function of Dr. Bishop's negative influence.⁸⁶ The student body was beside itself with frustration. Student leaders being called into a regularly scheduled Board of Trustee meeting with only fifteen minutes notice did not help the matter. Nevertheless, the following six leaders represented the student body: Seniors Nesby and Thelma Garris and Juniors Glivian Armstrong, Harold Mincey, Larry McCleary, and Carolyn Jean Buffalo. Nesby explained the student body's position, but each student felt slighted by the circumstances of the meeting. The Board readily approved their request for a meeting to be held later where the student leaders could supply the evidence for their grievances. Feeling extremely pressured, Nesby first agreed to try to rein in the students and then came back into the meeting after the students were dismissed and

⁸¹ *Fayetteville Observer* 1971: 1B.

⁸² *The Voice* 1971: 3.

⁸³ *Fayetteville Observer* 1971: 2A.

⁸⁴ *The Voice* 1971: 1. The lines of the poem "Motto" form the major subheadings for the protests represented in this essay. See Arnold Rampersad and David Roessel, eds., *The Collected Poems of Langston Hughes* 1994: 398.

⁸⁵ *The Voice* 1971: 1.

⁸⁶ "Three Day Boycott of Classes Ends at Fayetteville State." *Fayetteville Observer* 1971: 1B.

withdrew his assurances. Nesby remembers being harassed and under surveillance while he was the SGA president. He said:

I had problems being the Student Government president. Students were... I don't remember if it were students or not...but they were damaging my car. I had my car vandalized a few times, and I was being followed around. I had to move off campus.⁸⁷

When the student leaders discussed how they felt in this meeting, they expressed hurt that the white Board members insulted them less than Lyons and the few Black Board members. They also felt some concern about Lyons taking a list of their names and they felt that he should have not even been present in the meeting.⁸⁸ In the same meeting, Lyons told the Board that the Faculty Assembly never properly served him a list of grievances. Lyons went on to say that all he received was “a copy from a dissatisfied member of the Faculty Assembly.” As he did not recognize this group as representative of the faculty, he simply refused to recognize duly received grievance list as legitimate. Interestingly, one of the Board members intimated that he felt some regret for firing Dr. Bishop or at least the timing of his firing. He said, “We could have lived with the situation until June.” When the Board voted on what portions of this meeting to release to the public, they voted to leave out any mention of Nesby's statement about reigning in the student body or his change of heart. Poor communication would continue to worsen discord in the Fayetteville State community.⁸⁹

The SGA called a mass meeting to be held at 7 pm in the Women's Gym. Nesby, Vice President Stevens, Dr. Cherry, and the ex-president of the Alumni Association, Barbara McNeill, each spoke. After Nesby shared what happened in the Board meeting, Dr. Cherry told the crowd that the “Board of Trustees was pregnant with Lyons and too moralistic to get an abortion.” McNeil told the student body not to give up or Lyons would continue his authoritarian rule. Stevens reminded her fellow students that the threat to their financial aid was real, but that risking their education may just be a chance they would have to take. She presented the students with the following choices as they moved forward. Students could (1) give up and go back to class and admit defeat; (2) return to class and meet with the Board of Trustees at a later time; (3) continue to be “sick” until the Board presented them with its inevitable ultimatum to return to class; or (4) send a mass delegation of students to Raleigh to speak with the Board of Higher Education. Stevens told those present that the National Alumni Association provided the SGA with \$1,500 to charter twenty buses for the trip. The student body voted to continue the sick-in and begin planning the trip to the state Capitol. The students promised to remain non-violent and sent a press release sharing their position with the larger Fayetteville community. The students, while terrified of possible reprisals, felt that their cause was righteous, and they felt some comfort in being united under their legal representative body—the SGA. Unlike other student organizations or factions, the administration could not easily ignore the SGA.⁹⁰ Junior Robert Steverson explained something of

⁸⁷ James Nesby, Interview with the author, January 9, 2019.

⁸⁸ *The Voice* 1971: 1.

⁸⁹ “Minutes of the Meeting of the Board of Trustees, 2-11-1971” 1971.

⁹⁰ *The Voice* 1971: 1.

the student leadership thought process when he recalled:

We had people who were leaning toward Malcolm, Black Panther issues, wanting to follow Farrakhan, you had all these different factions. I was trying to get people to look at where we were going. How best we could get there based on the resources we had as opposed to looking at it and just saying, ‘Yes, I’d like to be on top of the mountain, but I don’t have any way to get there.’⁹¹

The Voice staff dedicated the February 15 issue to the publication of various lists of campus community grievances. Each student demand spoke to a campus society teetering on a foundation of miscommunication. The students were concerned about the state of the university considering the impending UNC system merger.⁹² Receiving a cacophony of information, they worried that Black education would suffer or that Black colleges would no longer exist. The students wanted Lyons to recognize the Faculty Assembly, they wanted the attendance requirements returned to those they won due to previous protests, and they wanted improved organization in the Business Office. Parents received notices of outstanding balances that did not exist, and Lyons issued no follow-up letter to parents apologizing for the mistakes. Students were concerned that well respected and knowledgeable instructors left the institution since Lyons became president. As students’ educative experiences in college are often predicated on dialogue with their teachers outside the classroom, the students wanted Lyons to stop barring teachers and instructors from talking to students by accusing them of inciting riots. They wanted Lyons to stop undermining students’ attempts to talk to him about grievances as a group.⁹³

The Faculty Assembly also released its list of grievances. The body argued that Dr. Lyons was an unethical leader and that no one was against Lyons until he displayed dictator like qualities. Their extensive list of grievances also spoke to a culture of confusion and poor communication. Bishop reasserted the faculty’s desire to effectively teach college students. He said:

Most of all the faculty members want to teach, but good teaching is seriously impaired because of the president’s poor planning and organization, his unnecessary and meaningless meetings, his seeming encouragement of mass confusion and his overall ineffectiveness. Fayetteville State University exists for its students and not for the purpose of glorifying a president.⁹⁴

Former SGA president Joseph Johnson was an alum during this time of protest, but he remembered Charlie “Action” Lyons. He said:

⁹¹ George Langford, interview with the author 2019.

⁹² In an effort to curb costs, the state of North Carolina sought to merge its public institutions into one system under one president and Board of Governors. Each campus would retain its own chancellor and Board of Trustees.

⁹³ Maloney 1971: 1.

⁹⁴ Faculty Assembly 1971: 4.

When Charlie Lyons came in, he got rid of all the professors that were at Fayetteville State for the most part. Walked in their class, handed them their resignation letter. He was very drastic about it. Charlie called himself “Charlie Action Lyons.” Charlie was a good guy, but he got rid of all of the great professors. I’m talking about Mrs. Bishop, Dr. Bishop, her husband. Dr. Eldridge, who’s one of the most renowned national mathematicians in this country. His wife is the one who wrote the Alma Mater. He got rid of those professors.⁹⁵

When asked if Lyons ever justified his decisions, Johnson, who spent several years as a college president himself, offered,

Not to the public. Like with any president, you must decide. I would never do anything that drastic, but I think the first thing you do is you assess. Now maybe Charlie did assess. Maybe Charlie felt that he wanted to do some things. You just never know, in the Academy, why things change—the real root reason of why they change. So, the acceptable reason is that, well, he’s coming in new; he should have a chance to have his own team. But he never gave any public reason and there was a big uproar. But TWIs, traditionally white institutions, were just as happy as they could be. They just scooped them [the fired professors] up.⁹⁶

Due to being alerted to their violation of multiple procedural errors, the Board of Trustees rescinded Bishop’s firing. Instead, they barred him from campus and suspended him with full pay for the remainder of his existing contract.⁹⁷ As the sick-in continued, thirteen student leaders, chosen based on their campus leadership and engagement, met with the Board of Trustees on Tuesday, March 2 and further discussed their grievances. Eight of the students were from places outside North Carolina such as New York and Washington, D.C. Steverson remembered,

We were in protest of [Dr. Lyons] and the things we thought he represented versus where the university needed to go. I didn’t see him as a dynamic leader who was willing to position the university out in front of the changes that were taking place. Part of those changes clearly were embracing what Dr. King and SNCC was doing. I think he shied away from that and most of us felt like he was not . . . a dynamic leader who was in the middle of what young people were embracing.⁹⁸

The Board scheduled a meeting with representatives from the faculty, the National Alumni

⁹⁵ Joseph Johnson, interview with the author 2019. Johnson was acting president of Virginia Union University in 2016.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Fayetteville Observer 1971: 1B.

⁹⁸ Robert Steverson, interview with the author 2019.

Association, and the administration on March 10—during Spring Break. This scheduling meant that most student leaders could not attend the meeting. Before seeing any of the representatives, the Board seemed to realize that much of the campus discord stemmed from a series of communication failures and suggested the formation of a series of committees aimed at cross communication between the city of Fayetteville, students, the administration, the faculty, and the Board. Department chairs or their representatives attended the meeting. Each faculty member present admitted that many of the problems cited by the Faculty Assembly and the SGA were valid but that they were loyal and committed to patience in correcting any remaining issues. Several faculty members felt that the student body did not trust them and that there was a breakdown in respect on all sides. The Business manager stated that although he inherited an inefficient office, he would improve the office's organization going forward.⁹⁹

On March 19, the Board of Trustees released a memo to the SGA and the student body that addressed several of their demands without addressing the overarching goal of the protests—Lyons resignation. The SGA responded to the memo on Monday, March 22 by saying, “We find it necessary to continue our pursuit for a solution to our problems.”¹⁰⁰

The Death March

The Fayetteville Observer reported that on Thursday March 25 at 3 pm, 400 Fayetteville State student marched from the campus to downtown Fayetteville. Participating students reported that 800 students participated in the march. Either way, the march was significant for a student body of 1400. Protesters carried signs that said, “Down with the Tyrant” and “Lyons is Dangerous to Our Health.” Several students carried a cardboard coffin painted Black with the word “Lyons” on the side of it. Nesby obtained student body approval of the short speech he delivered. He said,

We have taken our appeal to the Board of Trustees, and no action has been taken to correct the problem which is Charles Lyons Jr. Therefore, we are appealing to the Fayetteville Community because we, the students, will never accept this man as president of FSU...the people of Fayetteville need to know the conditions under which the university has deteriorated to the point that unless the people of this city become concerned, our efforts to obtain an education will be lost.¹⁰¹

Nesby also pointed out that the institution infused money into the Fayetteville economy and therefore it “needs the support of the entire community.” Nesby later told the press, “I think the community was shocked to see that the students were still dissatisfied.” We let it be known that we the students are not the only ones who benefit from FSU.” Students held at least two additional marches.

On Thursday, April 1, 600 students marched through a campus building where Lyons held

⁹⁹ “Meeting of the Board of Trustees” 1971.

¹⁰⁰ The Student Government Association 1971.

¹⁰¹ Downes 1971: 1B and Waters 1971: 1.

a meeting before standing outside the building and chanting, “Lyons Must Go!”¹⁰² After leaving the academic building, the students marched to Lyons’ home. The SGA planned a march to the Administration Building for the next day, but there is no indication that it took place. On April 6, after hearing from all facets of the Fayetteville State community, the Board of Trustees heard Lyons’ response to the grievances and the student protests.¹⁰³ He released the report to the *Fayetteville Observer* as well. Lyons’ accounting of the events of the last month incensed the students and they wrote to the *Fayetteville Observer* and *The Voice* to correct perceived inaccuracies in Lyons’ account. The student body again argued that they could speak for themselves and were not manipulated by the faculty. They cared about the faculty’s wellbeing just as much as they cared about their own. The students argued that some programs were “not adequately staffed or provided for materially.” “The Black Studies Program,” they said, “cannot be implemented because Lyons dismissed the main force, the architect of the program, who could implement it (Dr. Bishop).”¹⁰⁴

On Friday April 16, in an effort to curb further student protests, Lyons released a campus memo establishing procedures for handling any further campus unrest. In addition to defining punishable disruptions, the memo provided a structure for a Committee on Campus Disruption and Disorder comprised of two faculty members, three administrators, one student, and one member of the Board. The memo defined a disruption or disorder as engaging or inciting others to engage “in individual or collective conduct that destroys or significantly damages university property or impairs or threatens the physical well-being of any member of the University Community.” Further, any building takeover, blocking of entrances, streets, or walkways after being expressly told not to do so, and any setting of fires, usage of weapons or explosives would be punishable by suspension or expulsion.¹⁰⁵

It is not clear how the student protests ended. As in previous years, the ending of the semester may have also signaled the end the protest. While there is no record of any student suspensions or expulsions related to the weeks of student unrest, the administration did fire ten switchboard operators for participating the April 1 campus march. Apparently, Lyons noticed that some of the operators were marching when they should have been answering the phones. Two students, Maudie Mitchell and Betsy Rodgers recounted their experiences in the student newspaper.¹⁰⁶ It appears that the *Voice’s* faculty advisor also faced reprisal. During the 1971-1972 and 1972-1973 academic years, the Director of Public Relations served as advisor to the paper staff—a role previously held by English Department faculty.

Looking Outward, Again, 1971-1973

Lyons opened the fall semester with a call for campus unity and announced that his door would always be open to all who enter in the search for “purposeful” dialogue.¹⁰⁷ Fayetteville State students,

¹⁰² Fayetteville Observer 1971: 1A.

¹⁰³ “Minutes of the Board of Trustees” 1971.

¹⁰⁴ Lyons, Jr. 1971: 6.

¹⁰⁵ Lyons, Jr. 1971.

¹⁰⁶ Waters 1971: 1.

¹⁰⁷ Lyons, Jr. 1971: 2.

still very much concerned with what the creation of the UNC System meant for their education and the education of those who came after them, joined students from North Carolina Central, Winston Salem State, North Carolina A&T, and Elizabeth City State—the five public HBCUs affected by the merger—in a mass rally at the state capitol. In total, over thirty-five hundred Black students met in Raleigh on October 25 to listen to the pros and cons of the proposed merger.¹⁰⁸ Fayetteville State students joined other HBCU students and returned to Raleigh on November 8, 5,000 strong.¹⁰⁹

The Voice developed an exchange agreement with a college newspaper in Palo Alto, California and published several reprints of full-page articles about the Angela Davis trial during the spring of 1972.¹¹⁰ The last issue of *The Voice* for the 1971-1972 academic year featured a short article that seemed to simultaneously look backward and forward in Fayetteville State students' quest to be recognized and heard as thinking adults with something to say and contribute to the college community. Senior English major and student leader Janice Pauling discussed a lack of meaningful communication between the students, faculty, and administration. Perhaps looking back at all she witnessed or participated in during her time at the university, she wrote, "A slight communication gap today, may flare into a destructive uprising tomorrow." She featured Elon College's successful "Lend an Ear" Program where administrators made themselves available to talk to students and she urged students to convince the administration to institute this program at Fayetteville State. Mirroring prior generations' student problem solving patterns, the student journalist presented a problem, shared why refusing to address the problem would hurt the college community, explored ways that other institutions addressed the same problem, and presented a possible solution to the problem at Fayetteville State.¹¹¹

While students continued to speak out about gendered differences in campus social privileges, the 1971-1972 academic year ended with no further large-scale protests.¹¹² Charles Lyons would not announce his resignation until the spring semester of 1987. While the exact reason for his decision is unclear, Lyons indicated that he did not resign willingly. He said, "I did not take the initiative to leave here. I was advised that it would be in my best interest to look at other options."¹¹³ In the *Voice* issue dedicated to presidency and chancellorship, the newspaper staff dedicated a page to reprints of articles about two of the 1971 protests.¹¹⁴

Conclusion

Students at Fayetteville State held public protests on campus in 1966, 1968, 1969, and 1971. Each of these protests followed the same path that student protests in the early 20th century followed. Students made their displeasure or concern known. The administration ignored or minimized their

¹⁰⁸ Meyers 1971: 1.

¹⁰⁹ Grant and Coleman 1971: 1.

¹¹⁰ *College Voice* 1972: 2.

¹¹¹ Pauling 1972: 4.

¹¹² Bond 1971: 2; and Jones 1973: 6.

¹¹³ *Bronco Voice* 1987: 1.

¹¹⁴ *Bronco Voice* 1987: 3.

concerns. Students increased their efforts to be heard and appealed to the alumni, the state, and the local community for help in reaching solutions to their grievances. As those efforts continued to be ignored, students resorted to the class strike. As was the case in past years, the administration wrote letters to their parents to control the students. Lack of communication is the prevailing theme through each BCM protest. Students communicated with each other, with the faculty, with the alumni, with the administration, and with the local community in person, through *The Voice* and, at times, through the *Fayetteville Observer*. The administration and the Board of Trustees' lack of transparency and communication with all the stakeholders in the Fayetteville State community was at the root of each BCM protest. Fayetteville State students' fully invoked James Baldwin's notion of critiquing America in that they loved their institution more than any other institution in the world, and, exactly for that reason, they insisted on the right to criticize Fayetteville State and demand that she rise to the occasion for which she was formed.¹¹⁵

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