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"POWER CONCEDES NOTHING WITHOUT A DEMAND": STUDENT ACTIVISM AT MEMPHIS STATE UNIVERSITY IN THE 1960S

by

Jack Brian Lorenzini

A Dissertation

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Major: History

The University of Memphis

May 2014

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Dedication

Dedicated to my mother, Barbara Jean Lorenzini, and to the student activists who sought to alter the Memphis landscape and make the world a better place.

Acknowledgements

I am indebted to a number of people who have supported this project over the years. There would be no dissertation without the support from the activists, who opened up their lives and shared moving stories of the movements of the 1960s, making it difficult to pick and choose which stories to include in this study. Nonetheless, I hope that they will be pleased knowing that the information that they provided me will create a better understanding of student activism in the South and the unique challenges faced by activists at Memphis State University. I would also like to thank Ed Frank and his staff at the Mississippi Valley Collection at the Ned McWherter Library at the University of Memphis. Ed and his staff worked tirelessly, tracking down sources that I might have overlooked. They made my visits to the fortress of solitude not simply tolerable, but exciting. In addition, I need to thank the staffs at the Wisconsin Historical Society at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, and the Memphis-Shelby County Room, particularly Laura Cunningham, for their expertise. I also cannot express enough gratitude to the Department of History at the University of Memphis. Karen Bradley and Karen Jackett, administrative assistants, ensured that I filled out the appropriate paper work and received permits for classes. I would like to thank Dr. Dennis Laumann and the Endowment Committee for awarding me with the 2012-2013 Dissertation Fellowship. I would especially like to thank my committee for believing in the project, their encouragement, and challenging me to reach my utmost potential. Committee members Dr. Charles Crawford and Dr. James Fickle provided invaluable suggestions that made this dissertation better. My dissertation advisors Dr. Aram Goudsouzian and Dr. Janann Sherman deserve an Olympic Gold Medal for their patience and support for this project.

Without their mentorship, this dissertation could not have reached fruition. They continually pushed me to think critically and thoughtfully about the "So what, significance" of each chapter. I greatly appreciate the countless hours that they spent reading over this dissertation. Towards the end of the dissertation process, Dr. Sherman rewarded me by giving me her talking Richard Nixon doll, which I will always treasure.

I have also been blessed by the constant support of friends and fellow graduate students along the way. I would like to thank the late Ella Paulman for her friendship and support of my project. She lost a courageous battle to breast cancer. I would like to thank Dr. June Ladd, Dr. Margaret Lewis, and Dr. Shannon Risk for reading parts of this dissertation and providing me with valuable feedback. I also need to thank James Conway, Le'trice Donaldson, Malcolm Frierson, Dr. Shirletta Kinchen, Dr. Jared Krebsbach, and Dr. Ann Mulhearn, for the support that they have given me over the years. Ann Mulhearn has mad editing skills. I am indebted to the countless times that she spent reading and editing drafts. She deserves a lifetime supply of unsweetened tea.

Finally, I would like to thank my family for the support that they have given me. I am blessed to have both maternal grandparents still living. Their shared stories of the past and encouragement for writing will never be forgotten. I am thankful for the solid foundation that they provided for the family. Similarly, the support of my Aunt Pat is appreciated. I consider her my number two fan. A special thanks to my sisters, Debbie and Amy, for putting up with me and for encouraging me to finish. Most importantly, thank you to my mother. As a single mother, raising three children—you were the first person who taught me what it was like to be loved. You constantly encouraged your children to do their best and to always pursue their dreams. You are my number one fan

and your unconditional love and support will benefit me in future dreams and goals that I pursue.

Abstract

Lorenzini, Jack Brian. Ph.D. The University of Memphis. May 2014. "Power Concedes Nothing Without a Demand": Student Activism at Memphis State University in the 1960s. Major Professor: Aram Goudsouzian, Ph.D.

This study examines how a group of Memphis State students, black and white, advocated for free speech, civil rights, and an end to the Vietnam War in the 1960s. It addresses how students carried out their ideas for reform, and it demonstrates what changes were achieved—or not achieved—at an urban commuter university in the South. Local conditions in Memphis effected how student activism unfolded at MSU. Memphis State activists operated in an intense political and cultural environment in the South. Although faced with challenges inherent to a commuter university and the conservative city surrounding it, activists were determined to alter their landscapes.

Did Memphis State student activism matter? The desegregation campaigns by student activists at the Normal Tea Room and Second Presbyterian Church resulted in lunch counters and church pews opening to African Americans. The visit by Steve Weissman, a leader of the Berkeley Free Speech Movement, to Memphis State represented a breakthrough of academic freedom in the South. The effort by MSU student groups such as Logos to espouse anti-war views generated a political consciousness on campus that previously did not exist. Logos transformed the university into a center for intellectualism and critical thinking. Furthermore, sanitation strike activism resulted in a watershed moment: black and white students engaged in meaningful communication and dialogue for the first time in school history. Coupled with the sanitation strike, the Black Student Sit-in was culturally transformative**.** Finally, the presence of the Students for a

Democratic Society (SDS) on campus gave likeminded students an outlet to express themselves politically.

The scholarship on campus activism tends to focus attention on students from elite institutions such as Cornell, Columbia, Harvard and Berkeley, as well as universities that were hotbeds of unrest, such as the University of Wisconsin-Madison and Kent State University. This dissertation challenges the traditional narrative and contributes to the emerging scholarship of southern student activism. The work also documents instances where MSU activists faced repression by the FBI and Memphis Police. Relying on informants, law authorities subjected civil rights and anti-war activists to heavy surveillance. These findings contribute to the ongoing discussion among scholars of the role played by the FBI and police organizations in monitoring the activists.

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Introduction

On May 4, 1970, national tragedy struck when Ohio National Guardsmen killed four students and wounded nine others at Kent State University. The shootings, coupled with President Nixon's recent announcement of the invasion of Cambodia a day earlier, led to widespread unrest on college campuses. Over 57% of America's colleges and universities experienced some kind of protest, including Memphis State University.[1]

The day after the Kent State shootings, a crowd composed of Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), SDS sympathizers, and the Revolutionary Marxist Caucus gathered at the MSU flagpole in front of the administration building to lower the flag in honor of the victims at Kent State. When the protesters moved to Jones Hall, the AFROTC location, other students hoisted the American flag back up. As the crowd of determined "radicals" went back to the flagpole, they encountered the supporters of the flag who proudly sang the national anthem.[2] Fistfights erupted and students fought to position the flag. Mary Ann McClure, SDS member and Memphis State student activist, declared that "our greatest evil was the football team." "You girls get out of the way, we

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[1] Richard Peterson and John Bilorusky, *May 1970: The Campus Aftermath of Cambodia and Kent State* (Berkeley: Carnegie Commission on Higher Education, 1971), 15.

[2] The students love for the national anthem was no different than other Memphians. One could get a sense of the patriotism of Memphians nearly two years earlier, when Pat Joyner wrote a letter to President Humphreys indicating his frustration with MSU for not having a vocalist for the national anthem during football and basketball games. On December 11, 1968, President Humphreys told Joyner that there was not a singer at football games "because of the difficulty of sound in that big stadium. Mr. Thomas Ferguson, Director of the Band, advises there is a four-second time lag between their singing the words and the time it comes out of the amplifiers, which creates a real problem for most singers...however he advised that each basketball game is opened with the national anthem, and they do have a singer to lead the singing." See Letter from C.C. Humphreys to Pat Joyner, 11 December 1968, Special Collections, University of Memphis, Memphis.

wouldn't want you to get hurt," said one young man to activist Karen Stuart. That provoked Stuart, who climbed up the flagpole.[3]

Once University President Cecil Humphreys heard of the campus disturbance, he went to the flagpole to talk to the students. He alleviated tensions and agreed to have a memorial service honoring the four killed at Kent State University the next day at noon. Over 3,000 persons attended the memorial service. During the ceremony the flag was lowered to half-staff. Humphreys, however, wanted the flag raised after the ceremony, because it symbolized that MSU "was not going to yield to duress."[4]

The infamous flagpole incident at Memphis State revealed a clash of cultures on the southern campus: hawk versus dove, and conservative versus liberal. As perhaps the most visible display of student protest, it reveals an aspect of campus culture at MSU in the 1960s. Coming at a time when the nationwide maelstrom over free speech, civil rights, and anti-war activism of the 1960s had begun to subside, many MSU students believed the encounter to be the campus's first and only protest. Although one of the most iconic moments at the university, the flagpole demonstration was only one of many expressions of student activism at Memphis State from 1959 to 1970. It demonstrated that even if student activism existed on a much smaller scale than at other universities, it was prominent at times, even if a majority of students did not participate. During this period, activists set out to alter the political, cultural and social landscape of Memphis State and the community it served.

[3] Mary Ann McClure, interview by Jack Lorenzini, Memphis, Tennessee, 23 December 2011.

[4] "Flag at Half Staff at MSU Memorial," *Memphis Press Scimitar*, 6 May 1970.

Abraham Kriegel, then a young professor of history, described student activism at MSU in the 1960s as "'incipient."[5] Memphis State student demonstrations were a part of the activism that swept across American colleges and universities in the 1960s. Students not only advocated free speech, but also sought to remove *in loco parentis* restrictions such as women's dormitory hours and dress codes. Student activists participated in civil rights activities including sit-ins, freedom rides, and voter registration drives. They also spoke out against U.S. foreign policy in Vietnam. But in the South, there was less tolerance for dissent. Southerners' resistance to integration, their staunch anti-communist sentiment, and their pro-military views, and their reluctance to criticize the United States made student activism more difficult at Memphis State. The university housed the largest AFROTC in the nation. It was also an institution with established attitudes about appearance: no torn jeans, no long hair. Most students did not welcome divergent ideas.[6] Religion also played an important role in shaping southern student attitudes. For the most part, they were more likely to defer to their ministers' and parents' viewpoints and avoid confrontation with authority.[7] In this way, MSU reflected the city that surrounded it. Bob Rutman, a student activist, recalled that, "Memphis was a culture of people who deferred to authority, deferred to age, and also deferred to a culture of compliance."[8] This environment posed a challenge for activists.

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[5] Abraham Kriegel, interview by Jack Lorenzini, Memphis, Tennessee, 28 January 2011.

[6] Ibid

[7] Jeffrey Turner, *Sitting in and Speaking Out: Student Movements in the American South, 1960-1970* (University of Georgia Press, 2010), 8-10.

[8] Bob Rutman, interview by Jack Lorenzini, Memphis, Tennessee, 23 September 2010.

Memphis State student activists also faced the obstacle of operating on a campus overwhelmingly comprised of commuter students. Memphis State competed for students with the University of Mississippi, the University of Tennessee, and the University of Arkansas. The great majority who enrolled at the university were first generation college students, coming from working class socio-economic backgrounds. According to James Chumney, "if you didn't have the money, you went to Memphis State."[9] For the most part, these students attended class during the day and left to go to their jobs and provide for their families. If they were not working, they gravitated toward other pursuits such as football, basketball, fraternities, and sororities—long considered traditional college pastimes. Jere Cunningham, a 1961 graduate of White Station High School and an art and advertising major at MSU in 1966, saw the campus atmosphere as "intellectually parochial, narrow and more like another level of high school than an enlightening challenging arena for mind growth."[10] Cunningham mentioned that the only element which united the student body was sports, primarily basketball.

Considered by some as "Tiger High," Memphis State struggled to detach from its origins as a training school for teachers; MSU did not have a graduate school or obtain university status until the 1950s. Founded in 1912 out of a need for training teachers, West Tennessee Normal School opened its doors. A decade after opening, the school transitioned from a two to four year college, becoming West Tennessee State Teachers College in 1925. For the first few decades the school provided a "necessary niche." Forty

[9] James Chumney, interview by Jack Lorenzini, Memphis, Tennessee, 3 March 2014.

[10] Jere Cunningham, interview by Jack Lorenzini, Memphis, Tennessee, 23 February 2011.

years later, the teacher college transformed into a multipurpose educational institution, serving thousands of students.

Cecil "Sonny" Humphreys became the university's seventh president in 1960. Humphreys, a former football all-American at the University of Tennessee in the 1930s, was no stranger to Memphis State. He served as a faculty member in the History Department and as an Assistant Football Coach in 1937. After leaving Memphis State College during the Second World War to pursue employment with the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Humphreys returned in 1946 to become athletic director.[11] Humphreys possessed good business sense and his popularity as a football star helped bridge the gap and "neutralize the long standing rivalry with the University of Tennessee."[12] Serving as university president from 1960 to 1972, Humphreys believed that his main priority was to continue the "student teaching mission of the university."[13] He also insisted that the university and city become partners, "to tie the town to gown, to build a 'communiversity.'"[14] As the city of Memphis grew in population, so did the university. From 1960 to 1970, enrollment at Memphis State increased by 13,000 students.[15] Humphreys oversaw university expansion as "the size of the campus increased from

[11] Janann Sherman, Beverly Bond, and Frances Breland, *Dreamers, Thinkers, Doers*: *A Centennial History of the University of Memphis* (Memphis: The University of Memphis, 2011), 50-51.

[12] James Chumney, interview by author.

[13] William Sorrels, *The Exciting Years: The Cecil Humphreys Presidency of Memphis State University 1960*-1972(Memphis: Memphis State University Press, 1987), 107.

[14] Sherman, Bond, and Breland, *Dreamers, Thinkers, Doers,*54

[15] Ibid., 51. The university enrolled around 5,000 students in 1960. By 1970, the school had a student population of 18,000.

eighty acres to nearly one thousand, and the number of buildings increased from 20 to 176."[16]

While the university grew, Humphreys also had to deal with the emergence of student activism at Memphis State. According to James Chumney, then a young Assistant History Professor at Memphis State, Humphreys was a firm believer that "activism was not local. It was spontaneous with leaders leading the protests."[17] Some have even jokingly remarked that the Humphreys presidency helped to foster disinterest for student activism among the student body. The president had a notorious reputation for holding loquacious faculty meetings.[18] Chumney referred to these gatherings as "interminable." During this period, Cecil Humphreys neither supported nor completely stifled student activism.

The scholarship on campus activism tends to focus attention on students from elite institutions such as Cornell, Columbia, Harvard and Berkeley, as well as universities that were hotbeds of unrest, such as the University of Wisconsin-Madison and Kent State University. Even though historian Kenneth Heineman argues against focusing only on elite schools when studying protest movements, for a long time few scholars had addressed the role of southern student activists.[19]

More recently, Doug Rossinow provides a comprehensive study of student activism in Austin, Texas, considered "the largest center of new left activism in the

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[16] Ibid.

[17] James Chumney, interview by author.

[18] James Chumney, interview by author; Maurice Crouse, interview by Jack Lorenzini, Memphis, Tennessee, 3 March 2014.

[19] See Kenneth Heineman, *Campus Wars: The Peace Movement at American State Universities in the Vietnam Era* (New York: New York University Press, 1994).

American South."[20] Moreover, Gregg Michel analyzes the rise and fall of the Southern Student Organizing Committee (SSOC), an organization that embraced southern distinctiveness, and how it brought a respectable form of activism to the southern campus. Michel's study also exposes the hardships of challenging *in loco parentis* restrictions, advocating free speech, espousing civil rights, and speaking out against the Vietnam War. Activism could lead to "rejection of one's family, expulsion from school and loss of friends."[21] In addition, Jeffrey Turner produces a regional analysis of white and black student activists in the 1960s. Turner addresses the challenges that activists faced in the South, maintaining that "local conditions played a crucial role in determining the form and content of activism in particular locales."[22] Robert Cohen's edited book enriches the understanding of southern student activism. Composed of a series of essays, the edited work examined the "prophetic minority" pitted against the "recalcitrant majority".[23] Cohen raises fundamental questions about southern student activism: "Did it matter? Did it have a major impact and prove politically or culturally transformative, either on campus or off?"[24]

Historians Shirletta Kinchen, Ibram Rogers, and Martha Biondi provide significant contributions to our understanding of black student activism. Kinchen's

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[20] Doug Rossinow, *The Politics of Authenticity: Liberalism, Christianity, and the New Left in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 7-9.

[21] Gregg Michel, *A Struggle for a Better South: The Southern Student Organizing Committee, 1964-1969* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 3.

[22] Turner, *Sitting in and Speaking Out,* 6.

[23] Robert Cohen and others, eds., *Rebellion in Black and White*: *Southern Student Activism in the 1960s* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2013), 18.

[24] Ibid., 12.

dissertation examines the rise of the Black Student Movement at Lemoyne-Owen College and Memphis State, noting how students implemented Black Power tactics for their own gain. Rogers presents an extensive study of the Black Student movement in which students, discontented with the inequities and restrictions imposed on them, challenged and restructured education at predominately white colleges and universities and historically black colleges and universities (HBCUS). Biondi delivers case studies of black student activism and charts the beginnings of black studies programs at San Francisco State University. Together, these works provide an understanding of black student activism and its importance in the time period.[25]

Specific to Memphis State University, two sources offer starting points for further investigation of student activism on campus: William Sorrels's *The Exciting Years: The Cecil Humphreys Presidency of Memphis State University 1960-1972* and *Dreamers, Thinkers, Doers: A Centennial History of the University of Memphis* by Janann Sherman, Beverly Bond, and Frances Breland. Given their scope, each work touches on the turbulent 1960s, but from the perspective of its chief administrator and the institution. Student protests are peripheral. Sorrel's biography of Cecil Humphreys provides only part of the story by acknowledging the achievements during the Humphreys presidency, along with his response to the changing campus environment of the 1960s. Meanwhile, *Dreamers, Thinkers, Doers* portrays over a hundred years of campus history, so it would not be possible to delve deeper into student activism.[26]

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[25] See Ibram Rogers, *The Black Campus Movement: Black Students and the Racial Reconstitution of Higher Education, 1965-1972* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012); Martha Biondi, *The Black Revolution on Campus* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012); Shirletta Kinchen, "We Want What People Generally Refer to As Black Power": Youth and Student Activism and the Impact of the Black Power Movement in Memphis, Tennessee, 1965-1975" (Ph.D. diss., University of Memphis, 2011).

[26] William Sorrels, *The Exciting Years: The Cecil Humphreys Presidency of Memphis State University 1960-1972* (Memphis: Memphis State University, 1987); Janann Sherman, Beverly Bond, and

This study challenges the traditional narrative of student activism that concentrates attention on Berkeley, Wisconsin, and Ivy League schools or hotbeds of campus unrest. Analysis of student activism at Memphis State also adds to the growing scholarship of southern student activism. Previous studies have not concentrated on a southern university located in one of the highly populated cities of the 1960s. In the 1960s, Memphis was the 22nd most populous American city with over 497,000 citizens.[27] While it is true that "urban and upper south campuses tended to display more cosmopolitanism and political tolerance than the rural Deep South,"[28] Memphis's history and geographic location complicates this assertion in some ways. Given its unique location wedged in between a more progressive upper south and an intolerant Deep South, Memphis was a conservative city. Time and time again, citizens linked civil rights with communism and anti-war rhetoric with being unpatriotic. Its citizens deferred to authority and did not favor changes to the status quo. Not until the late 1960s would Memphis emerge as a more progressive city, gradually opening itself to new ideas and becoming more "cosmopolitan."

Previous case studies such as Mary Ann Wynkoop's *Dissent in the Heartland: The Sixties at Indiana University* and Joy Ann Williamson's *Black Power on Campus: The University of Illinois, 1965-1975* more fully explore student activism in the Midwest.

Frances Breland, *Dreamers, Thinkers, Doers: A Centennial History of the University of Memphis* (Memphis: The University of Memphis, 2011).

[27] According to the 1960 census, Memphis's population was smaller than Baltimore, Houston, Dallas, New Orleans, and San Antonio. By the 1970 census, Memphis ranked 17th in the nation and surpassed New Orleans with a population of over 623,000. "Largest US Cities By Population: Top 1,000 Nationwide-1960 Population Data," available from http://www.biggestuscities.com/1960; Internet; accessed 25 October 2013.

[28] Cohen, *Rebellion in Black and White*, 26.

This same approach promises to be revealing when applied to student activism in the South. At MSU, student activists engaged in direct action with the intent of reaching "a particular social or political end."[29] For instance, they sought to desegregate Memphis State, restaurants, and churches. Other students advocated free speech and worked diligently through the publication of an underground newspaper to express their anti-war views on campus. Activists participated in anti-war activities, marched in support of striking sanitation workers, and hoped to be recognized by chartering a campus chapter of Students for a Democratic Society (SDS). Meanwhile, black student activists, along with a few white supporters, staged sit-ins with a determination to restructure the educational system in place.

A number of sources have been beneficial in making this research possible. Newspapers, the papers of Cecil Humphreys, and materials contained in the extensive Sanitation Strike collection at The University of Memphis shed light on student activism at Memphis State during the 1960s. The sources that have been perhaps most useful are the oral histories. Oral history can be both a blessing and a curse. Tracking potential interviewees, running into obstacles with incorrect interviewee information, and transcribing interviews are challenges for the researcher to overcome. Another challenge is dealing with the memory of the interviewee fading over time. Their stories must be confirmed by consulting other sources, if possible. Various oral histories have been used in this study. Many of these voices have not been heard before. Their voices must be

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[29] Michael Penrod, "Patterns of American Student Activism Since 1950" (Ph.D. diss., Kansas State University, 1985), 3. Mary Ann Wynkoop, *Dissent in the Heartland: The Sixties at Indiana University*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002); Joy Ann Williamson, *Black Power on Campus: The University of Illinois, 1965-1975* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2013).

heard and considered to understand how activism unfolds at a largely commuter campus situated in the mid-South.

There were no Mario Savios or Mark Rudds or gun toting African Americans occupying buildings making national news at Memphis State. Student activists were ordinary people who fought for extraordinary changes in their society. This dissertation presents a bottom to top approach, examining how a group of Memphis State students, black and white, advocated for free speech, civil rights, and an end to the Vietnam War. It addresses how students carried out their ideas for reform, and it demonstrates what changes were achieved—or not achieved—at an urban commuter university in the South.

Chapter 1

"Lay it on the Line": The Desegregation of Memphis State University and the Normal Tea Room

Shortly after the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, the Memphis NAACP was determined to desegregate Memphis State College. In a meeting on May 27, 1954, with representatives of the NAACP, J.M. Smith, the school's president, stated that he would not admit African American students "until the Supreme Court decides when and how its decision is to be carried out, and the State Board of Education in turn instructs" him to do so.[1] President Smith argued that the NAACP hurried the integration process. Despite the president's viewpoint, the civil rights organization continued to push the university to open its doors to five students in June 1954.[2] Visiting the campus in early June, the students seeking admission were asked to provide high school transcripts to President Smith. When the students did not have the necessary documents, Smith affirmed the school's provision, stated in the catalog, that allowed entry only "to white persons, residents of the state, who have completed the full four year course of an approved high school."[3] The students were rejected. As a result, the Memphis NAACP filed an appeal with the State Board of Education.

The following year, the State Board of Education implemented a plan of gradual desegregation, where colleges and universities would be fully integrated within five

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[1] "Memphis State Bars Negroes- Requirements aren't Met," *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, 8 June 1954; "Four Negro Students Seek to Enter MSC," *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, 5 June 1954.

[2] "Four Negro Students Seek to Enter MSC," *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, 5 June 1954.

[3] "Memphis State Bars Negroes- Requirements aren't Met," *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, 8 June 1954.

years.[4] According to the plan, African American students could be admitted to the graduate level in 1955, and to the senior class in 1956, and so forth until African Americans could enter as freshmen.[5] The plan was disputed in the case of *Ruth Booker v. The State of Tennessee* in October 1955. The U.S. district judge Marion Boyd ruled that the board's proposal was acceptable and that "it would not be advisable or practice to order immediate integration at Memphis State College."[6] Ruth Booker, one of the five students seeking enrollment at MSC in 1954 and represented by the NAACP, appealed the district court's decision to the United States Court of Appeals, Sixth Circuit. The court overturned Judge Boyd's ruling in January 1956.[7]

While the courts were deciding the constitutionality of the State Board of Education's plan, Memphis State implemented more stringent admission policies in an effort to maintain enrollment at 3,000. Screening tests for transfer and out of state students were adopted, along with considerations for having prospective graduate students take aptitude exams and write essays for admission. Citing proposed changes in requirements of the Southern Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools, President Smith asserted that this was necessary for MSC to keep its accreditation. According to the administrator, if the proposed measures did not maintain the current enrollment the

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[4] Tennessee State Board of Education Minutes, 9 August 1957. Cecil Humphreys Collection, Box 7, Special Collections, University of Memphis, Memphis.

[5] "Victory Not Complete, Says NAACP," *Tri- State Defender*, 22 October 1955.

[6] Ibid.

[7] "MSC To Consider Negro Applicants," *Memphis Press Scimitar*, 1 June 1957; Tennessee State Board of Education Minutes, 9 August 1957. The State Board of Education appealed this decision to the U.S. Supreme Court, but the court declined to review on May 20, 1957.

college might have to eliminate the graduate school.[8] Other changes required sophomore and junior transfer students to have a "C" average and for transfer senior and prospective graduate students to have a "B" average. Seniors and graduate students whose grade point average was less than a "B" average were required to take a qualifying exam. The new restrictions placed on students resulted in the rejection of over 200 prospective students, including five African Americans seeking admission to the graduate school.[9]

New restrictions placed on prospective graduate students did not stop African Americans from applying. In 1957, Maxine Smith and Miriam Sugarmon attempted to enroll at Memphis State University.[10] Smith, a graduate of Spelman College, wanted to pursue graduate work in foreign languages, while Sugarmon, a graduate of Wellesley College, intended to study English. The school refused to admit the women into the graduate school. The school justified its decision by mentioning that graduate courses in foreign languages were not offered and citing that Sugarmon did not have an adequate number of undergraduate classes necessary for enrollment in the English graduate program. While an entrance and credits committee would consider them for undergraduate study, R.P. Clark, the school's registrar, declared that the students' efforts were futile, since they missed the application deadline to apply for undergraduate

[8] "Stiff Tests Slated For Those Shifting To Memphis State," *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, 23 January 1956.

[9] "MSC Raising Its Entrance Standards," *Memphis Press Scimitar*, 14 August 1956; "MSC Will Consider Negro Applicants As Undergraduates," Memphis *Commercial Appeal*, 1 June 1957.

[10] The college obtained university status in 1957. Janann Sherman, Beverly Bond, and Frances Breland, *Dreamers, Thinkers, Doers*: *A Centennial History of the University of Memphis* (Memphis: The University of Memphis, 2011), 45.

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admission. After the students were denied by school officials, Sugarmon professed: "I feel the officials are groping in the dark to find some excuse to keep us out."[11]

Excuses and measures implemented by university officials continued to stall integration. In 1958, the year that African Americans could enter as freshmen, the school adopted entrance exams, designed to bar potential African American prospective students. Moreover, in a letter to the State Board of Education, President Smith requested that integration at Memphis State be postponed until fall of 1959. Smith acknowledged that a tense environment existed in Memphis as a result of the recent violence at Little Rock's Central High School and the unsuccessful desegregation campaigns of public buses and libraries in Memphis. The president stated: "I am thoroughly convinced that considerable trouble and even violence could occur should we enroll Negroes."[12] The State Board of Education granted Smith's request, while the Supreme Court declared that the threat of violence was not a legitimate reason for delaying integration.[13] The eight African American students who passed the entrance exams would have to wait another year.

Missing from President Smith's letter to the State Board of Education was his plan to appease those eight students, who were eligible for admittance to MSU. At one point, Smith considered reducing Memphis State enrollment by eight students so that state funds could be made available to A&I State University, the only state funded black

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[11] *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, 1 June 1957. The NAACP filed another suit on behalf of the two students. Sherry Hoppe and Bruce Speck, *Maxine Smith's Unwilling Pupils: Lessons Learned in Memphis's Civil Rights Classroom* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, *2007), 19.*

[12] Letter from J.M. Smith to Tennessee State Board of Education, 8 August 1958, Cecil Humphreys Collection, Box 7, Special Collections, University of Memphis, Memphis.

[13] "Negro Students Expected to Enter MSU in Fall," *Tri State Defender*, 11 July 1959.

institution in Tennessee, which was located in Nashville. In the original draft, Smith stated, "I pledge to obtain sufficient funds from private sources to award the eight… scholarships to A&I University in the amount of the additional cost of attending college away from home."[14] Smith asserted that the students could enroll in 1959. He would waive the entrance exam if they were in good standing. Of the eight who passed the entrance exam in 1958, only four returned to Memphis State in 1959: Marvis Kneeland, Eleanor Gandy, Sammie Burnett, and Ralph Prater.[15]

Having exhausted every possible "legal" measure to stall integration, President Smith announced to graduates and their families during winter commencement that integration would soon come to Memphis State. Smith declared, "I trust the citizens…will accept the inevitable which has been forced upon us."[16] The grudging acknowledgement by Smith was regarded by Reverend David Cunningham, President of the Memphis NAACP, as a "true prophecy." Miriam Sugarmon, who was refused admission to the graduate school nearly two years earlier, reacted to the president's message by declaring "it can only be regarded as a bitter acceptance of the inevitable by a foe of equal justice for the Negro."[17] The NAACP continued its fight for equal justice. On July 17, 1959, Federal Judge Marion S. Boyd of the District Court ruled in favor of

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[14] Original Draft of Letter from J.M. Smith to Tennessee State Board of Education, August 1958, Cecil Humphreys Collection, Box 7, University of Memphis Special Collections, Memphis.

[15] "8 Negroes to Enroll at M.S.U. Next Week," *Tri State Defender*, 12 September 1959.

[16] "Integration is Inevitable, MSU Graduates Are Told, *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, 31 January 1959.

[17] "MSU Proxy View Draws Comments," *Tri State Defender*, 7 February 1959.

the NAACP and the students. After an arduous five year legal battle by the NAACP, students were guaranteed admission to MSU in the fall.[18]

Before classes began that fall, the Memphis State Eight were required to attend an orientation session led by R.M. Robison, Dean of the University. Bertha Rogers Looney, one of the eight, recalled, "We just thought that this was a regular orientation for all students, but found out it was only for us."[19] Dean Robison made it clear to the students that they were not welcome. Having exhausted all legal measures to keep the students out of Memphis State University, Robison admitted that the only reason they were there was because the school received federal money. This was a common phrase uttered to African American students in the early 1960s by the MSU administration. Dean Robison imposed a number of restrictions on the Memphis State Eight. They were prohibited from entering the school's cafeteria and student center. Students were required to enroll in only morning classes, and leave by noon. They had access to only two restrooms: women in the administration building and men in the library. They were exempt from taking physical education classes. Students were told that little to no interaction with other students was in their best interest. They were completely isolated.[20]

Bertha Rogers, Rosa Blakney, John Simpson, Luther McClellan, Ralph Prater, Eleanor Gandy, Marvis Kneeland, and Sammie Burnett integrated Memphis State University on September 18, 1959. Their admittance to the university did not result in the wide-scale violence that erupted on the campuses of the University of Georgia in 1961

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[18] "Says Negroes to Enter in Fall," *Tri State Defender*, 18 July 1959.

[19] Bertha Rogers Looney, interview by Jack Lorenzini, Memphis, Tennessee, 4 March 2013.

[20] Ibid.

and Ole Miss in 1962. While segregationists flew confederate flags and cars drove by with signs reading "Civil Rights for Whites," Memphis State students exercised restraint.[21] *The Tri State Defender*, Memphis's black weekly, congratulated the Memphis State student body. An editorial stated, "By accepting the young Negro men and women as classmates without even a ripple of resistance, the white students displayed far more maturity than did the university administrations which 'prepared' the campus for integration." The editorial stated that southern white adults could learn a lesson from the college students. The admission of eight students to Memphis State signaled a time where the university "came of age." According to the *Tri State Defender*, "the city of Memphis for the first time unpinned its diapers." The desegregation campaign by the NAACP at Memphis State provided it with a model for future integration plans: through persistence, any racial barriers introduced by Jim Crow could be eradicated.

The Memphis State Eight were pioneers who paved the way for other African American students to enroll at MSU. In the early 1960s, African American students were repeatedly subjected to the patronizing orientation session by Dean Robison. The dean continued to advise students to be "as inconspicuous as possible,"[22] a hard proposition for only two dozen African Americans attending a university with a population of 4,000. African American students were still required to use only approved restrooms. Physical education classes and ROTC requirements were waived to limit contact with white students. In 1960, African American students could enroll in afternoon classes and socialize in the student center. Students still could not eat in the student cafeteria. A small

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[21] Janann Sherman and Beverly Bond, *Memphis in Black and White* (Charleston, S.C.: Arcadia Press, 2003), 135.

[22] Emma Primous, interview by Jack Lorenzini, Memphis, Tennessee, 10 September 2012.

area was set up in the student union that sold hot dogs, hamburgers, and french fries; that was the menu for most African American students for four years. By sundown, the students had to leave the campus; the university would not be responsible for the safety of the African American students.

For the Memphis State Eight and the African American students who attended in the early 1960s, the classroom environment was a lonely, harrowing experience. White students shunned black students and often made no effort to engage in conversations with them. According to Carrie Harris, "It was like we were invisible. They just pretended like we were not there."[23] In many cases, there was only one black student in class. As black enrollment at MSU increased, there were more black students in classes with one another, and white students grew suspicious of black students sitting next to one another in class. Priscilla Davis remembered, "if we sat together, somebody would always say: What are the black folks plotting back there?"[24] Davis never thought to question or ask what the other ninety eight white students in the classroom were plotting.

Some classes were less stressful for the African American students than others. History, Philosophy, and English tended to be classes where students felt more comfortable, unlike Economics and Mathematics. For those students who majored in Health and Physical Education, gym class could be dangerous. During a volleyball class, Odel King recalled being kicked by a student. King said that when the student "would go up and try to hit the ball, he would go out of his way to try to kick me under the net."[25]

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[23] Carrie Harris, interview by Jack Lorenzini, Memphis, Tennessee, 17 September 2012.

[24] Priscilla Davis, interview by Jack Lorenzini, Memphis, Tennessee, 12 October 2012.

[25] Odel King Jr., interview by Jack Lorenzini, Memphis, Tennessee, 18 September 2012.

King remained calm and avoided retaliation, which would have led to expulsion from Memphis State. Despite the encounter, King also had positive experiences playing handball and pickup games with some athletes.[26] He socialized with the students in class and got to know them. King's experience of fostering acquaintances with whites was rare among black students. Only after white students looked past the color of one's skin could true meaningful friendships among students flourish.

Prejudiced administrators and professors also accounted for the intimidating campus atmosphere for black students. The Memphis State Eight were subjected to derogatory racial slurs from George Pratt, Dean of Students, who consistently and openly called them "niggers."[27] African American students of the early 1960s were also subjected to prejudiced professors. One Biology professor referred to the students as "niggas," telling them that they would receive an "F", regardless of their work.[28] As the only African American student in an economics class of seventy five students, Carrie Harris dreaded attending class. Her economics professor continually made prejudiced remarks. For example, he declared that "black people have never been good in economics; they don't understand business principles."[29] The economics professor also blatantly stared at Harris whenever he spoke of the Kennedys, as he believed that their economic policies were socialistic. He sometimes pretended Harris was not there. When Harris attempted to answer questions that the professor raised in class, she was ignored.

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[26] Ibid.

[27] "Congrats Students: An Editorial," *Tri State Defender*, 26 September 1959.

[28] Priscilla Davis, interview by author.

[29] Carrie Harris, interview by author.

Other black students were penalized for asking questions and correcting an instructor's mistakes. In home economics, Frances Johnson was viewed as a "troublemaker" for correcting the errors of her instructor. Grades were not given for conduct, but Johnson noticed that her grade was substantially lower than what she expected. These experiences revealed the harsh environment that students were exposed to. Eventually, black students circulated a list of the most racist teachers on campus. They knew which professors to avoid.[30]

Black students complained about receiving poorer grades than their white classmates. "Our only problem was that you never knew what grade you were going to get," declared Bobby Collins. In other words, A or B averages that students earned throughout the semester were not guaranteed. Instructors could give the black student any grade he or she desired. Some instructors acknowledged that it would take "an act of congress" to change a student's grade. For example, Odel King had a 96% average going into his Botany final. King meticulously reviewed his answers and was the first to finish. He was confident that his hours of studying paid off. When he received his final grade, he was given a B. Dismayed and perplexed, he wanted an explanation. He could not contact the instructor because of summer vacation. He proceeded to express his concerns to university officials, but they would not listen. The odds were stacked academically against the black student.

Emma Primous was a graduate of Melrose High School, which was known for an English Department that taught students how to write effectively. Primous remembered the early 1960s as a time when the black students "had to do A work in order to get a C."

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[30] Frances Johnson, interview by Jack Lorenzini, Memphis, Tennessee, 19 September 2012.

According to Primous, her English professor awarded F's to those who had three grammatical errors. Carrie Harris received D's in English courses at Memphis State. Harris, a Melrose High graduate herself, asserted, "Melrose students didn't make D's, maybe some of them made a C; no one made a D."[31] In addition, Lizzie Poe received a D in Freshman English. Poe, who graduated in top five percent of her 1962 class at Booker T. Washington, questioned the final grade. Her professor told her that most freshmen make an F their first time in a college English class. Poe, an English major, never received A's as an undergraduate. It wasn't until junior year that she consistently made B's.

Outside of the classroom, black students who attended football and basketball games faced challenges. They were forced to sit in segregated sections at games held at city-owned facilities.[32] In 1959, the Memphis State Eight boycotted the first home football game at Crump Stadium because of the segregation policy.[33] Some black students who attended football games later came back to their cars only to find the tires flat, punctured by a vandal.[34] At basketball games, popcorn and ice chips were thrown at black students.[35] Racial slurs were also uttered to those students who attended football and basketball games and directed to those opposing teams who fielded black athletes. During one game in 1964 that pitted the Tigers against Loyola of Chicago, a team comprised of black athletes, the Memphis fans jeered and heckled the team with racial

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[31] Carrie Harris, interview by author.

[32] Sherman, Bond, and Breland, *Dreamers Thinkers Doers*, 50.

[33] "1st School Day is 'Peaceful'," *Tri State Defender*, 26 September 1959.

[34] Emma Primous, interview by author.

[35] Odel King Jr., interview by author; Priscilla Davis, interview by author.

epithets. The atmosphere became so uncomfortable that many of the black students left and reported the incident to the NAACP. Memphis defeated the 1963 NCAA Division I national champions 83-65.[36]

There were few opportunities for African Americans to participate in extracurricular activities. Emma Primous maintained, “We were there for educational purposes only. No extracurricular activities.”[37] Few campus organizations were integrated at first. Black students could not attend dances, participate in the marching band, try out for any of the school’s athletic teams, or pledge in a white fraternity or sorority. Delta Sigma Theta, the first black sorority on campus, did not come until 1963-64. It was soon followed by the first African American fraternity, Kappa Alpha Psi. These organizations provided black students with much needed social interaction. When there was a request to establish Alpha Kappa Alpha, the first and oldest African American sorority in the United States, to further promote interaction among black students, Flora Rawls, Dean of Women, rejected the idea saying, “Y’all have one. You do not need another.”[38]

One of the few campus organizations integrated in the late 1950s and early 1960s was the Westminster House. Bertha Rogers Looney remembered, “The minister in charge was very welcoming to us, in fact invited us to come.”[39] For African American students like Bertha Rogers Looney, Carrie Harris, Ralph Prater, and Mike Braswell, the

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[36] *Desoto* 1964, volume 52 (Memphis State University, Memphis), 79.

[37] Emma Primous, interview by author.

[38] Lizzie Long, interview by Jack Lorenzini, Memphis, Tennessee, 24 November 2012.

[39] Bertha Rogers Looney, interview by author.

Westminster House provided a "centering place" that made them feel welcome.[40] They were seen as human beings, not judged by the color of their skin. Reverend Gene Ethridge was chaplain of MSU's Westminster House during the early 1960s. Harris recalled that Ethridge served as a father figure "who did everything he could to open that campus house to anybody and everybody and to encourage us to do things and fully participate in the life of the school."[41] From time to time, students attended Presbyterian youth meetings and church retreats. Students also met at the religious organization for Bible Study and lunch. The Westminster House was one of the few places that African American students could eat on campus.

From 1959 to 1964, African American students were prohibited from eating in the cafeteria. Those African American students who could afford the cafeteria food brought it back to the snack side where the black students sat. Tense situations between black and white students were common in the cafeteria. The *Report to the Executive Secretary of the NAACP* in 1961 described white students throwing rolls and papers at African American students.[42] In other encounters, football players knocked down students. In the spring of 1964, an incident occurred after Emma Primous attempted to eat in the cafeteria. Primous, who was student teaching at Melrose High at the time, decided to enter the cafeteria. She persuaded a few other African American students to join her. According to Primous, it was a "nightmare." "The students threw bread at us. They slid

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[40] Carrie Harris, interview by author.

[41] Ibid.

[42] Report of Executive Secretary 1961, Maxine Smith NAACP Collection. Memphis Room, Memphis Public Library.

chairs to stop our walking."[43] After Primous left the cafeteria, she was approached by a white student who called her the "n" word and questioned her presence in the cafeteria. He then pushed her. Primous's first reaction was to strike back, so she struck back. After this was done, Primous remembered, "He just literally picked me up and threw me upside the wall and ran, ran out of the cafeteria."[44] Primous ran off as well. This encounter led to her being summoned to speak with Robert Melville Robison, Dean of Students and Assistant to the President. Calling Primous a "little red-headed spitfire," the dean ordered her off campus. Robison questioned why she ate in the cafeteria and reminded her of his advice to African American students at orientation. "During your orientation, I advised, I ADVISED, you nigras not to eat in the cafeteria."[45] For four years, there had been no major disturbances to integration on campus. Robison told Primous if she stopped eating in the cafeteria, then the next year black students would be allowed to eat there again. This delay would give the university time to respond to the changing landscape as well as calm tensions between white and black students. Primous stopped, and in the fall, black students again ate in the cafeteria.

As black students challenged de facto segregation at Memphis State, others were committed to contesting Jim Crow laws in the surrounding community. For over fifty years, Memphis State and the Normal community, the area that surrounded the university, enjoyed an amicable relationship. Normal residents took pride in their close-knit community of homes, restaurants, churches, and stores. MSU students and faculty

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[43] Emma Primous, interview by author.

[44] Ibid.

[45] Ibid.

worked hard to maintain the high standards of beautiful streets, high property values, and friendly businesses.[46] With the university expansion and purchase of several properties, greater interaction, along with tensions, became inevitable between students and Normal residents.[47] Normal businessmen desired to hold onto conservative viewpoints and continued segregationist policies. One establishment determined to preserve the status quo was the Normal Tea Room. For nearly ten years, the Normal Tea Room, a "meat and three," catered to blue collar workers in the Normal community. While white MSU students were able to dine there, African Americans were denied service. Between 1963 and 1964, Nick Karris, a former salesman of Cedar Grove Dairy, became manager and operator of the restaurant.[48] Other restaurants in the area such as French's College Inn, known for its veal cutlets, and Berretta's, famous for barbecue, resisted change. The Normal Tea Room was targeted by the Intercollegiate NAACP due to its closer proximity to Memphis State, its repeated advertisements in MSU's student newspaper *The Tiger Rag,* and the sign on its window which read, "All MSU Students Welcome."[49]

Memphis State students decided to take them at their word. On April 6, 1964, Joe Purdy, Memphis State student and member of the collegiate chapter of the NAACP, sent a letter to Karris. Purdy urged the owner of the restaurant to desegregate without regard to race:

> It is our hope that you will see your moral duty to act accordingly. It is also our hope that you and your competitors in the immediate vicinity will do your duty in regard to this situation as a co-operative effort. If this cannot be accomplished, we will be forced to dramatize this failure to comply with the basic tenets under our

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[46] Mary Helen Chumney, *The Normal Community and Memphis State University, 1912-1980.* Honors Thesis (Memphis: Memphis State University, 1980), 28.

[47] Ibid., 25.

[48] Memphis City Directory, Detroit: R.L. Polk & Co Publishers, 1964.

> Christian and democratic heritage. This will be done in accordance with the tenets of non-violence in whatever form we deem necessary and desirable. It is our hope that you will meet with us before the end of the week to work out plans where-by desegregation will be accomplished with as little damage to your business as possible.[50]

Acting on their immediate concerns, Purdy and members of the Intercollegiate NAACP, along with their supporters, fought hard to eradicate the inequalities evident in the community. They would engage in direct action protest if needed. Formed in March 1963 at a meeting at Lemoyne College, the Intercollegiate NAACP consisted of students from Lemoyne, Owen, Memphis State, and Southwestern.[51] There were three special groups within the chapter that focused on non-violence, voter registration drives, and publicity campaigns.[52] Memphis State students led by Joe Purdy learned tactics from the student sit-ins that originated in Greensboro, North Carolina, in 1960 and from the various non-violent workshops in Nashville taught by Reverend James Lawson. The North Carolina A&T students set a precedent in direct action by students, while the activism of the Nashville students generated a movement.

Memphis students learned from the sit-in movements elsewhere. Students at Lemoyne and Owen colleges participated in sit-ins at public libraries, the Pink Palace Museum, and lunch counters downtown.[53] The increasing calls for desegregation led to a greater involvement by the Memphis NAACP. The Memphis NAACP collected

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[50] Letter from Joe Purdy to Nicholas H. Karris. Box 10385, Special Collections, University of Memphis, Memphis.

[51] Report of Executive Secretary February 6- March 5, 1963, Maxine Smith NAACP Collection. Memphis Room, Memphis Public Library.

[52] Report of Executive Secretary February 4- March 3, 1964, Maxine Smith NAACP Collection. Memphis Room, Memphis Public Library.

[53] David Tucker, *Memphis Since Crump: Bossism, Blacks, and Civic Reformers 1948-1968,* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1980), 119.

donations in churches for non-violent demonstrators and boycotted merchants who continued to deny African Americans service.[54] Moreover, the Memphis NAACP benefitted from increased membership. Shortly after the sit-ins began, the Memphis NAACP received well over 2,000 new memberships. The impact of these attempts to desegregate parts of Memphis was so apparent by the summer of 1960 that membership increased to 6,000.[55]

For Memphis State African American students, there was a feeling of spiritual fulfillment in embracing non-violent tactics. Facing explosive situations in early sit-ins like those at Walgreens, where some MSU students were spat upon and hit with objects, non-violence was the only winning strategy to dismantle segregation in the city. Mentored by Reverend James Lawson, who in 1962 became Senior Minister at Centenary Methodist Church, Memphis State students and others were taught non-violent methods and the philosophy of non-violence. In the spring of 1964, four non-violent workshops were held at Centenary Methodist Church.[56] For many members of the Intercollegiate NAACP, non-violence was not only a strategy, but a philosophy. According to Hortense Spillers, a member of the Intercollegiate NAACP, it was a "way of life that attempted to embrace peace and the best of Christian principles."[57] For the Memphis collegiate group of the NAACP, utilizing non-violent strategies gave activists "a sense of moral

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[54] Ibid.

[55] Laurie Green, *Battling the Plantation Mentality: Memphis and the Black Freedom Struggle*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 236.

[56] "4 Non-Violence Workshops Set for Saturdays," *Tri State Defender*, 7 March 1964.

[57] Hortense Spillers, interview by Jack Lorenzini, Memphis, Tennessee, 23 August 2012.

superiority, an emotional release through militancy and a possibility of achieving desegregation."[58]

The non-violent strategies were put into practice after Karris's restaurant refused to integrate his lunch counter. At noon on April 15, 1964, six students (four black, two white) arrived at the Normal Tea Room, sat at a booth, and demanded to be treated like the other customers. With television cameras recording and local reporters on the scene, the owner was put in an awkward, uncomfortable situation, a deliberate strategy of the activists.[59] As expected, the restaurant refused to serve the students and Nick Karris told the six to vacate the premises. When students ignored this request, the manager called the police. After their arrival, the police demanded that the students leave. When the students refused to leave, they were arrested. Howard Romaine, a student at Southwestern, along with Memphis State students Mari T. Stovall, Joe Purdy, Odel King, Hortense Spillers, and Phyllis Ross, were charged with "interfering with trade and commerce."[60]

A small mob had gathered outside the Tea Room. As the protesters were hauled to jail, the crowd shouted and jeered. Spillers remembers being placed in the paddy wagons, the police vehicles without windows. She maintained, "The black people without regard to gender were all placed in the paddy wagons. You sit in darkness and are taken to the holding station."[61] The white participants were placed in police cars. Facing a felony with a charge of interference with interstate trade and commerce, students were in jail for a

[58] Hortense Spillers, interview by author.

[59] Odel King Jr., interview by author.

[60] "Sit-in Students Held to Jury," *Memphis Press Scimitar*, 17 April 1964.

[61] Hortense Spillers, interview by author.

few hours. But the students never went to trial. Odel King maintained that it was a police tactic to scare the sit-in participants. The charges were later dropped.

The direct action protest of the students was met with mixed reactions from their parents. The mother of Phyllis Banks respected her daughter's activism and expected it from her. On the other hand, Odel King's father was opposed to his son's activism. King's father "felt like blacks should know their place, be ourselves, keep our heads low, and follow the law and nothing with happen."[62] This was a common generational gap: many older blacks desired to accommodate to the segregated society, and many youth wanted to test discriminatory practices. In addition, the reaction from parents of white students is reflective of the obstacles and risks that white students faced for participating in civil rights activism. Howard Romaine's mother cried and his father threatened to take his Ford Falcon, a car he inherited after his grandfather's death.[63]

After the arrest of the six sit-in activists, other Memphis State students and their allies participated in desegregation efforts of the Normal Tea Room. They picketed the restaurant for weeks. Holding signs demanding "Justice," "Equality," and "Freedom," activists picketed for several hours each day during Normal's busy lunch hours. For instance, Liz Long, MSU African American student, was scheduled to picket for four hours one day.[64] Students who participated took shifts so as to not interfere with their education. Bobby Collins, an Intercollegiate NAACP member who picketed several times at the Normal Tea Room, declared, "We made sure that we wouldn't miss any classes. So

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[62] Ibid.

[63] Howard Romaine, interview by Jack Lorenzini, Memphis, Tennessee, 25 October 2012.

[64] Lizzie Long, interview by Jack Lorenzini, Memphis, Tennessee, 12 October 2012.

when we had free moments, we would walk up there on Highland and participate and then get back to the campus in time to go to our classes."[65] During the height of protest, there were over thirty demonstrators. Some students only demonstrated once because of the tense situation. Subjected to racial slurs and objects thrown at her signs, Emma Primous, an African American MSU student, declared, "I am sort of a non-violent person… I am not doing this again."[66] Frances Johnson, another student, was encouraged to participate in picketing, but she refused. Johnson, a veteran of earlier sit-ins at Walgreen's in downtown Memphis, knew all too well the hostility that participants could face. Johnson was spat upon and called derogatory names as projectiles landed in her hair. Johnson's parents and grandparents asked her not to get involved at the Normal Tea Room. They knew that she had a temper. Johnson would not be able to tolerate those conditions. Non-violent direct action demanded discipline. It required activists to embrace the "Ten Commandments of Non-Violence" that included "sacrificing personal wishes in order that all men might be free, observing with both friend and for the ordinary rules of courtesy, refraining from the violence of fist, tongue, or heart, and striving to be in good spiritual and bodily health."[67]

The activists were a small minority of the student body and their actions were by no means universally endorsed. Singing "Dixie" and "waving confederate flags," the mob gathered to provoke and intimidate the picketers. Bobby Collins acknowledged the volatile situation emerging even under the watchful eye of the police. Outside the Tea

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[65] Bobby Collins, interview by Jack Lorenzini, Memphis, Tennessee, 9 November 2012.

[66] Emma Primous, interview by author.

[67] Martin Luther King Jr., *Why We Can't Wait* (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), 61.

Room, a police officer stood beside a rabble-rousing student who was prepared for an encounter with Collins. "He had a plastic water pistol," says Collins, "he put ink in and he just shot me all in the face."[68] As a result of the ink attack, Collins appeared as if he stepped out of the picket line. He asserted that when this happened, "the policeman was just beating his billy stick, looking at me." The police officer never prevented the white student from firing ink.[69]

In another encounter, Lizzie Long suffered a physical injury from a group of white males. She recalled, "One of them threw an empty coke bottle; it caught the back of my left hand. I was rushed to the hospital where I received a cast that I wore for six weeks."[70] She felt blessed that she had not suffered an injury to her head. Long later returned to class, where an English professor remarked that she should have expected to be injured and blamed her "sheltered upbringing…blinding her to the possibility of physical injury."[71] Those committed to desegregating the Normal Tea Room understood there would be spontaneous acts of violence. Most of the exchanges between picketing students and the mob occurred en route from the restaurant to campus or vice versa. They traveled back and forth to campus along fraternity row on Mynders Street. Along the street, fraternities and their allies set up lemonade stands and harassed picketers of the restaurant. Collins recalled that Sherman Yates, brother of Arlene Yates, his girlfriend at

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[68] Bobby Collins, interview by author.

[69] Ibid.

[70] Lizzie Long, interview by author.

[71] Ibid.

the time, had some of his teeth knocked out as a result of an encounter with the mob of students on Mynders.[72]

After days of picketing, Joe Purdy was charged with extortion on May 5 for the letter he sent to Nick Karris back in April. He was arrested in the early morning hours. Bond was set at $5,000, but eventually reduced to $500, on assurance by Purdy's attorney A.W. Willis Jr., that Purdy would be in court when the case was announced. As Purdy was held in the downtown jail, nine adults protested the arrest. They included Memphis NAACP President Jesse Turner, NAACP Executive Secretary Maxine Smith, and Reverend James Lawson.[73] Two others were white.[74] This was the first time that a Memphis jail was picketed; the picketers marched outside the jail for forty five minutes. After spending five hours in jail, Purdy posted bond at 1:45 p.m.[75] After his release, the group from the jail headed over to picket the Normal Tea Room. No serious altercations were reported.

Tensions between opposing sides dramatically increased on May 6. Picketers were met by a mob on the sidewalk by the Tea Room. The mob threw bananas, squirted ink, and taunted the activists.[76] Picketers not only consisted of members of the collegiate NAACP and African American students, but also white allies. In the only report of

[72] Bobbie Collins, interview by author.

[73] Jesse Turner, President of the NAACP and of Tri-State Bank, was one of the most prominent African American businessmen. He filed the suit to desegregate the library. Maxine Smith was one of the first to test segregation of Memphis State University with Miriam Sugarmon in 1957. Memphis State University was not integrated until 1959.

[74] "Student Jailed on Extortion Letter Charge," *Memphis Press Scimitar*, 5 May 1964.

[75] Ibid.

[76] "Six Pickets Return to Tea Room After Yesterday's Flare Up," *Memphis Press Scimitar*, 7 May 1964.

physical violence acknowledged by the Memphis newspapers, Bob Morris, a graduate of Southwestern and supporter of the desegregation effort, was met by a mob of Memphis State students who “knocked (him) to the ground and struck with fists, sticks and bottles as he left the scene of a racial demonstration.”[77] Morris recalled being called a “nigger lover” by the group of students and dodged rocks being thrown at him and the other picketers. He did not seek medical treatment. The police dispersed the crowd with no arrests. Morris faced a number of consequences for his involvement. Along with Howard Romaine, his roommate who encouraged him to participate, he was forced out of the home that they rented. He also lost his job in the Maintenance Department at Southwestern College. Moreover, the mother of a former roommate saw him and told him he was not welcome in her home anymore.[78]

After the encounter, picketing students escaped to the Newman Club, the Catholic Student center. Like the Westminster House, the Presbyterian student organization, the Newman Center was committed to integration. Exposed to hostile conditions on campus, black students could eat in only two places: the student center and the Newman Club. Ed Wallin, chaplain of the Newman Foundation from 1962 to 1966, declared “One third of the students at Newman who came to eat were African American. These students also joined the Newman Club on Friday nights for dances.”[79] At Newman, located on Mynders Street, angry MSU students waited for the picketers to come out. Due to safety concerns, a call to police was made in the early afternoon. Several police arrived on the

[77] “Picket is Beaten in Racial Protest,” *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, 7 May 1964.

[78] Bob Morris, interview by Jack Lorenzini, Memphis, Tennessee, 9 November 2012.

[79] Ed Wallin, interview by Jack Lorenzini, Memphis, Tennessee, 22 September 2012.

scene to disperse the loitering crowd. As a safety precaution, police monitored the activities at the Newman Club overnight.[80] This was not the first time that students were given sanctuary in the Newman Club. Wallin vividly remembered one time helping picketers escape a volatile situation. He recalled, "They were hitting students with baseball bats. I was driving around the corner and saw this. I then drove down the sidewalk blowing my horn. I told the picketing students to get into my car."[81] Ten people crammed in his car. Harassed by a mob of students with confederate flags, the chaplain drove the students to the Newman Center.

On May 7th pickets continued at the Normal Tea Room. Throughout the six hours of picketing, broken into shifts, over thirty black and white students participated, protected by police. Across from the Tea Room, an estimated crowd of 500 white students heckled demonstrators. They threw eggs from across the street and some hit the restaurant's window. Due to the large crowd, traffic was backed up as much as three blocks.[82] As the last shift ended, students returned to campus and discussed the progress of non-violent direct action. That afternoon, after three weeks of picketing, Joe Purdy called off demonstrations "at the request of the Memphis Committee on Community Relations," which sought to discuss desegregation with the restaurant's operator.[83] The

[80] "Six Pickets Return to Tea Room After Yesterday's Flare Up," *Memphis Press Scimitar*, 7 May 1964.

[81] Ed Wallin, interview by author.

[82] "Tea Room Pickets Await Discussion," *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, 8 May 1964.

[83] "Six Pickets Return to Tea Room After Yesterday's Flare Up," *Memphis Press Scimitar*, 7 May 1964.

end of demonstrations was a relief to Claude Armour, Police Commissioner, who maintained there were not enough policemen to prevent a more serious encounter.[84]

The student newspaper recorded a variety of responses. Sue Parham, an African American MSU student and recent candidate for Student Government Association Recording Secretary, opposed violent demonstrations but "believed in human rights and dignity for all men, regardless of race, color or creed."[85] Jim Cochran, President of the Student Government Association, and Lolita Pew, President of Smith Hall, condemned the actions of the mob. They felt that public denouncements degraded the university and hindered progress at the university. Pew warned: "We have seen what these actions have done to our southern universities and I do not want Memphis State to follow their example."[86] Touting the previous compliance with integration at MSU, Cochran believed that students had no right to concern themselves in matters off campus.[87] Pew and Cochran referred to the explosive situations that occurred at Ole Miss and at Alabama. One cannot say how representative these were, but it does demonstrate some variety of opinion.

By 1964, C.C. Humphreys noted that "students were no longer willing to accept traditional patterns of institutional control off campus."[88] Two years earlier, Humphreys warned students that they faced expulsion if they became participants or spectators in the desegregation conflict at Ole Miss. College administrators faced challenges of dealing

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[84] Sorrels, *The Exciting Years*, 94.

[85] "Opinions Given on Racial Issue," *Tiger Rag,* 12 May 1964.

[86] Ibid.

[87] Ibid.

[88] Sorrels, *The Exciting Years*, 93.

with spontaneous emotional outbursts by the student body that could become hostile or use physical violence.[89] Echoing the Student Government, President Humphreys attributed the success of the university's integration effects to the maturity of the students. Despite recent tensions among students, he had confidence in students to continue forward. Humphreys also declared, "Our nation and our institutions are founded and can endure only by the use of legal and peaceful means to bring change and settle differences of opinion."[90]

Student leaders were committed to settling matters lawfully. In a petition signed on May 10, SGA and members of the InterFraternity Council declared, "We pledge ourselves to avoid violence and to preserve the dignity of our university."[91] Mike Stewart, *Tiger Rag* reporter, felt that earlier campus disruptions at Ole Miss and the University of Alabama benefitted no one. He encouraged students to use "logical reasoning" and avoid extremism on either side. In this challenging time for southern institutions, Stewart, like other staff of the *Tiger Rag*, urged students "to act with sobriety and intelligence instead of violence."[92] Such students believed that Memphis State could serve as a model for how a southern institution should handle a controversy logically, peacefully, and with maturity.

Not all students felt compelled to embrace the viewpoints of student leaders and newspaper staff. In a letter to the editor of the *Tiger Rag*, student Donald Norris wanted to incite violence. Lamenting about the tendency of Memphis State students to speak

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[89] Ibid.

[90] "A Message from Humphreys," *Tiger Rag*, 12 May 1964.

[91] "Student Leaders Adopt a Petition at Meeting," *Tiger Rag*, 12 May 1964.

[92] "Nothing to be Proud Of," *Tiger Rag*, 12 May 1964.

loudly and do nothing, Norris encouraged overt action. In other words, for people who spoke of “Brotherhood” or “Equality” or “Peace,” he demanded that students “react immediately and crucify such radicals or shoot them in the back and throw acid in their faces… Put back in their places those who dare speak out against the established order and its wrong.” Another student took a calmer approach. J.C. Jones, who believed in non-violence, felt that those who disagreed with the picketing students had every right to protest. He was bothered by the fact that all of those students who had segregationist views were troublemakers and agitators. For Jones, it was about exercising his freedom of speech and right to oppose divergent views related to race.[93]

A consortium of President C.C. Humphreys, members of the Memphis NAACP, and the Memphis Committee on Community Relations invited the restaurant owner to discuss integration.[94] Held at the Newman Club and with the chaplain in attendance, Ed Wallin remained silent, “smiling in triumph that the segregation wall was caving.”[95] The negotiations were carried out by the Memphis Committee on Community Relations(MCCR). Founded in 1958, by prominent Memphis attorney Lucius Burch, the MCCR was a bi-racial committee that called for voluntary and peaceful desegregation. The committee was instrumental in helping to desegregate libraries, movie theaters, the zoo, department stores, hotels and some lunch counters. It also worked with firms to provide jobs for African Americans.[96] Restaurants in Memphis were less inclined to

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[93] “Students Voice Opinions on Demonstrations,” *Tiger Rag*, 22 May 1964.

[94] A previous appeal to mediate the controversy by Rev. Wallin was rejected by the Normal Tea Room Owner.

[95] Ed Wallin, interview by author.

[96] Lester Rosen, “Speech Before Catholic Convention on Religion and Race in the South,” Memphis, March 1965.University of Memphis Special Collections, Memphis.

desegregate. In 1963, Memphis NAACP leaders believed that desegregation of restaurants should be accelerated; they were ready to picket segregated restaurants by December.[97] The gradual desegregation occurred after Police Commissioner Claude Armour and the Chamber of Commerce recommended it, and after the editors of the *Commercial Appeal* and the *Memphis Press Scimitar* declared that integration efforts would receive no publicity unless there was violence. As a result, twenty eating establishments desegregated.[98] The desegregation attempts at the Normal Tea Room came at a time when over 100 Memphis restaurants served all customers. Those restaurants that dismantled the Jim Crow barriers were considered the "finer" restaurants of Memphis. These were full scale restaurants that joined the lunch counters already desegregated in department and drug stores, as well as at hotels. Desegregated lunch counters experienced no boycott by whites in Memphis. These restaurant owners who agreed to desegregate thought that their viewpoints were ignored and, regardless of earlier success in desegregation, were concerned that they would be criticized by white patrons and suffer financially as a result of the decision.[99] Similarly, Nick Karris, owner of the Tea Room, also feared losing customers as a result of serving African American customers. Out of the meeting came a compromise. In an agreement, if students stopped demonstrating and calm was restored in the summer months, the Normal Tea Room would serve all students by Fall 1964. Shortly after this agreement was reached, the Civil

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[97] David Tucker, *Memphis Since Crump*, 136.

[98] Ibid.

[99] "100 Restaurants to Serve All Comers," *Memphis Press Scimitar*, 6 May 1964.

Rights Act of 1964 prohibited discrimination in public facilities and rendered the agreement moot.[100] The Normal Tea Room desegregated on July 6, 1964.[101]

The interracial group of students who participated in the sit-in built their relationship on trust. Their partnership was vital.[102] As at most predominately white southern universities, there were some Memphis State students who demonstrated "a modicum of enlightenment and humanity," while the majority either did not involve themselves, deferred to law and order, or were actively hostile.[103] Mob violence undermined segregation. The media coverage of the sit-in led to greater efforts to desegregate the restaurant and ultimately led to the owner conceding to the MCCR. The story also revealed that possibilities for activism among the more diverse student body at Memphis State, as compared to Southwestern, an institution that did not admit blacks until fall of 1964. The persistence of the students and their embrace of non-violent tactics revealed that segregation could be unraveled. While Memphis State was unique in that it was supported by the largest branch of the NAAC and the city had a more lenient police commissioner, as well as a history of desegregating aspects of public life more quickly than other places in the South, the challenges and hardships of those committed to dismantling Dixie were still present.

The African American student experience of the 1950s and 1960s raises a number of questions. How successful was integration at Memphis State University? How were

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[100] Some businesses across the South found a loop-hole and declared their establishments "private"; thereby showing disregard for the new legislation.

[101] "Negroes Served By Tea Room," *Memphis Press Scimitar*, 6 July 1964.

[102] David Chappell, *Inside Agitators: White Southerners in the Civil Rights Movement* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), 4.

[103] Hortense Spillers, interview by author.

students influenced by the local NAACP? What did the Normal Tea Room reveal about Memphis State activists? What is the legacy of the sit-in?

Integration at Memphis State University was "successful," in that white students and the local community did not resort to violence. The explosive situations concerning school integration that erupted at Ole Miss, the University of Georgia, and the University of Alabama were not present at Memphis State. Located on the periphery of the Deep South, Memphis State (1959) and the University of Tennessee (1961) experienced smoother transitions for the integration of the undergraduate student body. Historian William Sorrels argues that there were "no major problems" at MSU during integration.[104] In reality, however, the restrictions placed upon African American students did not achieve true integration. Bertha Rogers Looney, one of the Memphis State Eight, declared, "We really didn't integrate because of so many restrictions placed on us. So we didn't achieve integration."[105] While students were prepared academically for Memphis State, nothing could prepare them emotionally for what they experienced. This was evident from the harrowing classroom experiences, segregated student organizations, incidents in the cafeteria, and demeaning comments at collegiate sporting events. Desegregation of the university did not translate into integration. Integration meant equal access to facilities without restrictions.

The story of the Memphis State Eight and experiences of black students throughout the 1960s provides an important template for wider student activism. Civil rights activism was the earliest form of activism to exist on and off campus in the late 1950s and 1960s. The gradual gains by the activists reveal the conservative identity of

[104] Sorrels, *The Exciting Years*, 75.

[105] Bertha Rogers Looney, interview by author.

MSU and the city surrounding it. For instance, J.M. Smith, Memphis State president in the 1950s, tried to delay integration on campus as long as possible as a means of preventing violence by whites. He favored gradual desegregation of the university to alleviate tension from the community. Moreover, Cecil Humphreys's administration gradually gave African American students more freedoms on campus, making the university a little less segregated. Essentially, the university reflected the culture of the city. Memphis prided itself on the gradual desegregation of public facilities with the help of the MCCR.

For the Memphis State Eight and the other African American students of the 1960s, Jesse Turner and Maxine Smith of the Memphis NAACP, along with Reverend James Lawson, influenced their decisions to alter their landscapes. The Memphis NAACP provided the necessary support for the students to combat the challenges of desegregating a southern university. The NAACP offered the Memphis State Eight scholarships. Jesse Turner called the Memphis State Eight repeatedly to tell them that the African American community was behind them. The influence of Turner and the community support led the Memphis State Eight to become pioneers. Their decision to enroll at the university furthered educational opportunities for future generations. The NAACP was an outlet where African American students could voice their concerns about campus inequities. Moreover, the activists were greatly influenced by Maxine Smith. Smith, who was denied admission to the university in 1957, continued to press for the integration of the university. She hoped it would occur as soon as possible. Her experience served as inspiration for the activists. In addition, the determination for integration by local NAACP leaders allowed the student activists to realize their true

potential. According to Hortense Spillers, “integration ideally opened the door for everybody to have the opportunity to have access to their talents.”[106] Furthermore, the non-violent workshops led by Reverend Lawson served as a model for student activism in the early 1960s. If the activists who participated in the sit-in were in a precarious situation, Reverend Lawson, along with the Memphis NAACP, provided a solid foundation of support.

The Normal Tea Room sit-in came at a time where some members of the Memphis NAACP debated the legitimacy of direct action protest. Some favored more meaningful negotiations. The diligence of the Memphis State activists revealed that sit-ins were still a viable form of protest. Desegregation meant more to Memphis State activists and their supporters than having the opportunity to have a warm meal; it meant dismantling the practices of Jim Crow. Desegregation meant giving a sense of dignity and humanity to the activists. The road to desegregation was an arduous journey for those of the southern sit-in movement. The story of the Normal Tea Room enhances one’s understanding of the sit-in movement and its power in transforming local communities. It illustrates the tension in Memphis between aggressive direct action and culture of negotiation exemplified by MCCR. Activists would not wait while the MCCR negotiated gradual desegregation. Student activists favored expedited forms of desegregation. It was only after violence ensued that student activists agreed to MCCR pleas to intervene. Civil rights activists throughout the South worked diligently to remove racial barriers. Phyllis Banks, Normal Tea Room sit-in activist and member of the Intercollegiate NAACP, declared, “We were willing to lay it on the line. Whatever we’ve got to do, we’ve got to

[106] Hortense Spillers, interview by author.

do."[107] While combatting segregation, these Memphis State activists made sacrifices and endured great adversity to ensure that future generations would be better off. Yet integration would not come overnight; it would be a continual struggle.

[107] Phyllis Banks, interview by Jack Lorenzini, Memphis, Tennessee, 9 September 2012.

Chapter 2

"The Anchors of Right, Justice, and Love": The Kneel In Campaign at Second Presbyterian Church

Speaking before the January 1963 Chicago Conference on Religion and Race, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., declared that "eleven o'clock on Sunday morning is still America's most segregated hour and the Sunday school is still the most segregated school of the week."[1] King's comments reflected the slow pace of desegregation in American churches. Located in close proximity to Memphis State University, Second Presbyterian Church (SPC) in Memphis, Tennessee, was determined to keep its doors closed to African Americans. In the spring of 1964, members of the Intercollegiate NAACP and their allies challenged the segregationist policy of the church. Those Memphis State African American activists who had participated in efforts to desegregate public accommodations now desired to integrate religious congregations. Driven by their religious faith and desire for social justice, Memphis State students, along with Southwestern students, participated in a yearlong effort to desegregate Second Presbyterian. Yet most MSU black students did not involve themselves in the struggle to desegregate the church. They either feared repercussions by the administration, concentrated efforts on desegregating public facilities, or were not of the Southern Presbyterian faith; opening doors to African Americans had little impact on the improvement of their lives.

The story of MSU involvement in the campaign to desegregate Second Presbyterian Church is a complicated narrative. All of the Memphis State activists were Baptist. Why should they become involved in what appeared to be a struggle among

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[1] Taylor Branch, *Pillar of Fire: America in the King Years, 1963-1965* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1998), 24.

Southern Presbyterians? Joe Purdy grew up in the Gospel Temple Baptist Church in Memphis. Purdy participated in a number of Bible studies.[2] Religious upbringing also played an important role in the activism of Hortense Spillers, who at the time attended St. John Missionary Baptist in Orange Mound. Spillers declared:

> I think without having grown up in that particular faith, I probably would have had a different attitude toward political activism, but it was clear to me early on that one of the dimensions of Christ's preaching had to do with revolutionary change and so that was not necessarily emphasized in my religious training, but it was certainly a lesson or a message that got through to me at a very young age, because I was a student of Sunday School and the Baptist Training Union where scriptures were analyzed and broken down. And so the revolutionary dimension of the work of Christ came through to me quite young, when I was quite young.[3]

Reverends L.D. McGee and W.C. Holmes, Spillers's pastors in her early life, were quite instrumental in providing her with the religious training that propelled her toward civil rights activism. For Vivian Dillihunt, a member of New Salem Baptist Church, religion did not play as great a role in her decision to participate. Dillihunt, who was the next door neighbor of Vasco and Maxine Smith, was interested in promoting social justice. Collectively, Spillers and Dillihunt wanted to participate with the Intercollegiate NAACP in a worthwhile desegregation campaign. The role of Memphis State activists in attempting to desegregate Second Presbyterian Church reveals the transformative power of religiosity in altering racial landscapes.

Second Presbyterian Church was officially organized on December 26, 1844, with members gathered in a warehouse on Front Street in downtown Memphis. As church membership increased, the warehouse could not accommodate worshippers. Five years later, a new church building was dedicated at Main and Beale Street. The church was

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[2] Carolyn McGhee, interview by Jack Lorenzini, Memphis, Tennessee, 10 March 2014.

[3] Hortense Spillers, interview by author.

occupied by the Union Army during the Battle of Memphis in 1862. Fifteen years later, a yellow fever outbreak resulted in over 5,000 deaths in Memphis, including forty-four SPC members. Thousands of others, including ten SPC members, fled the ravaged city. As normality returned in the years after the outbreak, church members initiated discussions about building a new church. Members were concerned that the church on Main and Beale was strictly "a business location." Church members did not want worship services interrupted by the "unnecessary noises" of a neighboring bakery.[4]

In 1893, the church held inaugural services in its new location on the corner of Hernando and Pontotoc Streets. For over fifty years, the church remained in that downtown location. Over time the city encroached on the church. Citing the commercialization of the area, the "seedy business" of warehouses, and the growing African American population, church members voted to move the church to its current location at Poplar and Goodlett in 1943. Since 1949, Second Presbyterian's spacious seven and half acre campus has anchored that corner.[5] Second Presbyterian Church had a history of working with African Americans. In the 1950s, there was a campaign of gradual integration as whites and blacks met in local churches, camps, and conferences. With the growing intermingling of white and blacks at religious functions, some church members were concerned with miscegenation. Specifically, the church was uncomfortable with mixed dances at church meetings. As a result, the church drafted a policy of segregation in October 1957.[6]

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[4] Charles Gillespie, *History of Second Presbyterian Church of Memphis, 1844-1971* (Memphis: Second Presbyterian Press, 1971), 11, 20, 27.

[5] Ibid., 33, 60, 64, 72.

[6] "2nd Presbyterian Takes Action on Segregation," *Memphis Press Scimitar*, 9 October 1957.

A year after the implementation of its segregation policy, Second Presbyterian installed its thirteenth pastor, Reverend Henry "Jeb" Edward Russell.[7] Prior to his arrival at the church, Russell was the minister at Trinity Church in Montgomery, Alabama. Reverend Russell was appointed to a biracial committee by W.A. Gayle, mayor of Montgomery, to help solve the 1955-1956 Montgomery Bus Boycott. Dr. Martin Luther King noted the impression Russell made on him during the meetings: "I remember the heartiness of his smile and warmth of his hand clasp."[8] At Second Presbyterian, Russell committed himself to pastoral and community work. His congregation admired him for his skillful preaching, enthusiasm, and resourcefulness.[9]

The preacher was the younger brother of Senator Richard Russell of Georgia. Senator Russell, a segregationist, was determined to resist any civil rights legislation, which he linked to communism. During the Cold War era, politicians such as Russell used anti-communism as a political weapon. Throughout the ideological war that pitted democracy versus 'godless' communism, progressive legislation such as civil rights was viewed as un-American. By challenging segregation in the South, civil rights activists and their allies were considered outsiders and communists focused on undermining society.[10] In other words, the "true" American did not want to modify the society by implementing progressive legislation. "True" Americanism was defined was by

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[7] Gillespie, *History of Second Presbyterian*, 86.

[8] Martin Luther King Jr., *Stride Toward Freedom: The Montgomery Story* (New York: Harper, 1958), 114-115.

[9] Gillespie, *Second Presbyterian Church*, 86.

[10] Mary Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and The Image of American Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 28-29.

demonstrating one's embrace of the status quo; xenophobia was used to combat foreign ideas or people.

Henry Russell was not a staunch segregationist like his brother; he avoided politics and controversy when possible.[11] He took control of the pulpit during a challenging period. As black Memphians and their allies continued to advocate civil rights and desegregate institutions, Second Presbyterian became a site of controversy as church members prevented African Americans and their allies from entering for nearly a year. On the eve of the encounter, Second Presbyterian Church was the largest Southern Presbyterian Church in the mid-South with over 3500 members.[12] The church was chosen as the meeting place for the General Assembly, the Presbyterian high court**,** of the Southern Presbyterian Church to be held in 1965.[13]

Even prior to 1954, some southern Presbyterians were committed to improving race relations, speaking out against the Ku Klux Klan in Virginia and North Carolina and providing jobs for blacks in the South. The Supreme Court decision of *Brown v. Board of Education* resulted in some Southern Presbyterians and Southern Baptists criticizing segregation. After the landmark court case, the General Assembly (PCUS) voted 239 to 169 to denounce segregation.[14] Similarly, the Southern Baptist Convention condemned

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[11] Stephen Haynes, *The Last Segregated Hour: The Memphis Kneel-Ins and the Campaign For Southern Church Desegregation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 192.

[12] "The Second Presbyterian Situation," *Memphis Press Scimitar*, 7 May 1964.

[13] Ibid., Since the Civil War, the Northern and Southern Presbyterian church were divided into separate factions. These churches did not unite under one body until 1983.

[14] Joel Alvis, *Religion and Race: Southern Presbyterians, 1946-1983* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1994), 57, 104.

the status quo in the South by a landslide vote of 9000 to 50.[15] These votes revealed that white southern denominations held divergent views from their segregationist southern politicians. There were few justifications for segregation in the Bible; white southern clergy rarely quoted scripture to justify segregation.[16] While these religious denominations opposed segregation, it did not mean that their churches would be immediately integrated. There were many within these denominations who opposed the *Brown* decision.

After the *Brown* decision, presbyteries in Atlanta, Virginia, and Little Rock supported school desegregation. During the crisis at Little Rock's Central High School, which ultimately led to Governor Orval Faubus closing schools in 1958 to prevent further integration, the governor referred to Presbyterians who supported desegregation as "communists." For segregationist politicians and those who favored segregation in their churches, fighting against civil rights was part of the anti-communist crusade. In fact, conservatives within the PCUS questioned the progressive interracial work of the National Council of Churches (NCC), fearing that it would advance the views of the communist party. The conservative minority in the PCUS wanted to withdraw its membership in the NCC. One controversial program of the council was the Delta Ministry. This ministry aided in finding economic solutions for African Americans and others financially challenged in Mississippi. Established in 1964, the Delta Ministry

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[15] Mark Newman, *Getting Right With God: Southern Baptists and Desegregation, 1945-1995* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2001), 24.

[16] Jason Sokol, *There Goes My Everything: White Southerners in the Age of Civil Rights, 1945-1975* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 2006), 101; David Chappell, *A Stone of Hope: Prophetic Religion and the Death of Jim Crow* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 112.

provided support for activists involved in the Mississippi Summer Project. It trained workers, fostered discourse with local clergy, and provided legal support.[17]

In April, PCUS religious leaders met at the 104th General Assembly in Montreat, North Carolina, to address the concerns of participation in the NCC, race relations, and the ordination of women to offices.[18] Ten years after the General Assembly condemned segregation, it adopted an official statement on the acceptance of all worshippers. The policy stated: "No one shall be excluded from participation in public worship in the Lord's House on the grounds of race, color or class."[19] By this time, a number of influential Southern Presbyterian ministers and laymen belonged to a group called Fellowship of Concern, which sought the eradication of segregation.[20] Two months after the General Assembly meeting, conservatives formed a group called the Concerned Presbyterians. The Concerned Presbyterians and other conservatives in the church stressed that their main focus was on the eternal salvation of man, not on seeking social justice.[21] Another proposal presented at the meeting called for the elimination of African American Presbyteries in order to integrate them with white presbyteries. Separate presbyteries existed in Mississippi, South Carolina, Louisiana, Alabama, and Georgia.[22] During the annual meeting, the General Assembly also confirmed its decision to hold its

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[17] Alvis, *Religion and Race*, 105-8, 117.

[18] "Big Decisions Facing Church," *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, 23 April 1964.

[19] "Church Extends Stand on Race," *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, 28 April 1964.

[20] "Ministers Reaction Varied on Church's Race Progress," *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, 2 May 1964.

[21] Alvis, *Religion and Race*, 74, 118.

[22] "Presbyterians Ask Bias Study," *Memphis Press Scimitar* 20 April 1964. This process of consolidating Presbyteries was completed in 1968. Alvis, *Religion and Race,* 93.

1965 meeting at segregated Second Presbyterian Church in Memphis. The high court waived the requirement that the host church had to open its doors to all worshippers.[23] The General Assembly believed "that prospects for genuine progress in race relations in Memphis might be set back rather than advanced by punitive action."[24]

The first kneel-ins occurred in 1960. Kneel-ins were a reference to African Americans attempting to desegregate churches. Most of the time these activists were not kneeling, waiting to enter the church; they simply walked up to the church door and were barred entry. During the 1960s, kneel-ins were non-violent, direct action attempts to desegregate Southern churches of every denomination. Kneel-ins occurred in Albany, Georgia; Atlanta, Georgia; Birmingham, Alabama; Jackson, Mississippi; and Memphis, Tennessee.[25] These attempts to desegregate the churches demonstrated the commitment of the civil rights movement to ensure equal access not only to secular venues but also religious institutions as well.

In August 1960, college and high school students in Memphis launched a kneel-in campaign at various local churches. The participants of the movement attempted to attend Immaculate Conception, St. Peter's, Bellevue Baptist, Idlewild Presbyterian, and First Assembly of God. With the exception of the Christian Science First Church, these churches prevented the participants from entering or had them detained by police. Parishioners at Bellevue Baptist church even cursed at the activists. The tensions associated with the desegregation campaign escalated during a religious rally for students

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[23] "Memphis Gets 1965 Assembly," *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, 26 April 1964.

[24] "An Emergency?," *Presbyterian Journal*, 10 February 1965.

[25] An extensive analysis of kneel ins that occurred throughout the South can be found in Stephen Hayne's book, *The Last Segregated Hour*, 30-51.

held in Overton Park. On August 30, 1960, black youth attended a rally promoted by the Assembly of God. As students arrived at the rally, they were advised to sit in the back of the revival. Refusing to agree to this demand, black students spread out and interspersed throughout the crowd. Whites were visibly angered at the attempts to integrate the rally. The leader of the rally called the police. Police arrested students, who "were charged with disorderly conduct, loitering, violating a city ordinance, and accused of disturbing a religious assembly." The prosecution argued that the actions of the black youth interfered with the Assembly of God's First Amendment right to hold a religious assembly. Representing the black youth, Benjamin Hooks, a prominent attorney and Baptist minister, offered a religious appeal to defend the student's Fourteenth Amendment right, to no avail. The students received felony convictions.[26]

The summer kneel-in campaign was successful in that it challenged local churches and ministers to speak out against segregation. Dr. Paul Tudor Jones, minister of Idlewild Presbyterian, was displeased that church members refused to admit the students to the church on August 28, 1960. He asserted that the church belonged to no one but Christ. He said, "If it isn't Christ's church, it is not a church at all. And it has never been a question of whom I want and whom I don't want but whom Christ wants and who will receive his welcome."[27] Throughout Memphis, many churches that were visited by activists in 1960 were desegregated within a few years.[28]

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[26] Laurie Green, *Battling the Plantation Mentality: Memphis and the Black Freedom Struggle* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 247-249. Appeals were denied to those convicted. Convictions were later commuted by governor.

[27] "Dr. Jones Comments on the Turning Away of Negroes at His Church," *Memphis Press Scimitar*, 6 September 1960. The minister addressed his congregation as he returned from vacation.

[28] Green, *Battling the Plantation Mentality*, 255.

Four years after the first kneel-in campaign, on March 15, 1964, one week before Palm Sunday, members of the Intercollegiate Chapter of the NAACP attempted to worship at Second Presbyterian Church. At first, the church was not specifically targeted because of its segregation policy; rather, the organization "decided that black and white group members would pair up on Sundays and visit each other's congregations."[29] White students had no trouble attending services at St. John Baptist Church, Parkway Gardens Presbyterian, and First Baptist Church. During the kneel-in campaign students also attended St. Patrick's Catholic Church. Black students were welcomed at St. Patrick's Catholic Church and encouraged to come back.[30] For eleven weeks, a group of Memphis State, Southwestern, and high school students, along with prominent members of the Memphis NAACP and local ministers, met at Second Presbyterian. They were refused entry "by a phalanx of men accompanied by police officers."[31] As the church continued to deny African Americans access, the kneel-in crusade grew and focused on Second's exclusionary policy. According to Howard Romaine, chairman of the non-violent committee, the Intercollegiate Chapter of NAACP intended to "promote the real meaning of brotherhood (and) felt a deep moral obligation to help make more meaningful the principles of Christianity."[32]

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[29] Haynes, *The Last Segregated Hour*, 125.

[30] Ed Wallin, interview by author. At the time, Wallin was the priest presiding over mass. Twelve African American students sat in the front row. Wallin told the group that at St. Patrick's, there were black members of the church and remembers an integrated congregation, when he served as Deacon of the church in 1955.

[31] "Biracial Group Plans 2nd Presbyterian Visit," *Memphis Press Scimitar,* 4 April 1964.

[32] Intercollegiate NAACP Notes, Maxine Smith NAACP Collection, Box 12, 17 April 1964. Memphis Room, Memphis Public Library.

Throughout the spring, student activists and their allies challenged Second Presbyterian to recognize that its views were incompatible with Christian principles of love, tolerance, and justice. They persisted in efforts to desegregate the church until May 24. At this time, they agreed, at the request of the General Assembly, to halt integration attempts, in order to ensure that groups associated with the General Assembly could reach a solution. In a letter to Reverend Russell, the Intercollegiate Chapter of the NAACP hoped for a "genuine reconciliation of brotherhood."[33]

Among those promoters of brotherhood and sisterhood were African American activists from Memphis State. They included Joe Purdy, Hortense Spillers, and Vivian Carter Dillihunt. Dillihunt, who picketed during the Normal Tea Room sit-in, recalled that Purdy "was very intelligent, very driven, and possessed leadership skills."[34] Joe Purdy, who had led students to picket the Normal Tea Room, revitalized a movement that had been dormant for four years. The Memphis kneel-in movement gained prominence after Purdy was refused entry into the church. During visits to Second Presbyterian, Purdy was accompanied by Southwestern students Robert Morris and Howard Romaine. Morris remembered the encounter with church members. Morris acknowledged that church ushers opened the door and asked the Southwestern students where Purdy was from. Morris and Romaine refused to answer for Purdy. Morris recalled, "The usher asked Purdy, 'Are you from India? (Joe did have a little pigment of color from India). Joe

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[33] "Second Presbyterian Situation," *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, 24 May 1964.

[34] Vivian Carter Dillihunt, interview by Jack Lorenzini, Memphis, Tennessee, 10 October 2012.

replied, ‘I am from here.’ The usher then asked ‘Are you colored?’ Joe just held out his hand and let them judge for themselves.”[35]

Accused of trespassing on private property, the three men were ordered off church grounds. Risking arrest, with television cameras recording the group’s actions, the three men went to the sidewalk, knelt down, and prayed.[36] The media had been following the continual rejection of activists at Second Presbyterian. Like Purdy, MSU activists Spillers and Dillihunt diligently advocated integration at Second Presbyterian. Dillihunt, alluding to the persistent efforts of Second Presbyterian to restrict access to African Americans, declared: “We went every Sunday morning and every Sunday morning we were met at the door and told that we could not enter…We were never allowed to come to worship.”[37] Spillers noted that the group that was refused entry “would stand on the streets of the church, waiting for the church to go through the benediction and for people to come out so that they could see that there would be worshippers who were refused entry or admittance.”[38] While some worshippers acknowledged the group’s presence outside, other church members paid little attention to the group.

Only a few students from Memphis State were devoted to desegregating the church, while others participated only once. The white Lynn Garrison and the black Mike Braswell, both members of the Westminster House, the Presbyterian student religious organization, tested the church’s policy. Braswell, who grew up Baptist, could not join

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[35] Robert Morris, interview by Jack Lorenzini, Memphis, Tennessee, 9 November 2012.

[36] Ibid.

[37] Vivian Dillihunt interview by author; Even though Memphis set a precedent for making most public forms of life open to all races, these did not apply to private institutions such as churches.

[38] Hortense Spillers, interview by author.

the Baptist Student Union on campus because it was not integrated; he joined Westminster House because it was open to all races. The students were mentored by Reverend Gene Ethridge, a beloved, mild mannered preacher, who saw his role to be in the background operating in small groups, rather than being on the forefront of marches.[39] As the two walked to the church door, they were met by church members blocking the door. They were denied. After they were refused entry, Garrison said to the usher, "Is it because that he's black?" Church members repeated "You can't come in."[40] The two left soon without incident. The following week, Garrison's mother insisted that the two come to Buntyn Presbyterian, a church founded by members of Second Presbyterian in 1910 and one that members of the Westminster House communicated with on a regular basis. A number of college professors and liberal-minded people also attended Buntyn, making it open to progressive ideas such as civil rights. The only requirement of Garrison's mother was that Braswell sit beside her. Garrison reflected on the experience, "Everybody was very nice and congenial to Mike because he was a member of Parkway Gardens Presbyterian. Buntyn had been the church that had sponsored its beginning."[41] The commitment to integration was also evident in the decision by St. Andrew's, which had a white congregation, and Parkway Gardens, which had a black congregation, to exchange ministers.[42]

Braswell, who served as the Intercollegiate President of the NAACP, was not committed to participating in the kneel-in campaign. According to Braswell, "I wasn't

[39] Lynn Garrison, interview by Jack Lorenzini, Memphis, Tennessee, 24 August 2012.

[40] Ibid.

[41] Ibid. Parkway Gardens Presbyterian was the first black PCUS church in Memphis.

[42] Alvis, *Religion and Race*, 99.

going to march unless necessary. Marching didn't mean anything. I was more concerned in helping people get better jobs." In 1963-1964, Braswell was instrumental in leading a boycott at Hogue & Knott, a Memphis grocery store. Before the boycott, blacks could only work as stock boys. Braswell believed that the students' success in calculus classes at MSU made them qualified to be cashiers of the grocery chain. As a result of the boycott, the African American men were quickly promoted to cashiers.[43]

Memphis State students were joined by students from Southwestern College, a private college affiliated with the Presbyterian church**.** At the height of the kneel-in campaign, there were thirty Southwestern students who participated.[44] Jim Bullock, son of a preacher, ushered in the movement with Memphis State student Joe Purdy. Prior to the attempt to visit Second Presbyterian, Bullock attended Parkway Gardens, Purdy's church, without incident.[45] Howard Romaine, a senior at Southwestern and a committed activist, visited the church for weeks. During one visit, he overheard a church parishioner voice her opposition to church policy. Seizing an opportunity to engage in a conversation with a likely sympathetic church member, Romaine attempted to speak with her. Before he could meet with the woman, "a guard forcibly removed him from church property."[46]

While some churchgoers were uncomfortable with church policy, it remained the official stance. The divergent views reflected the difficulty that segregationists had in convincing the "silent majority" of moderate segregationists or "fair-weather" segregationists that their policy was legitimate; the cohesive system of segregation that

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[43] Mike Braswell, interview by Jack Lorenzini, Memphis, Tennessee, 24 October 2012.

[44] Haynes, *The Last Segregated Hour*, 126.

[45] Ibid., 128.

[46] "Second Presbyterian Church is Unyielding," *Tri State Defender*, 2 May 1964.

once existed began to fracture. For Southwestern graduate, Bob Morris, his offering prayers before the kneel-ins earned him the nickname "chaplain." According to Morris, "it was kind of odd because I stopped believing in God a couple of years before that in France."[47] Interestingly, in an April 1965 letter to Second Presbyterian's congregation from church elders, both Morris and Romaine were viewed as suspected atheists; elders lamented that one of the two "harangued several elders with traditional Marxist ideological doctrine."[48]

In addition to MSU and Southwestern students, local ministers and prominent members of the Memphis NAACP participated in the struggle. Reverend Lawrence Haygood, a pastor of Parkway Gardens who supported the student's actions, declared that Second Presbyterian's policy contradicted the General Assembly's policy to embrace all races.[49] Parkway Gardens was an integrated church, with some white members who also belonged to MSU's Westminster House.[50] Another kneel-in activist was Dr. Vasco Smith. Smith was an elder of Parkway Gardens, member of the Memphis Presbytery, and Vice President of the Memphis NAACP.[51] His wife Maxine Smith, Executive Secretary of the Memphis NAACP, and Jesse Turner, President of the Memphis NAACP, also provided support to the desegregation effort. During one visit to the church, Maxine Smith, along with other activists, was pushed by the hired guards of the church "until she

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[47] Robert Morris, interview. Morris had studied abroad in France one year.

[48] Haynes, *The Last Segregated Hour*, 165.

[49] "Private Police Block 'Kneel-ins' From Presbyterian Church," *Tri State Defender*, 25 April 1964.

[50] Georgiana Coker, interview by Jack Lorenzini, Memphis, Tennessee, 4 September 2012.

[51] "Private Police Block 'Kneel-Ins' From Presbyterian Church," *Tri State Defender* 25 April 1964; "Second Presbyterian Church is Unyielding," *Tri State Defender*, 2 May 1964.

demanded they keep their hands off of her."[52] They provided the foundation for student activism by giving moral and physical support. As experienced activists in the long struggle for civil rights, these adults provided the Intercollegiate Chapter of the NAACP with a solid foundation to lead the desegregation effort at Second Presbyterian. Students were disciplined in non-violent protest and pictures taken revealed that activists wore proper church attire.[53]

As the struggle to desegregate the church continued for over nine weeks, the activists received support from Dr. Carl Pritchett, a white Presbyterian minister from Bethesda, Maryland. Accompanied by activists, Pritchett approached the steps of Second Presbyterian and delivered an address to church officials. He declared: "I am at the door of your church because I am concerned about the influence of the racial policies of your church on the Christian witness and reputation of the Presbyterian Church."[54] Pritchett was denied entry into the church. He viewed local churches similar to Second Presbyterian as "the last refuge for segregationists."[55] Later in the day, Pritchett and the activists were welcomed for services at Parkway Gardens.[56] The minister believed with the annual meeting coming to Memphis in 1965 that all Southern Presbyterians were involved in Second Presbyterian's decisions; they had a stake in the matter. The crisis not

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[52] "Second Presbyterian Church is Unyielding," *Tri State Defender*, 2 May 1964.

[53] "Private Police Block 'Kneel-Ins' From Presbyterian Church," *Tri State Defender*, 25 April 1964 .Activists turned away one bystander dressed in casual attire, who wanted to join the kneel-in.

[54] "White Maryland Minister Refused Admittance to Second Presbyterian," *Tri State Defender*, 9 May 1964.

[55] Ibid.

[56] Ibid.

only existed at one church; it was felt by other Southern Presbyterians. He was the only white minister who joined the activists.[57]

The presence of the activists elicited mixed responses from the congregation. Small acts of kindness were evident in church members greeting the activists with "hello," "good morning," "we're glad to have you," or a handshake.[58] As the crisis continued, some members favored an integrated house of worship, including Reverend Russell. But these gestures were muddled by the church elders and policy supporters. Clear signs of staunch segregation were confirmed in comments from members who declared "We are not going to be forced to admit people we don't want,"[59] or "Today they are back and have brought a 'coon' with them to take their picture."[60] The pro-segregation group at Second Presbyterian viewed activists not as worshippers, but as agitators. The Session, the church elders of Second Presbyterian, delivered a statement to the congregation that suggested there was no evidence that the activists "have a sincere desire to worship."[61] Church members believed that the goal of the activists was either to embarrass Senator Richard Russell, Reverend Russell's brother, or to attack the segregation policy ahead of the scheduled 1965 General Assembly meeting at the church.[62]

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[57] Haynes, *The Last Segregated Hour,* 96.

[58] Haynes, *The Last Segregated Hour,* 160; "2nd Presbyterian Bars Students 6th Sunday in Row," *Memphis World*, 25 April 1964.

[59] "2nd Presbyterian Bars Students 6th Sunday in Row," *Memphis* World, 25 April 1964.

[60] "Private Police Block 'Kneel-Ins' From Second Presbyterian," *Tri State Defender*, 25 April 1964.

[61] "The Second Presbyterian Situation," *Memphis Press Scimitar*, 7 May 1964.

[62] Haynes, *The Last Segregated Hour*, 163. Activists began their crusade against the church before knowing this information.

The activism of Southwestern students greatly troubled Second Presbyterian Church. Southwestern received economic support from the church. In talks with the administration of Southwestern, church officials "threatened to withdraw support" if students continued to advocate integration at the church.[63] Southwestern embraced its affiliation but also held its reputation in high esteem as a liberal arts college. Second Presbyterian felt that the institution was not committed to "faith centered" education. Listening to the demands of church officials, Peyton Rhodes, President of Southwestern, replied that "the college is not for sale."[64] In addition to applying pressure on the Southwestern administration, church elders obtained addresses of Southwestern students and wrote letters to parents. Howard Romaine was depicted as "rudely demanding" that African Americans be admitted to the church and "walking hand in hand with Negro girls."[65] His parents were upset when they found this out.

Other Southwestern students were photographed by the church and their photos were mailed to their parents. For example, Hayden Kayden, a white Southwestern activist, was photographed holding an umbrella over a black woman.[66] Unlike Romaine's parents and those of some Southwestern students, Kayden's parents were pleased with his Christian convictions to participate in desegregation efforts at the church.[67] The letters alluding to the "alleged" white-black, male-female interaction between activists

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[63] "Second Presbyterian Church is Unyielding," *Tri State Defender*, 2 May 1964.

[64] Haynes, *The Last Segregated Hour*, 64, 82.

[65] "Second Presbyterian Church is Unyielding," *Tri State Defender*, 2 May 1964.

[66] Haynes , *The Last Segregated Hour*, 62.

[67] Ibid., 60-62.

accounted for much of the reason why the church implemented a policy of segregation. The possible desegregation of Second Presbyterian and churches like it was controversial enough and members, particularly church elders, did not want to be burdened by evaluating "what kind of interracial relationships would be allowed between males and females of both races."[68]

The desegregation campaign led to tensions between some Southwestern administrators and activists. Jacquelyn Dowd, kneel-in activist, declared that the reactions of the administrators were "icy and hostile."[69] Despite the hostile reactions from administrators, Southwestern students were not expelled for their activism.

Southwestern students spoke out concerning the kneel-in campaign in *The Sou'Wester*, the student newspaper. In a letter to the editor, student Charles Murphy neither supported segregation nor favored the actions of kneel-in participants. Instead, Murphy highlighted the successes of the church. He touted the notable youth programs such as Youth Week, Christ-centered retreats, and the sponsorship of trips to Rocky Eagle World Missions Conference. He encouraged dialogue between the two groups.[70] Bob Hall, reporter for the newspaper, asserted that some students believed it was Second Presbyterian's right to choose its worshippers, even if it contradicted the General Assembly policy of embracing all races. While Hall conceded that most Southwestern students felt worshippers should not be denied, he mentioned that they believed that the

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[68] Alvis, *Religion and Race*, 82.

[69] Haynes, *The Last Segregated Hour*,142-143; When Jacquelyn Dowd was a little short of tuition, she was told by a university official to leave the school.

[70] "Letters to the Editor: Second Presbyterian Controversy," *The Sou'Wester*, 8 May 1964.

actions of the activists were "ill motivated and unjustified."[71] Hall criticized these viewpoints by stressing that those non-violent participants in the desegregation struggle truly embodied Christian love.

While *The Sou'wester* reported on the controversy at Second Presbyterian Church, there was no acknowledgment of the kneel-ins in *The Tiger Rag*, which concentrated on the controversy surrounding attempts to desegregate the Normal Tea Room. The efforts to desegregate the restaurant the same spring generated widespread reactions from segregationist MSU students. Moreover, the lack of exposure of the desegregation efforts of the church could be because Memphis State was a public, secular institution, whereas, Southwestern was a private, Presbyterian institution. Southwestern students felt that Second Presbyterian should adapt and join the very best of Southern Presbyterians in condemning segregation. Another possible reason for why the activism at the church did not result in much attention at MSU was that some members of the Westminster House, especially African American ones, belonged to the northern Presbyterian Church, and the actions of the church did not affect them.

The segregation policy of Second Presbyterian drew criticism from the General Assembly and other Southern Presbyteries. At the General Assembly meeting in 1964, Second Presbyterian received a reprimand for its exclusionary policy. Despite this reprimand, the church continued to deny access to African Americans.[72] The persistent attempts to block would-be worshippers put the PCUS in a precarious, embarrassing situation at home and abroad. At the meeting, there were various calls among attendees to

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[71] "Non-Violent Group Gains National TV Recognition," *The Sou'Wester*, 8 May 1964.

[72] "2nd Presbyterian Says 'No' 7th Time," *Memphis World*, 2 May 1964.

move the 1965 meeting out of Memphis, if the church did not abolish its policy. Others, like Roscoe Nix, an African American commissioner in Washington, asserted that his church would not attend the meeting if it was in Memphis.[73]

Other objections to the Memphis meeting came from the Synods of Texas, North Carolina, and Tennessee. Fearing that Second Presbyterian's stance against integration brought "much adverse publicity," Texas ministers urged the General Assembly to reconsider meeting in Memphis.[74] The Texas Synod encouraged integration at Second Presbyterian. If integration was not possible, the Synod requested that the church decline its invitation to host the 1965 meeting.[75] Texas Presbyterians declared that they would only meet in churches that embraced all races. The Texas Synod made available its facilities if the meeting was moved.[76] Over sixty faculty and students at Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary wrote a letter to the Session of the Second Presbyterian. They stated that the Second Presbyterian's position was "in direct contradiction of the conscience of the church."[77] Echoing the sentiment of Texas Presbyterians, the Synod of North Carolina, voted 323-32 against meeting at Second Presbyterian unless church policy changed.[78] Similar favorable views on integration were shared by the Synod of Tennessee, reflected by its adoption of two resolutions. One resolution offered by Perry Biddle, Pastor of St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church in

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[73] Ibid.

[74] "Texas Presbyterians Attack Plans to Meet in Memphis," *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, 21 May 1964.

[75] "Integration is Urged at Memphis Church," *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, 22 May 1964.

[76] "Message to Memphis," *Presbyterian Outlook*, 1 June 1964.

[77] "Memphis Second and the 1965 Assembly," *Presbyterian Outlook*, 29 June 1964.

[78] Ibid.

Memphis, called upon the Memphis Presbytery to advise Second Presbyterian to reconsider its policy and hosting the 1965 annual meeting of the General Assembly. The church council also asked the Memphis Presbytery to settle the conflict at the church.[79] The other resolution came from Dr. John Millard, minister emeritus of Evergreen Presbyterian Church in Memphis. Millard recommended that "each church take action necessary to align itself with… the position of the Presbyterian church of the U.S."[80] By November 1964, the Memphis Presbytery supported the General Assembly's amendment to include all races in church by a vote of 50 to 39.[81]

Missionaries abroad were also concerned about racial discrimination in the Presbyterian Church. Segregation made it difficult for missionaries to Christianize those living in Asia, Africa, and South America. In a general plea to the PCUS, 202 missionaries expressed their feelings that segregation made it difficult for non-believers to embrace Christianity. Missionaries asserted that segregation policies gave "God's enemies cause to blaspheme his name, are a source of perplexity to Christians in many lands, and hamper the evangelistic outreach of the church."[82] Specific to the controversy at Second Presbyterian, the American Presbyterian Congo Mission felt compelled to address the PCUS. At an August 1964 meeting at Luluabourg, Congo, missionaries stressed that widely publicized racial conflicts in the United States have an adverse effect

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[79] "Presbyterians Set Showdown on Church's Racial Policies," *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, 16 June 1964.

[80] Ibid.

[81] "Memphis Vote," *Presbyterian Outlook*, 9 November 1964. By this time, thirty seven of forty two churches approved the amendment. The amendment needed to be accepted by forty one churches.

[82] "202 Missionaries Appeal to Home Church," *Presbyterian Outlook*, 27 April 1964. In his book *Getting Right With God*, Newman acknowledged that Southern Baptist missionaries believed persistent segregation at home undermined their work abroad. IX

on missionary work. "Incidents of racial discrimination, especially in churches, confuse and sometimes deny the Gospel message you (the church) have sent us to proclaim."[83]

Like other missionaries around the world, the Congo mission challenged the PCUS to take greater actions to promote integration and diffuse embarrassing situations similar to those at Second Presbyterian. Missionaries hoped that the church would live up to its potential by promoting Christian love at home, as it asked missionaries to do abroad. The hypocrisy at home hindered the work of missionaries and undoubtedly affected those from Second Presbyterian. Six missionary posts in Africa were created during the World Missions Conference in January 1964, held at the church.[84] While Second Presbyterian barred African Americans from attending services, they realized the importance of saving different peoples and promoting Christian beliefs from around the world. Moreover, they understood that expansion was necessary in the 1960s, as various religious denominations jockeyed for religious prominence in the newly independent nations of Africa.[85]

The negative publicity that Second Presbyterian received nationwide and abroad prompted the church to reconsider its segregation policy in January 1965. It was also at this time that kneel-ins, which were called off in May 1964, resumed on January 10. For the first time since the controversy began, Reverend Henry Edward Russell spoke out against the segregation policy. In a letter to parishioners, Reverend Russell, joined by the other Second Presbyterian ministers William Hazelwood, C. Phil Esty, and Edward

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[83] "To: The Presbyterian Church US; From: the American Presbyterian Congo Mission; Regarding Racial Discrimination," *Presbyterian Survey*, November 1964.

[84] Haynes, *The Last Segregated Hour*, 107.

[85] Chappell, *A Stone of Hope* 148, 120.

Knox, declared: "We cannot in Christian conscience approve the policy of excluding people…we cannot find support for this policy in the word of God…This policy is out of harmony with our Presbytery, Synod, and General Assembly." [86] Russell's first official statement to the congregation reveals that Christian beliefs of love, tolerance, and justice took precedence over segregation. In other words, God's laws were higher than man's.[87]

Three days after Reverend Russell sent out the letter, he addressed the issue before his Sunday sermon. Calling it "the greatest crisis in the 120 year history of our church," the minister hoped to persuade the congregation to abandon the segregation policy. Russell thought it was hypocritical for African Americans to be denied the right to worship when they were permitted to come for weddings, funerals, and baptisms at the church. In his statement the minister acknowledged that early accounts of church membership listed a slave. Mindful of the church's past and aware of the viewpoints of missionaries concerning racial segregation, Reverend Russell declared that the church should not prevent anyone from entering. Quoting Isaiah 56:7, "My house shall be called a house of prayer for all people," Russell exposed the incompatibility between segregation and God's message. For Russell, this included African Americans, people who dressed less formally, socialists, atheists, and even communists.[88] As Russell conveyed his message, activists were denied entry for the third straight week. By the end

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[86] Letter from H.E.Russell, C.Phil Esty, James Hazelwood, and Edward Knox to Church Congregation. January 21, 1965. Box 66747, Special Collections, University of Memphis, Memphis.

[87] Chappell, *A Stone of* Hope, 118.

[88] Statement by Dr. Henry Russell to Second Presbyterian Church, 24 January 1965.Box 66747. University of Memphis Special Collections, Memphis.

of January, Reverend C. Phil Esty, associate minister, received sixty letters from parishioners supporting integration, compared to nine who opposed it.[89]

While the congregation devoted more time to discussing possible changes to church policy, the Memphis Presbytery, the highest court of Presbyterian churches in West Tennessee, ordered all of its churches to accept all churchgoers and "rescind any actions" contrary to policy immediately.[90] A directive was also issued to Second Presbyterian Church "to meet not later than February 1 to consider the Presbytery's request."[91] If the church disregarded the directive, the Presbytery could take control of the church. The directive was timely; it was given just days after Reverend Russell's address to the church members and days before the church's sponsorship of the World Mission Conference. Session members met to consider the request. After meeting for over four hours, the Session announced that a new resolution on the matter would be presented within 15 days.[92] An editorial in the *Memphis Press Scimitar* condemned the slow pace of progress in the church and hoped the church solved the problem before the World Mission Conference.[93] Church policy could only be changed by the Session.[94]

Around the time the church pondered the directive of the Memphis Presbytery, it received an announcement by Dr. Felix Gear, moderator of the General Assembly and former Second Presbyterian minister, that the 1965 meeting was moved from Memphis to

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[89] "Session to Study Rules on Negroes," *Memphis Commercial Appeal* 30, January 1965.

[90] "2nd Church Overruled by Presbytery," *Memphis Press Scimitar*, 26 January 1965.

[91] "Door Left Open by Presbyterians," *Memphis Press Scimitar*, 27 January 1965.

[92] "2nd Presbyterian Race Resolution," *Memphis Press Scimitar*, 1 February 1965.

[93] "Two Meetings at Second Presbyterian," *Memphis Press* Scimitar, 30 January 1965.

[94] "2nd Presbyterian Race Solution," *Memphis Press Scimitar*, 1 February 1965.

Montreat, North Carolina. An emergency existed in PCUS, where half of the denomination's members asked that the meeting be moved.[95] The decision to move the meeting was not punitive; rather, it was "an earnest endeavor to take the action which seems most appropriate for a Christian church."[96] Second Presbyterian failed to honor its pledge to the General Assembly to provide desegregated facilities and accommodations.[97] According to denomination records, it was the first time since the Civil War that a meeting had been moved.[98] *The Presbyterian Journal*, a conservative weekly magazine, received a letter to the editor from Reverend Thomas Johnson of Elkton, Virginia. The letter labeled the liberals as "young turks who are out to alienate and divide, to punish and to destroy" the church.[99] The editorial advocated patience in the matter concerning Second Presbyterian. The Memphis Presbytery wanted the meeting moved back to Memphis if Second Presbyterian desegregated its sanctuary. The decision by the General Assembly surprised Reverend Russell. He stated: "It's quite unexpected. I knew it had been discussed but I didn't believe it would be done."[100]

Even if Second Presbyterian's ministers, deacons, and a growing number of parishioners favored integration, some members of the Session continued to embrace

[95] "Memphis Church Regrets Site Change," *Presbyterian Journal*, 10 February 1965. Dr. Felix Gear was chosen as the moderator at the 104th General Assembly.

[96] "General Assembly Is Moved From Second Presbyterian," *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, 27 January 1965.

[97] "An Emergency?," *Presbyterian Journal*, 10 February 1965.

[98] "General Assembly is Moved from Second Presbyterian," *Memphis Commercial Appeal* 27 January 1965. Due to "conflicting armies" in the region the 1862 meeting was moved from Memphis to Montgomery, Alabama.

[99] "Love and the Law," *Presbyterian Journal*, 3 March 1965.

[100] "An Emergency?," *Presbyterian Journal*, 10 February 1965.

segregation. After Reverend Russell delivered his statement to the congregation on the illegitimacy of segregation in the church, Robert Hussey, member of the Session, sent letters to parishioners defending the church's continued refusal of African Americans.[101] The elder argued that the amendment adopted by the General Assembly to admit all worshippers regardless of race was not an official church law and he believed that it might not be ratified by the 1965 General Assembly.[102] The elder avowed that those participants of the kneel-in campaign were turned away because they "demonstrate and act as busy-bodies."[103] Other Session members shared Hussey's views and lamented that the segregation policy was "misinterpreted and misunderstood."[104] After three hours of deliberation, a seven man committee, consisting of elders, drafted a new resolution. Defiant of the Memphis Presbytery, the committee voted three to two in support of segregation. Two members of the committee abstained.[105] Reverend Russell referred to the decision by the Session as "a most imprudent act." His antipathy for the Session vote was felt vocally by women in the church, who shouted "Hallelujah" and "Amen," when the minister advocated integration.[106] These shouts of jubilation in favor of Russell's viewpoints represented that racial solidarity amongst whites did not exist.[107]

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[101] "2nd Presbyterian Will Reconsider," *Memphis Press Scimitar*, 28 January 1965.

[102] Ibid.

[103] Ibid.

[104] "Second Church Position Stated," *Memphis Press Scimitar*, 9 February 1965.

[105] "Second Presbyterian Vote Keeps Segregation Policy," *Memphis Press Scimitar*, 10 February 1965.

[106] Ibid.

[107] Chappell, *A Stone* of Hope, 181.

Soon after the Session's decision, internal conflicts within the church escalated. Coinciding with Race Relations Sunday in the PCUS, Reverend Russell talked of unspecified charges filed against him by the Memphis Presbytery and mentioned that these charges would be withdrawn if he sought "to quell the rebellion of the Accord Committee."[108] The Accord Committee emerged when Deacon William Craddock Jr., along with church elder Clifton Kirkpatrick and their supporters, devised a plan to solve the church crisis by "delimiting the power of the pro-segregation faction" of elders.[109] The Accord Committee wanted to change the dynamics of the Session by reducing terms from life to a few years, thereby giving younger leaders a voice in dictating the structure of the church.[110] The committee received over 1,300 signatures from parishioners in order to call a congregational meeting.[111] As a result of this development, some members of the Session realized that their power within the church diminished.[112]

The underlying tensions that existed within the church served as a catalyst for ending the crisis. In a five hour meeting, elders overturned the segregation policy and planned to seat African Americans in the balcony of the church.[113] They also voted to hold a congregational meeting on February 28th. The imminent meeting caused concern among those elders who wanted to maintain the status quo. Letters were sent on behalf of

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[108] "Threat of Charges, Dr. Russell Says," *Memphis Press Scimitar*, 15 February 1965.

[109] Haynes, *The Last Segregated Hour*, 114.

[110] "Threat of Charges, Dr. Russell Says," *Memphis Press Scimitar*, 15 February 1965. Most elders of PCUS were rotated. Sixteen of nineteen Memphis and surrounding Presbyterian churches used rotating Sessions.

[111] "Second Church to Admit Negroes," *Memphis Press Scimitar*, 17 February 1965.

[112] "Threat of Charges, Dr. Russell Says," *Memphis Press Scimitar*, 15 February 1965.

[113] "2nd Presbyterian to Vote Sunday," *Memphis Press Scimitar*, 22 February 1965.

the elders to church members calling for the cancellation of the congregational meeting, which decided whether or not elders would be rotated and serve a limited time. The power of these elders dissolved just like the church's segregation policy. While the elder was ordained for life, once his term expired he had to remain inactive for two years before being re-elected to the Session.[114] The congregation voted 932 to 598 to restructure the Session.[115] Elders would be elected to five year terms.[116]

With reforms taking place within Second Presbyterian, a split in the church was discussed as some elders and their supporters met to debate the possibility of establishing a new church. On Sunday, March 7, the same day that Second Presbyterian admitted its first African American worshipper, over two hundred people attended an informational meeting at Goldsmith's Civic Center Auditorium in Audubon Park.[117] The following week, a Steering Committee founded a new church, calling it the Independent Presbyterian Church, located on Walnut Grove Road. That Sunday, over 350 people attended worship services. The founders of the new church made their exclusionary policy explicit. In the church's by-laws the policy declared that "all visitors and members

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[114] "Second Presbyterian Meeting Tomorrow; Statement Issued," *Memphis Press Scimitar*, 27 February 1965.

[115] "Second Church Takes Its Stand," *Memphis Press Scimitar*, 2 March 1965.

[116] "Church Approves Elders' Retirement," *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, 15 March 1965.

[117] "Split is Talked at 2nd Church," *Memphis Press Scimitar*, 8 March 1965 The African American worshipper was a senior citizen who attempted to attend services February 28th. He was turned away because of the congregational meeting and asked to come back. Prior to this, no other African Americans attended church services after the segregation policy was eliminated.

should be compatible with the congregation and the peace and unity of the church."[118] This policy was not removed from the church's by-laws until 1985.[119]

The nearly yearlong struggle at Second Presbyterian is reminiscent of Dr. King's assessment of how southern whites "rigidly" followed this discrimination in their churches as they did in public accommodations.[120] At a time when civil rights legislation promoted integration, some southerners wanted to make sure their private institutions, and especially their churches were kept intact.

The kneel-in controversy reflected the careful and cautious demeanor of Reverend Russell. His reluctance to speak out against the church's segregation policy was important. His conscience and past experience as a mediator during the Montgomery Bus Boycott conflicted with the prejudices of members of the Session. However, his constrained approach in handling the matter meant that even if he was sympathetic to civil rights activists, he could not speak for the whole church. He realized his limitations as a pastor in a conservative church. It was considered taboo in the South to embrace integration at the pulpit. Presbyterian ministers in the South risked losing their positions at churches. In fact, during a roundtable discussion on Morality and Segregation in October 1956, L. Nelson Bell, editor of the *Southern Presbyterian Journal*, acknowledged that six Presbyterian ministers were dismissed from their churches for having favorable views on integration.[121] Knowing full well the consequences for supporting integration, the General Assembly of 1964 even set aside a fund to support

[118] "New Church Organized on 'Compatible Basis'," *Memphis Press Scimitar*, 15 March 1965.

[119] Haynes, *The Last Segregated Hour,* 234.

[120] Martin Luther King Jr., *Why We Can't Wait* (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), 40.

[121] "Roundtable on Morality and Segregation," *Life Magazine*, 1 October 1956.

those ministers who were removed from the pulpit by their congregations. If Russell and other Second Presbyterian ministers thought their strategy of silence would prevent a crisis in the church, they obviously miscalculated. The long, drawn-out campaign to desegregate the church led to a crisis in the church between those wanting to integrate and those wanting to preserve segregation. The crisis ultimately led to a split within in the church. During the internal debate among church members over the Accord Committee, Reverend Russell remarked that the crisis could be turned into something beneficial for the community. Yes, he was put in an awkward position of being the brother of a segregationist politician and he risked alienating pro-segregation forces at the church. Unlike Reverend Carl Pritchett and those in the General Assembly, he failed to take the lead in condemning segregation and advocating integration.

The civil rights movement transformed southern religion. David Chappell argues that church doctrine, especially in the black church, shifted "away from eternal salvation and toward attaining justice in this life."[122] Memphis State and Southwestern students saw the opportunity in participating in the kneel-ins as a way to "attain justice" in a life that was far from perfect. Referring to the desegregation campaign, MSU student Hortense Spillers professed, "I think that the activism was an attempt to get the church to live in the present, to live out a vision of social religions and to see that attempt as an extension of the Gospel."[123] The students pursued a living Gospel. They came not only to encourage Second Presbyterian to do the right thing but also to worship with their

[122]Chappell, *A Stone of Hope*, 97.

[123] Hortense Spillers, interview by author.

brothers and sisters in Christ. They emerged center stage hoping to alter the landscape of the church.

The landscape of the PCUS was altered, especially after the General Assembly meeting of 1964. Taking a stand on the race issue and condemning segregation, the Southern Presbyterian church underwent changes that led it to embody the Christian principles of love, tolerance, and justice. The number of Presbyteries speaking out about the decision to let the pro-segregationist Memphis church host the meeting was indicative of the direction that the national church was going. Pressure by the General Assembly and the Memphis Presbytery ultimately forced Second Presbyterian to find a solution to its crisis. Without the intervention of these groups, the segregation policy at Second Presbyterian would have remained intact.

The Second Presbyterian story also provides insight into student activism of Memphis State and Southwestern Students. Southwestern was an all-white, private religious institution. In 1964, white students supported the Civil Rights Act of 1964 by holding a rally during U.S. Democratic Senator Herbert Walters's visit to Southwestern.[124] This was a watershed event at Southwestern that led to the growth of student activism at the college. One could see this in the commitment of Southwestern students to participate in the kneel-in campaigns. Scholar Stephen Haynes acknowledges that a number of participants were ministers' sons or affected by religious experiences. Students at Southwestern, a segregated campus, demanded that true Christian principles prevail during the campaign. One of the required courses at Southwestern that had a profound impact on Southwestern students was Man in the Light of History and Religion.

[124] Haynes, *The Last Segregated Hour*, 124.

Howard Romaine, Southwestern student, revealed that the course "had special theological salience" for the activists.[125] Romaine also acknowledged that possibly for some of the Southwestern students, the kneel- ins represented an interdenominational struggle.

At Memphis State, there were no rallies by white students advocating the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Memphis State, a public and secular institution, was largely a commuter school of native Memphians. Southwestern, by contrast, had a more diverse white student population from around the country. Hortense Spillers believed that the "Southwestern students were far more committed to a change of practice than were the Memphis State students."[126] The lack of activism among white students at MSU was not surprising. One interesting aspect, however, was that not a lot of African American Memphis State students participated in the kneel-ins. For students like Mike Braswell, marching was not embraced unless absolutely necessary. There was more at stake in fighting for rights in secular institutions. Actions leading to economic betterment took higher priority than the right to worship in a local Presbyterian church. For Carrie Harris, an African American student belonging to the Westminster House and a worshipper at Bethel Presbyterian, a Northern Presbyterian Church, the actions of Second Presbyterian, a Southern Presbyterian Church, had no relevance in her life. Furthermore, a great majority of the African American students at the university were either Baptists or Methodists; the struggle at Second Presbyterian did not affect them.[127] In addition, Memphis State students feared repercussions from the university administration. "Going

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[125] Howard Romaine, interview by author.

[126] Hortense Spillers, interview by author.

[127] Ibid.

to Memphis State,' as Vivian Dillihunt explained, 'was a way to better themselves." They did not want to jeopardize their education.[128] While the integration of the university in 1959 led to a gradual diversity of the campus and greater potential for civil rights activism, African American students refrained from participation in the kneel-ins for various reasons.

There was also no compelling evidence or correspondence related to how Reverend Gene Ethridge, chaplain of the Westminster House, reacted to the Second Presbyterian church controversy. In his campus notes, Frank Holloman, Director of Development for Memphis State, acknowledged that Reverend Lawson had greater influence than Reverend Etheridge with students.[129] However, one account mentioned an effort on the part of the Westminster House to hold a camp for inner city youth at Second Presbyterian in 1965. In the spring of 1965, Reverend Ethridge and Judy Pearson, a MSU student who belonged to Westminster, shared concerns over African American children in Memphis. They wanted to create a short-term one-to- two-week day camp for children. Pearson, aware of a playground at Second Presbyterian and its close proximity to the campus, thought the location offered an ideal place for the camp. Meeting with church representatives, Ethridge and Pearson made clear that camp counselors and campers "would only enter the church buildings to use the restrooms." Adults would escort campers to restrooms. Surprised by their request, the church denied the Westminster

[128] Vivian Dillihunt, interview by author.

[129] Notes by Frank Holloman. Frank Holloman Collection, Box 1, Series II "Memphis State University and Mid-South Medical Center Council, 1964-1967," Memphis Room, Memphis Public Library.

House the use of the playground; even though it was made clear that "the camp would only be for children old enough to use the playground equipment safely."[130]

For the Memphis State students who showed up to the church week after week, their activism suggested that equal access must be given in both the secular and religious spheres. They challenged racial barriers around campus. These students favored full integration as opposed to token forms of integration or gradual integration. Without their involvement along with other African American Memphians, there would not have been a kneel-in campaign. Howard Romaine declared, "We must concede that the campaign was black led, black energized, and liturgized via Dr. King's movement, nationally, and Jim Lawson locally, with adult support from Maxine and Vasco Smith."[131]

The decision by Second Presbyterian to allow blacks to sit in the balcony certainly was not how Memphis State and Southwestern activists defined or envisioned integration, but any concessions by the white church were embraced. In similar circumstances, one Baptist church in Memphis sat black parishioners in the choir loft. This was not full integration. Activists fought for integration without limits. Throughout the South, integration was not 100 percent. Restaurants and churches like Second Presbyterian did not want to be forced to integrate. Similar to restaurants that found loopholes and ways to discriminate black customers following the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, churches were in essence doing the same thing. This mentality permeated in areas throughout the South and even the North. Full integration was the prize of activists committed to the struggle. While integration was not 100%, it was preferable to the previous segregationist practices of the community. Reflecting on her

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[130]Judy Pearson, interview by Jack Lorenzini, Memphis, Tennessee, 17 November 2012.

[131] Howard Romaine, interview by author.

brother's activism, Carolyn McGhee, sister of Joe Purdy, declared that "Joe was driven by a greater call/need for mankind to move forward."[132] This recollection of Purdy exemplifies student activism at Memphis State in the 1960s.

[132] Carolyn McGhee, interview by author.

Chapter 3

The Forging of an Intellectual Revolution?: The Free Speech Movement Comes to Memphis State

"The visit of Steve Weissman was the most memorable event of the year. It caused the most controversy and it shows me that even if a communist or a communist supporter says something it does not necessarily make it wrong."[1]*—Terry Nickelson*

Throughout the 1960s, the political and social maelstrom of the civil rights movement and later the Vietnam War led to heightened levels of student activism on college campuses. Students expressed their concerns and challenged restrictions on free speech and political advocacy placed upon them by university administrators. The 1964 Berkeley Free Speech Movement (FSM), comprised of students from all political backgrounds, achieved great success in obtaining free speech and combating *in loco parentis* regulations. The FSM's victory led Steve Weissman, a graduate assistant of history at the University of California at Berkeley and member of the Steering Committee, to embark on an ambitious tour to southern colleges and universities.[2] His purpose was to inform students about the FSM and to inspire them to think critically about the universities they attended. In 1965, Weissman, a student activist, came to Memphis State University.

Weissman and others of the Berkeley Free Speech Movement were influenced by the Mississippi Freedom Summer of 1964. This campaign was spearheaded by the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), and the Mississippi chapter of the NAACP. It included college students from

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[1] "Memorable Moments Reviewed By Students," Tiger *Rag*, 21 May 1965.

[2] The Steering Committee followed closely negotiations between Berkeley administrators and students. It played a crucial role in leading the Free Speech Movement.

around the United States to register African Americans in Mississippi to vote. The road to freedom would be an arduous journey. African Americans long disenfranchised by Jim Crow laws in the South would in time be assured their right to vote, following President Lyndon B. Johnson's signing of the Voting Rights Act in 1965. Meanwhile, students at Berkeley inspired fellow students and faculty to reject certain restrictions placed upon them by the administration.[3]

The experiences of the volunteers who participated in Freedom Summer and civil rights activism in their own communities were rich and offered life lessons to incorporate into their everyday lives. Mario Savio, one of the Mississippi Freedom volunteers and a passionate orator of the FSM, sympathized with the injustices of African Americans and related these injustices to the restrictions placed upon the students. Reflecting on the fall semester at Berkeley in 1964, Savio declared, "when you oppose injustice done to others, very often—symbolically sometimes, sometimes not so symbolically—you are really protesting injustice done to yourself… Students became aware, ever more clearly, of the monstrous injustices that were being done to them as students." One of those injustices to Berkeley students was the attempt to censor free speech. Pressured by the Bay Area business community, the administration at UC Berkeley in mid-September 1964 decided to prohibit free speech.[4] The Bancroft Strip was an area for political canvassing. After

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[3] Mario Savio, Eugene Walker, and Raya Dunayevskaya, *The Free Speech Movement and the Negro Revolution*, (Detroit: News and Letters, 1965), 46. Most of the volunteers sent to Mississippi in 1964 came from the North and West. In his book, *Sitting In and Speaking Out: Student Movements in the American South 1960-1970*, Jeffrey Turner acknowledges that only "about 11 % of the applicants for Freedom Summer were from southern schools, and almost half of these southerners were black." (141)

[4] Robert Cohen*, Freedom's Orator: Mario Savio and the Radical Legacy of the 1960s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 43, 78, 81. Students believed that the university administration was pressured by conservatives to prevent future student activism from recurring. Earlier that year in May, UC student Mario Savio participated in "the Sheraton Palace sit-in, which generated 167 arrests, headlines, and controversy for UC." UC President Clark Kerr "aligned with the forces of law and order." The Sheraton

failed attempts to resolve the matter, students decided to stage a sit-in on September 30 in the administration building. A few days later, on October 1 and 2, free speech escalated. Defying the ban on free speech, Jack Weinberg set up a political activist table. He was arrested for his civil disobedience**.** For thirty-two hours, a crowd numbering hundreds surrounded a police car, preventing Jack Weinberg from being taken to prison. Mario **S**avio addressed the crowd from the roof of the police car and "embodied the emerging anti-authoritarian spirit of the sixties-liberty over order." The struggle for free speech continued throughout the academic year.[5]

Not until December 1964 did students achieve their greatest success. On December 2, over 800 students protested in Sproul Hall over the continued suppression of free speech. During the Sproul Hall sit-in, Savio, in what would become his most important speech, delivered a poignant critique of the university:

> There comes a time when the operation of the machine becomes so odious, makes you so sick at heart, that you cannot take part. You cannot even tacitly take part and you've got to put up your bodies upon the wheels, and the gears and all the apparatus and you have to make it clear to people who own it and to the people who run it, that until you are free their machine will be prevented from running at all.

In the December sit-in, 800 students were arrested. The arrests were protested by the student body and led to overwhelming faculty support for the student demands. By a

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Palace sit-in protested the hotel's discriminatory hiring practices of African Americans, denying them. There were few black employees of the hotel. Those who worked there were given "menial, low paying jobs." Another potential reason for the closure of the Strip stems from the Berkeley students protests against Barry Goldwater. These protests incensed William Knowland, publisher of *The Oakland Tribune* and supporter of Goldwater. San Francisco was the 1964 site of the Republican Convention. Berkeley students also protested discriminatory hiring practices of *The Oakland Tribune.*

[5] Savio, Walker, Dunayevskaya, *The Free Speech Movement and the Negro Revolution,* 8, 17, 40; Robert Cohen, *Freedom's Orator,* 45, 75-76, 81-88. On October 1, Jack Weinberg was the leader of the Campus Core, one of the leftist groups on campus "dominated by the non-Communist left and especially by Independent Socialists." (Cohen,47) The other leftist organization was the Ad Hoc Committee to End Discrimination "dominated by Communists and the W.E.B. DuBois Club." set up a political activist table on Sproul Plaza. Jack Weinberg was not a student at the time.

vote of 824 to 115, faculty endorsed the Resolution of the Academic Freedom Committee. Knowing that the fight against university policy was successful, Mario Savio resigned from the Free Speech movement on April 26, 1965. The FSM disbanded.[6]

The FSM provided the model framework and foundation for future forms of activism on campuses. The success and the attention that the movement garnered in 1964 permeated newspapers around the country. There was a common fear that local colleges and universities would be transformed into "Another Berkeley." This concern sent shockwaves through communities. Savio and the FSM supporters revolutionized the nature of how college students reacted to free speech. In other words, according to scholar Robert Cohen, "Savio helped to define a new role for American college students, that of a dynamic youth leader igniting mass student protest." Often imitated and idealized, Savio's role in helping students at Berkeley obtain free speech was used as a model on other college campuses.[7]

The Free Speech Movement greatly influenced southern student activism. Jeffrey Turner argues that "the FSM provided a blueprint for action for activists on some southern campuses and helped refine the vocabulary with which students addressed the university's role in larger societal issues." While the FSM was certainly a catalyst of southern student activism, "the roots in the South were deeper and the movements were homegrown." By 1964, tensions from participation in direct action and integration of campuses were still being sorted out and processed.[8] By this time, Memphis State had

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[6] Cohen, *Freedom's Orator*, 6, 97, 178, 238; Savio, Walker, Dunayevskaya, *The Free Speech Movement and the Negro Revolution*, 22.

[7] Cohen, Freedom's Orator, 2.

[8] Turner, *Sitting In and Speaking Out,* 139.

been integrated for five years. African American students were not fully assimilated into the university. Moreover, a potentially volatile situation erupted as segregationist students jeered and heckled students engaged in attempts to desegregate the Normal Tea Room.

Even though Berkeley is central to the free speech discussion, there were liberal southern institutions that had considerable success in "searching for truth" by sponsoring controversial political speakers. Henry Mayer, a graduate of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and later a graduate student at Berkeley, recalled that UNC was a progressive institution. While at UNC, Mayer was responsible for bringing to campus in 1962-1963 a myriad of speakers who represented various viewpoints. Some of the invited speakers included Norman Thomas, William Buckley, and Malcolm X. When a permit to speak in a park in neighboring Durham was denied to Malcolm X, UNC invited the controversial speaker. Mayer remembered that in early 1961, Berkeley barred Malcolm X from speaking because "he represented a religious organization." Although Berkeley censored its speakers, UNC prided itself on academic freedom. As early as 1931, Frank Porter Graham, president of UNC, affirmed that "academic freedom included the freedom of students with their growing sense of responsibility… and the right of lawful assembly and free discussions by students of any issues and views whatever." As an institution with a tradition of being a center of political dissent, UNC possessed what Berkeley lacked until 1964. Mayer rightfully characterized Berkeley in 1963 as an institution where "free speech seemed safer on the sidewalk, where it was constitutionally protected, than it did within the university." However, by June 1963, legislation in the North Carolina Assembly banned communist speakers or "those who took the fifth amendment before Congressional committees" from speaking on state funded campuses

like UNC. The speaker ban was significant not only for banning future controversial speakers at UNC, but also for allaying the concerns of right-leaning constituents. With the success of the FSM a year later, it was evident that both UNC and Berkeley underwent significant transformations: Berkeley became the new center for free speech and UNC morphed into an institution of censorship. Given its history of progressivism and the frustration over the new censorship, UNC could become a "southern Berkeley" after the arrival of Steve Weissman on its campus. Many UNC students were opposed to the recent speaker ban and hoped to gain the support of faculty.[9]

Sponsored by the Southern Student Organizing Committee, Steve Weissman spoke of the Free Speech Movement and university reform throughout the South. Weissman "addressed audiences totaling 2500, at 27 colleges in ten southern states." Weissman was accompanied by folk singer Hedy West.[10] Some of the other schools where Weissman delivered his speeches included the University of North Carolina, Louisiana State University, University of Arkansas at Fayetteville, Morehouse College, and University of Virginia. When asked why he came to Memphis in early May 1965, Weissman answered that "some of the things we have been doing at Berkeley have been inaccurately, if not inadequately covered by the southern press. Also, the Free Speech Movement has followers here at MSU." He wanted students to challenge the *in loco*

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[9] Robert Cohen and Reginald Zelnik, eds., *The Free Speech Movement: Reflections on Berkeley in the 1960s* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 159-60; 163. The speaker ban was met with resistance. By 1968, the ban was ruled unconstitutional.

[10] Newsletter of SSOC, May 1965, Gabriner Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison. Appearances by Hedy West helped to pay for the Southern tour.

parentis restrictions which included specific curfews for women in dorms, censorship of free speech, and dress regulations placed on them.[11]

Before Weissman's arrival in May, conservative students at MSU expressed their opinions on beatniks and college reformers. John Gamble, a reporter for *The Tiger Rag*, the MSU student newspaper, wrote an article entitled "Picketing Beatniks are Troublemakers." Gamble's article appeared on April 23, just three days before Weissman was originally scheduled to deliver his speech. Gamble embraced FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover's condemnation of beatniks who were either involved in communist front groups or leftist organizations. This conservative editor viewed the FSM as one that "attracted all the coffee house scum in that locality. And we have seen hundreds of these slob-like vegetables flock south to take part in civil rights demonstrations." Not only did Gamble attack the FSM, he responded to the recent anti-war demonstration in Washington. At that demonstration, more than 20,000 spoke out against U.S. policy in Vietnam. He declared that the "radicals" were out "in their new Easter apparel, 'new' dirty blue jeans, never washed tee shirts, boots or sandals, and all sporting beards and typical Neanderthal haircuts." Gamble, a supporter of U.S. policy in Vietnam, offered a message to beatniks: "stay off the streets, go back to your coffeehouses and leave politics to saner people. You disgrace not only your generation but the nation as well."[12]

The Commercial Appeal, a Scripps Howard newspaper, gave considerable attention to Weissman's visit to MSU, painting him as an agitator. This attention led to

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[11] Weissman "called on students to organize and force the faculty to speak as a body." As a result, Weissman's visit to UNC led to a student movement protesting the Speaker Ban in 1966.Turner, *Sitting in and Speaking Out,* 136; "Weissman's Memphis State Visit Discussed," *Tiger Rag*, 7 May 1965; "Steve Weissman to Address Students, Faculty Monday," *Tiger Rag*, 23 April 1965.

[12] "Picketing Beatniks are Trouble-Makers," *Tiger Rag*, 23 April 1965. Due to a scheduling conflict, Steve Weissman's visit was postponed one week and held on May 3, 1965.

the condemnation of the FSM by the Memphis public. In late April, ten women, only one whom had a child attending the university, met and asked Dr. Cecil Humphreys, president of MSU, to cancel the speech. The women condemned the radical nature of the FSM and the possible destruction of the status quo at MSU and in the nearby community. While understanding the complaints of the women, President Humphreys refused to cancel Weissman's appearance. According to Humphreys, such action would "create future problems of greater significance and be the best way to attract supporters to the movement." Also, if he cancelled Weissman's speech, MSU would be viewed as a repressive campus. Humphreys later recalled the tension surrounding the Weissman visit. He declared that the "administration was not aware that such a meeting was planned. I was set up and realized it… the worst action that could have been taken was to cancel the speech."[13]

On May 2, Humphreys spoke to fifty incensed Memphis residents in the university cafeteria. These residents were determined to stop the speech. The group opposed Weissman because "the texts of most of his speeches have been based on lawlessness." During the meeting, Humphreys reiterated his opinion on the speech. Humphreys firmly said to the concerned Memphis citizens: "If you think I want to tear it down… then you are mistaken. But just simply shutting people up won't cure problems… you've got to use a little bit of intelligence." Unhappy with Humphreys's decision, citizens led by Charles Chiunate "planned to demonstrate on the president's lawn." Throughout the controversy, Humphreys received various letters and telephone calls from the Memphis public urging him to "Fire the Commie Professors and kick out

[13] Sorrels, *The Exciting Years,* 110.

the longhaired troublemakers.” Humphreys reacted logically and calmly to the challenge and criticism he faced.[14]

Weissman’s talk was sponsored by MSU’s Speech and Drama Department, chaired by Harry Ausprich. The department was contacted by Kathy Barrett of Loyola University in New Orleans. She was a representative for the Southern Student Organizing Committee (SSOC). Headquartered in Nashville, Tennessee, the SSOC was founded in 1964 to recruit white southern college students to participate in civil rights activism. According to the SSOC, the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) would fund all of the expenses from Weissman’s visit to MSU. Steve Shiffrin, assistant forensics coach at MSU, and Harry Ausprich believed that it was good to discuss controversial issues which affect a society. They encouraged critical thinking. Shiffrin asserted that the speech department hoped to find another speaker with an opposing viewpoint to debate Weissman. Conservatives William Buckley and Russell Kirk were named as possible speakers.[15] However, it was later decided by Humphreys that an opposing speaker could lead to the students’ distrust toward elders. The president of the university maintained at the time that “the phrase you can’t trust anybody over thirty had not become a slogan with college students, but the attitude was developing and I didn’t want to encourage it at Memphis State.” The approach embraced by Humphreys would lead students to decide

[14] “Freedom’s Cry Called Bogus,” *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, 2 May 1965; “Humphreys Sees Red Pattern, But Gives Speech ‘Go Ahead,’” *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, 3 May 1965.

[15] Memo from Frank Holloman to C.C. Humphreys, 29 April 1965. Frank Holloman Collection, Box 1, Series II “Memphis State University and Mid-South Medical Center Council, 1964-1967,” Memphis Room, Memphis Public Library.

for themselves how their views either differed or coincided with those of Steve Weissman.[16]

On May 3, 1965, Steve Weissman delivered a talk entitled "Free Speech, Berkeley, and the Conventional Wisdom" to the MSU students and faculty. In front of a capacity crowd of 200 in the Education Department auditorium, Weissman addressed three issues: "1) How does social responsibility relate to individual freedom? 2) What is 'free speech'? 3) What is the function of a university?"[17] The FSM believed that the function of the university was to provide for an exchange of ideas, even controversial ones. The redheaded and bearded Weissman also maintained that the FSM was a "revolt against the impersonality of the 'multiuniversity' and against consensus politics. The idea of finding out what regents will give before you ask for it." In other words, he advocated for Memphis State students' rights to determine university policy.[18] Change was only possible through student involvement. Weissman declared that "only the student activists—with their concerns for freedom, for human dignity, for democracy and participation in decision-making—can provide the force to subvert the automated ivory tower."[19]

Weissman also spoke about how Cuba was not getting a fair hearing in the United States. At that time, Weissman was a member of the Fair Play for Cuba Committee, which supported the Cuban Revolution initiated by Fidel Castro. This controversial

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[16] "Free Speech Movement Leader Postpones Talk," *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, 22 April 1965; "New York Unit Backing MSU Talk," *Commercial Appeal,* 24 April 1965; Sorrels, *The Exciting Years,* 111-112.

[18] *Tiger Rag*, 23 April 1965; "Controversial Visit is Over But CA Fights On," *Tiger Rag*, 14 May 1965; "Weissman Speaks at MSU; Visit Creates Controversy," *Tiger Rag*, 7 May 1965.

[19] Steve Weissman, "Freedom and the University," undated. Students for a Democratic Society Records 1958-1970, Box 6, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison.

stance by Weissman led to a student walking out of his speech. Robert Kutchera, a freshman and Cuban refugee who had lived in Cuba between 1958 and 1961, could not bear to listen to misrepresentations of the Cuba he knew. An eyewitness to the revolution, Kutchera saw dead bodies of Castro's political enemies lying in the streets of Old Havana. He was traumatized by firing squads and denied freedom. During a question and answer period, Kutchera declared, "I know what it is like to lose your freedom. It's like being denied air to breathe…What you are saying about Cuba is not correct. It is not a place to go and be there in the Peace Corps." [20] He acknowledged that Weissman had the right to speak, but respectfully excused himself from the auditorium in silent protest. Kutchera's protest of communist Cuba generated applause from the audience and prompted others to leave the auditorium. When asked by a reporter for *The Tiger Rag* why he left during the question and answer period, Kutchera replied, "there was no reason to ask him questions. He was so slick that he could get around any pertinent questions you would ask him. The rest of the questions were so stupid they weren't worth asking."[21] After he left the speech, Kutchera feared that he might be arrested by Castro's secret police in Miami, who kept a close watch of Cuban exiles living in the United States. The Memphis dailies reported on the Cuban refugee's bold action. Henry Loeb, conservative Mayor of Memphis, praised Kutchera for his patriotism, thanking him for speaking for ordinary Memphians.[22]

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[20] Robert Kutchera, interview by Jack Lorenzini, Memphis, Tennessee, 13 October 2012.

[21] "Humphreys Favors Unity Pleas; Weissman Visit Discussed," *Tiger Rag*, 7 May 1965.

[22] Robert Kutchera, interview by author.

Whether or not MSU students agreed with his position, Weissman respected them and thought they were quite intelligent. During Weissman's hour-long speech the auditorium's doors were closed so as to not disrupt classes in the building. Due to an order from the Memphis Fire Department over two hundred students were prevented from standing in the auditorium. Following the talk, Weissman met with free speech supporters and curious students outside the Freewill Baptist Church on Southern Avenue. As Weissman spoke under a large tree, 150 students listened to him, asking more questions about the FSM. One of those students was John Gamble. He viewed Steve Weissman as a "professional agitator," a phrase that Weissman took ownership of in other speaking engagements throughout the South. Now he urged MSU students to create a campus chapter of the SDS.[23]

One of the criticisms during Weissman's visit dealt with the inadequate size of the Education Auditorium. Weissman believed that "it was an effort on the part of the administration to prevent a larger number of students from being 'contaminated by my ideas.'" Harry Ausprich lamented that the Education Auditorium was the only space available. He noted that organizers tried to get the University Auditorium, but it was already reserved by the Music Department. Another possibility was the Fieldhouse, but the faculty of the Speech and Drama Department "didn't feel as if more than 100 students would come." With an additional week to prepare for Weissman's visit, the organizers of the speech could have provided a more adequate facility to hold the speech. Free Speech was a controversial issue on the college campus and by the accounts of those who were

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[23] "Weissman's Memphis State Visit Discussed," *Tiger Rag*, 7 May 1965.

unable to hear Weissman speak, it was a missed opportunity for students to participate in the exchange of ideas.[24]

Two students blamed the poor planning on the administration. Robert Barker, a freshman, asserted that "if the administration was really interested in enlightening the student body to the pressing issues of our time it would have made such scheduling arrangements to give Mr. Weissman the opportunity to speak to a large number of the student body as possible." Anne Bastnagel, a senior, offered a more powerful condemnation of the inadequate planning. She acknowledged the various lamentations by *Tiger Rag* that student apathy prevailed at MSU. She believed that the responsibility for student apathy rested with the university administration. As a result of improper planning, "over 150 students along with several faculty members were turned away. The door was then closed with the excuse that the noise of the microphone would disturb classes. There were no classrooms in use in the two halls which lead to the auditorium." The reactions from these students indicated that there were more students than expected who were concerned, interested, or curious about controversial issues.[25]

Another issue surrounding Weissman's visit was the belief that Steve Shiffrin, assistant forensics coach, "secretly" brought the speaker to MSU. In a letter to the editor of *The Tiger Rag,* Shiffrin argued that he went through the appropriate channels of getting the administration's approval to have the event. He noted that when Weissman could not come at the end of April, Ausprich submitted an alternative date to President Humphreys for approval and Humphreys accepted it. In addition, Shiffrin criticized *The*

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[24] Ibid.

[25] "Humphreys Favors Unity Plea; Weissman Visit Discussed," *Tiger Rag*, 7 May 1965.

Tiger Rag for its opinionated reporting, which failed to cover the FSM in its entirety. In a letter to the editor on May 7, 1965, Shiffrin maintained that "Mr. Weissman may not be the guardian of all truth but why have you not reported that the faculty at Berkeley by a vote of more than eight to one supported the Free Speech Movement?" Shiffrin charged The *Tiger Rag* with faulty reporting for omitting UC President Clark Kerr's position on the FSM. Even though Shiffrin was in an ebullient mood after knowing that Weissman would deliver a speech on campus, he personally disagreed with Weissman's methods and beliefs.[26]

While Shiffrin believed that debating controversial issues on campus was important, John Gamble condemned Weissman's visit. In an article published in *The Tiger Rag* entitled "Portrait of a Professional Radical," Gamble viewed Weissman as an advocate for disorder on campus. Gamble mentioned that the free speech supporter disregarded any laws that he felt were inappropriate. The laws to which Gamble specifically referred were the restrictions placed on college students by the administration. Gamble stated that Weissman "found delight in tearing down the MSU administration and never thanked the university for allowing him to speak on campus…He acted like a prima donna who pouted because he failed to get a red carpet treatment." Viewing Weissman as a "disciple of chaos," Gamble thought that Memphis State learned its lesson for its decision to host a "radical speaker." According to Gamble, Weissman's appearance exposed the university "to professional agitators. We can learn better methods to oppose their radical views."

There were mixed reactions to Gamble's article. Andrew Pavlick, a senior, praised Gamble for his "great political insight" and noted that "The University of

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[26] Ibid.

Tennessee Law School's gain will be Memphis State's loss." Gamble, a senior, was admitted into the University of Tennessee Law School in 1965. On the other hand, Douglass Averitt, a graduate student, suggested that Gamble's beliefs "do not represent the political feelings of many in our student body and should be replaced next year by a more enlightened individual." Gamble was set in his conservative beliefs and did not find it necessary to embrace an exchange of ideas.[27]Gamble had a number of supporters and some who disliked his conservative stance.

Gamble's supporters felt that Weissman should not have been given the right to speak. Bun De Wese adamantly maintained that "this radical movement has no place at Memphis State or in the South. Liberal conditions existing in Southern California cannot be applied to civil rights movements or to free speech movements in the conservative South." Moreover, J.M. Bramblett, Jr., wrote a scathing letter to the editor of the *Commercial Appeal* on the FSM and those subscribing to "radical" ideology. Referring to recent anti-war protests, Bramblett asserted, "it depresses me deeply to face the realization that many fellow students have not been able to guard themselves against such 'brainwashing'. These students have our national government in a senseless and highly embarrassing position." Bramblett saw freedom of speech as an impediment to freedom of thought and as a wave sweeping campuses in which people were simply hopping on the bandwagon. Another student, Steven Paul Godenberg, said that "radical" leftists brought disorder to American society due to their disregard and contempt for laws. Godenberg offered a challenge and solution to the problem for MSU students: "Why can't students of MSU show the people of the U.S. that not all students are like those of

[27] *Tiger Rag*, 7 May 1965; "Portrait of a Professional Radical," *Tiger Rag*, 14 May 1965; "Gamble Draws More Letters," *Tiger Rag*, 21 May 1965.

UCLA and the SDS... Instead of destroying society let us the students of MSU help build it."[28]

On the other hand, some MSU students reacted seriously to the provocative and controversial exchange of ideas that emerged from Weissman's visit. Boyd Lewis, a student, considered Weissman's appearance as the emergence of an "intellectual revolution" at MSU. Lewis, acquainted with the campus environment, declared that "the revolution will die quietly." Various students, whether or not they agreed with Weissman's position, saw the usefulness in providing him an opportunity to speak. Wilbur Crump declared: "I don't care if what he said was right or wrong. John Birch or communist! I think it is definitely a healthy trend when students can hear both sides of the issue instead of what people in power want you to hear." Crump's sentiment was echoed by fellow students Bruce Robins and Doyle Silliman. These students believed that thorough debating of controversial issues was necessary to make an informed opinion.

The editors of the *Tiger Rag,* the campus newspaper, also commented on the recent event. They praised the student body for acting maturely, calmly, and quietly. They also offered praise for the MSU administration for allowing Steve Weissman to speak. An editorial mentioned that "at many eastern schools which have a 'liberal' reputation the governor of Alabama was not allowed to speak. At Loyola of Los Angeles Gov. Nelson Rockefeller was not allowed on campus." Embracing the opinions of some

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[28] *Tiger Rag*, 7 May 1965; "Gamble Draws More Letters," *Tiger Rag,* 21 May 1965; "Letters to the Editor," *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, 2 May 1965.

students, the editorial acknowledged the need to listen to all viewpoints whether or not one agreed with them.[29]

The reactions from the *Commercial Appeal* and *Memphis Press Scimitar* were also important. The *Commercial Appeal* was diligent in its efforts to portray Steve Weissman as a "radical." In the week prior to Weissman's scheduled talk, the newspaper devoted stories and editorials to the famed free speech advocate. In one editorial entitled "Enough Said," the editors argued that Weissman's views did not warrant anyone's attention. The editorial claimed that "the efforts to turn his visit into a cause célèbre are putting this minor character into more importance than he deserves." After Weissman delivered his address at MSU, another editorial associated the activist with anarchy. The editorial firmly noted that "the alternative is peacemaking. To keep a peace you must have authority and discipline. No society has existence for long without them."

Unlike the *Commercial Appeal, The Memphis Press Scimitar*, another Scripps Howard paper, offered a far more restrained approach to the controversial speaker. Editors praised Humphreys for his handling of the situation, citing his statement that "simply shutting people up won't cure problems." It also acknowledged that only a small percentage of Memphis State students (350 out of a student population of 10,000) were listening to Weissman's message. *The Tiger Rag* condemned *The Commercial Appeal* for its excessive coverage of Weissman's visit. In the week leading up to the speech, *The Commercial Appeal* discussed the radicalism of the free speech advocate. *The Commercial Appeal*'s reaction to Weissman's visit was out of proportion with what he

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[29] "Students and Officials Lauded for Handling Weissman Visit," *Tiger Rag,* 7 May 1965.The Governor of Alabama at this time was George Wallace, known for his segregationist views. A student leader at Fayetteville, AR, wanted to bring Weissman on campus but was "suspended for sponsoring without authorization." "Since the Arkansas assembly was conducted in the defiance of school authorities, normal school rules of discipline are being applied."

said and his effect on his audience. While the *Tiger Rag* condemned the coverage of the *Commercial Appeal*, it applauded the *Memphis Press Scimitar* for its support for Humphreys. The editorial stated that "it is heartening to see one newspaper stand behind a responsible official and defend his intelligent decision."[30]

Memphis residents also expressed their displeasure with Weissman's visit in letters to the editor. Leslie Birchfield wrote that "Humphreys' 'vaccine' has not been perfected… indeed [it] has miserably failed wherever field tested… Humphreys does not learn from the experience of others such as Dr. Clark Kerr, President of the University of California at Berkeley." With the same passion, Ann Patrick emphasized that "the seeds of lawlessness violence and riot have been sown by Steve Weissman and will start to grow… who knows how long before we become the 'Berkeley of Tennessee'." J.H. Pope offered an observation relating to Weissman's disdain for laws. Pope proclaimed that Weissman's opinion toward law would have been treasonous and "would have placed him dangerously close to the gallows at an earlier time in our history." There were no letters to the editor in support of Weissman's visit or one that articulated the need for ideas to be exchanged through civil discourse.[31]

The controversy associated with Steve Weissman's visit in Memphis eventually settled, but the Tennessee State Board of Education applied pressure upon the administration by mandating a new policy concerning campus speakers. An earlier draft of the policy prohibited "subversive" speakers. Due to "problems of identity and

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[30] "Dr. Humphreys Did Right," *Memphis Press Scimitar,* 4 May 1965; "Quite A Contrast," *Tiger Rag,* 14 May 1965; "Enough Said," *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, 30 April 1965; "The Children's Hour," *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, 5 May 1965.

[31] "Letters to the Editor," *Memphis Press Scimitar*, 7 May 1965; "Weissman Talk Stirs Comment," *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, 9 May 1965.

definition" of subversive, C.C. Humphreys, a former FBI agent, convinced the board of education to remove such language in the revised draft.[32] This policy, adopted on May 21, 1965, upheld that "those who masquerade under the guise of free speech, while expounding disrespect for the due processes of law and order have sacrificed their eligibility and have no sanction to utilize the facilities of a college or university under this Board." The new speaker policy was passed to prevent any kind of campus disturbance which would hinder the everyday operations of the university. Memphis State University, like all state supported colleges and universities, was obligated to establish a policy in which future speakers "will make a positive contribution to the cultural or educational benefit of the institution." By December 1965, MSU's policy required academic departments and student organizations to obtain approval from R.M. Robison, Dean of Students, before inviting a campus speaker. According to Tennessee state law, political rallies and religious meetings were prohibited on campuses; however, "political and religious speakers may come to campus but the audience must be limited to the student body and faculty. Public attendance would constitute a political rally or religious gathering according to interpretation of state statutes." The more restrictive speaker policy not only gave the MSU administration more control over decisions but rescued it from having to make a difficult, unpopular decision regarding a campus speaker.[33]

Weissman's visit exposed the conservative political and cultural climate of Memphis. Henry Loeb praised those who prevented the communist message from being

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[32] Sorrels, The Exciting Years, 113.

[33] Tennessee State Board of Education Newsletter, 21 May 1965, Cecil Humphreys Collection, Box 7, Special Collections, University of Memphis, Memphis; "MSU President Issues New Speaker Policy," *Tiger Rag*, 14 December 1965. Invited by the Conservative Club, George Wallace, Governor of Alabama, was the first to speak under the university's new speaker policy.

heard. The *Commercial Appeal* and John Gamble, linked the Free Speech movement to lawlessness and communism. The portrayal of Weissman as an "agent of chaos," "radical," "agitator," and "proponent of anarchy" was the antithesis of Memphis, a city whose citizens embraced law and order, religious values, and deference to authority. The letters to the editor and pleas to "Fire Commie Professors" by Memphis citizens, coupled with meetings with President C.C. Humphreys urging him to cancel the speech, revealed this clash of cultures. An editorial in *The Tiger Rag* alluded to the censorship practiced by the Scripps Howard paper. It charged the *Commercial Appeal* with only publishing letters that advanced its own viewpoints on Weissman's visit.

The hysteria in Memphis surrounding Weissman's visit was reflective of the Cold War culture "which was suspicious of protest, frightened by disorder and uncomfortable with insurgent oratory."[34] Since 1956, through its program COINTELPRO, the Federal Bureau of Investigations sought to expose and disrupt activities of communists and other subversive groups. The Free Speech Movement was closely monitored by the FBI, as members of the Steering Committee had belonged to older leftist organizations.[35] Even though the majority of FSM supporters (including Mario Savio) were not linked to Marxism, the group was feared to be subversive**.** The Memphis State administration had in its possession a dossier of Weissman which suggested his association with Bettina Aptheker and Robert Paul Kaufman, two Communist Youth leaders in California.[36] Even

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[34] Cohen, *Freedom's Orator,* 224.

[35] Ibid., 131. Bettina Aptheker belonged to the Communist led Du Bois Club; Syd Stapleton was a member of the Young Socialist Alliance; and Jack Weinberg strongly supported the Independent Socialist Club.

[36] Stephan Mark Weissman dossier, undated. Frank Holloman Collection, Box 1, Series II, "Memphis State University and Mid-South Medical Center Council, 1964-1967," Memphis Room, Memphis Public Library.

John Gamble linked Weissman's position in the Students for a Democratic Society with other organizations such as SNCC and SSOC that were perceived to be communist infiltrated or Communist front groups.

Weissman's visit to Memphis State and other southern colleges and universities also revealed a breakthrough for academic freedom in the South, where divergent ideas could be heard. For instance, students at the University of Arkansas at Fayetteville and at Atlanta's Morehouse College pledged their support for free speech by signing "a statement affirming their rights of free speech and their determination to stand by those who had invited Steve Weissman."[37] The estimated 2500 students who listened to the message surpassed the expectations of Weissman and the SSOC. On average, ninety three students and faculty listened to Weissman's speeches. At Vanderbilt, sixty attended his lecture; at the University of Arkansas at Fayetteville, one hundred students attended. Memphis State marked the greatest success for Weissman on his southern tour, as over 350 students (200 who sat in the auditorium, and 150 who were denied entry into the auditorium due to fire codes) attempted to hear his message; it was the most favorable student reaction of the southern colleges that Weissman visited.[38] Even if a handful of students vocally protested with scattered boos or in silence or by leaving, other students were either supportive or curious about the Free Speech Movement that received great publicity in *The Commercial Appeal*. The exposure that Weissman and the FSM received by the Memphis daily generated enough excitement by students to fill the auditorium to capacity. Ironically, without this publicity, there would not have been a large crowd.

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[37] *Southern Patriot*, Braden Papers Box 61 Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison.

[38] "Berkeley Student Leader Violates Speaker Policy," *Arkansas Traveler*, 6 May 1965.

There no organized protests of students approving or disapproving of free speech on campus during Weissman's visit. The students who continued discussion with Weissman at Free Will Baptist reveal that an audience could listen, even if most were not committed to student radicalism. Weissman was not run off the church property for espousing seemingly communistic ideas. His visit ushered in what some students called an intellectual revolution. Some believed it was an exciting time to be a student at Memphis State University.

Ultimately, this incident revealed that MSU was at a crossroads between the conservative culture of the city and a rapidly emerging free speech movement around the nation. Amid pleas by Memphis citizens to "Fire the Commie Professors and kick out long-haired troublemakers," Cecil Humphreys understood that overreacting was not in the best interest of the university. Moreover, he ignored demands by Memphians to cancel Weissman's speech, which would have generated more attention for the FSM.[39] The arrival of Weissman and the FSM movement brought with it new possibilities for students to take greater control over their lives.

[39] Sorrels, *The Exciting Years*, 110-111.

Chapter 4

"Harsh as truth and as uncompromising as justice": Logos and Free Speech, 1965-1966

Inspired by the Free Speech Movement and "fueled by peanut butter and hope," Logos, a group of about six or seven regular members, formed in late 1965 with the intent of exposing Memphis State students to condemnations of U.S. foreign policy in Vietnam and support for civil rights. Logos, came from the Greek word meaning "reason." Jere Cunningham, a Logos member, thought it meant "reckoning."[1] Members of Logos were committed to presenting viewpoints to MSU students that were absent in the *Tiger Rag* and *Commercial Appeal.* While there were other members of Logos, the active members included Peter Quinn, Joseph Ravizza, Brian Murphree, Bruce Murphree, Jere Cunningham, and Cleve Lanier Anderson. With the exception of Cunningham and Anderson, the active students were from Connecticut. The Murphree brothers were native Memphians who moved to Connecticut in 1956. The brothers wanted to go away to school and Memphis State's inexpensive tuition presented them with an opportunity.[2] Key faculty supporters were Jean Antoine Morrison and John Dolphin Bass of the Foreign Language department and Edgar Welch, a law librarian.

The first issue of their underground paper, *LOGOS,* appeared in December 1965. The second issue appeared sometime in January 1966.[3] Getting their facts from a myriad of sources such as *The Nation, The New Republic, The New York Times,* and *The Times*

[1] Jere Cunningham, interview by author.

[2] Brian Murphree, interview by Jack Lorenzini, Memphis, Tennessee, 12 November 2012.

[3] In this chapter, there are two spelling styles of Logos/*LOGOS.* When I use Logos I am referring to the group. When I use *LOGOS,* I am referring to the mimeograph publication of the group.

Literary Supplement,[4] Logos members sought to fill the void in press coverage, embracing the anti-war movement and promoting human liberty and social and economic equality. In addition, Logos wanted to replace the "mirage of intellectualism" with discussions of broad human concern. Lastly, *LOGOS* did not intend to be a sensationalistic press. Jere Cunningham declared that the ultimate purpose of creating Logos was patriotic. "We loved our nation and saw it sliding into an abyss of imperialism in Vietnam; we saw our friends being sent to die for nothing," he noted. "We also saw in the civil rights struggle the same need to help our nation strive for true equality."[5]

The publications produced by Logos received the attention of the Federal Bureau of Investigation. Between March and August, four FBI reports were produced on Logos. The FBI's interest was sparked by Joseph Ravizza's enrollment at MSU and his ties with subversive groups. The COINTELPRO program targeted communists and communist-infiltrated groups. As one of the most important leaders of the group, Ravizza attended Adelphia College in New York prior to coming to Memphis State University in 1966. While at Adelphia, Ravizza's roommate was Bob Armstrong, a leader of the May 2nd Movement (M2M). Organized in New Haven, Connecticut in the spring of 1964, the main purpose of the M2M was to plan and lead an anti-war demonstration in New York City demanding the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Vietnam. The M2M was dominated by the Progressive Labor Party. Founded in April of 1965 the PLP became "the new party of revolutionary socialism." The ultimate objective of the PLP was to establish a

[4] Brian Murphree, interview by author.

[5] *LOGOS*, vol. 1 no. 6, University and Student Publications, Box 10, University of Memphis Special Collections, Memphis; United States Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation Report, "Logos," Memphis: 11 March 1966. Cecil Humphreys Collection, Box 4, University of Memphis Special Collections, Memphis. 7; Jere Cunningham, interview by author. Edgar Welch came to MSU in 1962. He believed he was not re-hired because he picketed the Ku Klux Klan in Memphis in 1965.

"militant working class movement based on Marxism- Leninism."[6] In March 1966, the M2M was financially broke and likely to shut down.[7] According to an FBI report, Ravizza was told by Armstrong to organize a radical student movement at MSU and abandon publication of *LOGOS* in early March. Ravizza believed he would be unsuccessful since MSU students were "too conservative." A radical movement at MSU could not exist if students did not embrace the message found in *LOGOS*.[8]

On February 28, 1966, the third issue of *LOGOS* was distributed on campus. This issue contained an article entitled, "Some Facts on Vietnam." It addressed the following questions: How Bad Are things in Vietnam? Why Are We in Vietnam At All? Why Are We Hated in Vietnam? What About Torture and Terror? What About Bombing North Vietnam? Can the War Be Won? What About A Communist Take-over? Why We Protest? The members of Logos declared: "as American citizens, we are ashamed of what our government is doing in Vietnam. We protested the crime of Russians killing Hungarians…We now protest United States actions…they, too, are a crime." Also appearing in this issue were appeals by Brian Murphree ("Action Not Verbal Masturbation"), Peter Quinn ("Pertinacity not Pettiness") and C.L. Anderson ("Action

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[6] Federal Bureau of Investigation Report, 11 March 1966, 34-35.

[7] United States Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation Report, "Logos," Memphis: 1 May 1966. Cecil Humphreys Collection, Box 4, University of Memphis Special Collections, Memphis, 1.

[8] United States Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation Report, "Logos,"34-35. The M2M was dominated by the Progressive Labor Party. Founded in April 1965 the PLP became the "the new party of revolutionary socialism." The ultimate objective of the PLP was to establish a "militant working class movement based on Marxism-Leninism." United States Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation Report, 6 May 1966, 1. In March 1966, the M2M was financially broke and "likely to cease operations."

not Acquiescence"). They implored the reader "to submit oneself to the act of reading ALL divergent and dissident opinions concerning international and domestic affairs."[9]

The challenge of Logos in distributing its message to the student body was evident. After the distribution of the third issue of *LOGOS*, John D. Bass, faculty supporter, and C.L. Anderson, the editor, were threatened with bodily harm. They demanded protection from Dr. Edward Don McDaniel, Dean of Men. This was not the first time that those with "radical" beliefs were confronted by conservative students. In 1965, Dale Richard Caldwell, a student activist, was threatened by MSU football players after carrying a sign that attacked U.S. foreign policy. Caldwell, a supporter of civil rights and peace groups, also picketed a visit to MSU by Alabama Governor George Wallace in December 1965. The FBI declared that "prior to this time there had been no known efforts to have any possible pro-communist student-professor oriented activity on the MSU campus." Student activism appeared at MSU, leading to miniature confrontations in February 1966. In early 1966, there was a student and faculty forum to debate U.S. policy in Vietnam moderated by Judy Schulz, MSU Assistant Director of Forensics. Those who criticized U.S. policy in Vietnam were Rev. James Lawson of Centenary Methodist Church, Professor Jerry Welsh of Modern Languages, and Dr. Charles Long, Professor John Bass, and Professor Robert Smythe of the German Department. On the other side of the debate, those who supported U.S. policy included Michael Schon, Director of Forensics at MSU, and Michael Charles Rice, an MSU debate student. Copies of LOGOS

[9] *LOGOS,* vol. 1 issue 3, University and Student Publications, Box 10, University of Memphis Special Collections, Memphis.

were distributed but Logos was not mentioned in the forum. After passing out their issue, the Logos members scheduled a meeting to discuss the future of the organization.[10]

March 1966 was a critical month for Logos. The members needed to decide a plan of action to publish a mimeograph that would gain the support of the MSU student body. According to the FBI, there were two factions of Logos: liberal and radical. Liberals, "wanted to tone down the pro-communist, anti-United States policy and to include such issues as free speech and racial desegregation." Radicals did not favor changing the publication. J. Kenneth Lipner, a graduate student and contributor to *LOGOS*, asserted that "Logos was too one-sided; too pro-communist; and that it should report all views which might be manifested by various students or professors."

William Edward Brigman, Assistant Professor of Political Science, favored making the necessary changes, citing that "Issue no.3 was far too radical and pro-Communist." Brigman assured members of Logos that he could get financial backing from over twenty faculty members once they moderated their approach. Rudolph Cox, an African American student, believed that the viewpoints of Logos alienated African American students. Cox noted that "most MSU Negro students (400 in number) with whom he had talked had said they considered 'Logos' to be pro-communistic and wanted nothing to do with the support of or affiliation with Logos." According to the FBI, the supporters of a more radical, pro-revolutionary policy were Brian Murphree, Bruce Murphree, and Joe Ravizza.[11] While they agreed to tone down their sentiments, they were adamant about getting their views across. Group members declared, "We'll do all we can to raise 'Hell' to stop the Vietnam War—will use any means—and will if necessary

[10] FBI Report, 11 March 1966, 8-10.

become activists." Whether they knew it or not, from the moment they began distributing the newsletter, they were activists. According to the FBI Report, members of Logos would even resort to writing letters to the editor of the LOGOS to "ridicule the anti-communist position and win sympathy to their cause." Sometimes referring to themselves as Maoists and bragging to be communists, these Logos members were "concerned at the apathy toward world affairs, international relations, peace and communism manifested by southern university students... and wanted to exploit student frustrations… to cause the students to think and to act." In early March 1966, some members accompanied Ronald Edward Roberts, instructor of Sociology, to the Unitarian Church to listen to a speech on Marxism. By mid-March, there were plans to organize the first anti-war march in Memphis. However, due to insufficient support and improper planning, an anti-war march did not occur on March 19.[12]

With the success of Logos creating controversy on the MSU campus, it did not take long for the *Commercial Appeal* to condemn the minority group. Reviewing its anti-war sentiments, the editorial ridiculed the name Logos: "if the editors of Logos are searching for a word it should be 'ostrich.' They have their heads in the sand." Meanwhile, a spokesman for Memphis State University noted that the administration took "no official stand" on Logos.[13]

On April 11, issue no. 4 of *Logos* appeared, focusing on race conditions at MSU and U.S. recognition of China. One thousand two hundred copies were passed out to students at Jones Hall. In an article entitled "Some Negro Opinions of Racial Conditions in Memphis," Rudolph Cox, an African American student, acknowledged not only the

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[12] FBI Report, 11 March 1966, 11-14, 20, 25; FBI Report, 6 May 1966, 3-4.

[13] "Logos in the Sand," *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, 4 March 1966.

inequalities in the workplace in Memphis, but also addressed the need for change on the MSU campus. Cox asserted that "the social life of M.S.U. for the Negroes is very poor. It is difficult for Negro girls to get into the Angel Flight. Negro girls are not on the pep squad and they are not allowed to be majorettes." Echoing a similar sentiment, Charles Pinkston, an African American student, in his article "The Racial Issue at Memphis State," stated that progress was slow. This author spoke of the lack of communication between white and black students. He maintained, "in my opinion, the students are not as friendly as some of them could be. If the students would get together and socialize a bit more, then the situation would be much better than it is at the present." Others mentioned that there was no Greek organization for blacks. These criticisms of campus life sought to expose the unpleasant conditions for blacks and make white Memphis State students aware of the inequities.

Another Logos editorial concerned the People's Republic of China. It stated "either the present government must acknowledge the People's Republic of China or be forced to take actions which will lead directly to the destruction of civilization." This issue also contained a letter to the editor by Norman Thomas, a prominent American socialist who supported the group's stance on the war in Vietnam.[14]

Perhaps the most revealing, controversial letter to the editor of *LOGOS* in issue no. 4 came from Bobby W. Smith, a graduate of a Fayetteville, North Carolina, high school and a MSU night student. He praised Logos for providing an alternative viewpoint to the *Tiger Rag* and *Commercial Appeal*. Smith was affiliated with a number of social

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[14] "Logos in the Sand," *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, 4 March 1966; FBI Report, 6 May 1966, 11; *LOGOS,* vol. 1 no. 4, University and Student Publications, Box 10, University of Memphis Special Collections, Memphis. Logos members met Norman Thomas in New York. He became aware of the group and directly sent a letter to the editor of *LOGOS*.

justice organizations including SSOC and SDS. He was also enlisted in the U.S. Navy. Smith passionately pronounced: "all worthwhile that can be offered to me by this derogatory organization is a premature discharge. A colossal wonder that I'm not yet behind bars, post Court Martial. I resent any sort of military uniform and speak incessantly against the Vietnam War." As the Vietnam War waged on, the young naval officer had become disenchanted. The anti-war viewpoints contained in Logos found an audience with this member of the navy. The "all-American" "managed to retain a sense of conscience" during a time of continued escalation of war.[15]

The primary motives of Logos in toning down its opinions after issue no. 3 were not only to attract a larger audience to their message, but to receive financial support. As a group with factions, liberals and radicals, there was frustration with the printing of issue no. 4. According to an FBI report, Peter Quinn, Logos member, noted that there were diverse opinions among members. For example, Quinn mentioned that C.L. Anderson, editor of Logos, did not support the pro-communist Chinese view. Moreover, the more radical members, Joseph Ravizza and Peter Quinn, thought that they "had prostituted their integrity for reluctantly agreeing to put non-communist material" in issue no. 4. The group still received support from professors John Dolphin Bass, Jean Morrison, and Joseph Carroll of the Foreign Language Department.[16]

Despite less "communist" material published in the recent *LOGOS* issue, faculty sympathizer Ronald Roberts, instructor of Sociology, called for a less vicious attack on

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[15] *LOGOS*, vol.1 no. 4. According to U.S. Naval Records, Robert Smith enlisted on April 2, 1965 as a minority (under the age of 18). FBI Report, 6 May 1966, 6-7. Smith was also affiliated with the War Resisters League (WRL), the Vietnam Day Committee (VDC) and the Central Committee for Conscientious Objectors (CCCO).

[16] FBI Report, 6 May 1966, 11, 14.

U.S. policy in Vietnam by members of Logos. Roberts, a graduate of Louisiana State University, was instrumental in creating the first Liberal Club at LSU. However, others who disagreed with the group's viewpoints on the war used threats. On April 12, 1966, a threatening phone call was taken by C.L. Anderson. The FBI obtained this information from a Homicide Report made available by Inspector N.E. Zachary of the Memphis police. It reported that Gary Smith threatened the editor of Logos with physical violence. Smith saw members of Logos as communists and noted that "he had a buddy or friend who has been killed in Vietnam trying to protect people such as Anderson." Threatening calls like this were significant in showing how Memphians, like much of the country at the time, still largely supported the war in Vietnam. In a survey conducted of over 180 students on Vietnam policy, students favored a stronger military stance "by a 150 to 7 margin."[17] Logos developed its identity on campus; more and more students would either tear or throw away copies of Logos.[18]

Logos continued to condemn U.S. foreign policy in Vietnam in issue no. 5. The issue promoted the first anti-war march to take place in Memphis, organized by MSU students Dale Richard Caldwell and James Brown. Another student, David Dybek, worked with Reverend James Lawson to promote the march. They hoped to not only gain the support of MSU students, but also attract students at Lemoyne College, Owen College, Christian Brothers College, and Southwestern College. Five days before the scheduled march of April 23, bulletins appeared in the MSU administration building calling for an anti-war march. According to E.C. Swann of the Inspectional and Intelligence Bureau, there was no record of Logos or any of the organizers requesting a

[17] "Student Poll Shows Support For Strong Asian Policy," *Tiger Rag*, 7 December 1965.

[18] FBI Report, 6 May 1966, 12-13.

permit from the city of Memphis to hold an anti-war march, nor of one issued for the march. Even though there was no permit issued, protestors of the war were able to march as long they obeyed traffic regulations. The Memphis police said "if they violated local traffic regulations, those violators would be arrested." This anticipated march led to greater enthusiasm among Logos members. It was an epiphany of sorts. An ebullient Ravizza declared: "When I came to Memphis five months ago, there was nothing. If we continue our present program, we might be able to create another Berkeley." The heightened student activism of 1966 was evident. However, Michael Schon, Debate Instructor, gave credit to pacifist Reverend Lawson for organizing the forthcoming march, referring to the Logos group as "a bunch of Johnny come latelys." Regardless of who organized the march, the excitement surrounding it led Logos members to solicit donations so that they could distribute copies of issue no. 5 and recruit students for the march.[19]

Without financial support, the Logos publication would not be possible. Logos received $20 from the Unitarian Fellowship, $20 from Bob Allen at a benefit dinner at the Free University of New York, and $25 from prominent Memphis attorney Lucius Burch Jr. In a letter by Burch to Logos dated April 13, 1966, the attorney mentioned that while he might not agree with everything that Logos embraced, he saw its publication as useful for discussing dissenting opinions. Even though Burch read only one issue of Logos prior to his financial contribution, he declared, "You are disturbing men's minds

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[19] Ibid., 17. There was an earlier attempt in March 1966 to organize an anti-war march in Memphis. John Bass called the Chief of Memphis police to obtain a permit for the march. At the same time, Dan Richard Caldwell, organized the march. Due to the lack of sufficient support, the march was called off. FBI Report, 11 March 1966, 33.Dybek was "suspected by the school administration of being involved in the illicit use of narcotics." United States Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation Report, "Logos," Memphis: 19 April 1966. Cecil Humphreys Collection, Box 4, University of Memphis Special Collections, Memphis, 3-4, 13. FBI Report, 6 May 1966, 17-18.

and requiring them to talk and perhaps to think, and this is always a commendable activity." In April, faculty member Jerry Welsh, professor of Russian History, also provided monetary donations to Logos. With the financial contributions, Logos was able to rent a mimeograph machine from A.B. Dick Company for $25 dollars with the "plan to buy 10,000 sheets of paper," allowing Logos to continue to distribute its message to students.[20]

Despite a claim by Logos that it had a circulation of 10,000, only about 3,000 copies were passed out to students at noon on April 22, 1966. Issue no. 5 of *LOGOS* contained an advertisement for the Saturday, April 23, march and an article entitled "The Vietnam Draft" by Roger Taus, a Logos member. In the article, Taus urged students to revolt against the draft, using any means to oppose it. He told "blacks that the real fight is in U.S. not Nam," he asked that students not be "trained robots or military puppets," and he called for all to "unite" against U.S. policy in Vietnam. This issue compelled one student to spit on the issue and a small fight to arise that prevented members from distributing their newspaper. During the encounter Edgar Welch was struck on the ear by a student. Prior to this scuffle, Welch notified the Attorney General that intolerance by MSU students towards Logos could result in violence. Logos members Ravizza and Quinn also attempted to distribute copies to students at Owen College. Logos sympathizers J. Kenneth Lipner and James Brown, both graduate students, taught social science courses for Owen College part-time. When it was discovered that the "outside

[20] Lucius Burch to Logos, 13 April 1966, Lucius Burch Collection, Box 65 Folder 1, Special Collections, University of Memphis, Memphis; FBI Report, 19 April 1966, 6, 11. Welsh planned on attending the anti-war march but went to Syracuse that weekend.

agitators" were passing out propaganda, Dr. Charles Dinkins, President of Owen College, demanded that Ravizza and Quinn leave.[21]

The first anti-war march in Memphis occurred on April 23, 1966. Approximately forty two marchers gathered at Union Avenue and East Parkway. They were five miles from downtown Memphis and began their march two by two down the sidewalks of Union, headed toward Front Street. Once at Front Street, marchers turned left and walked to their final destination, the Main Post Office, to express their concern and frustration with U.S. foreign policy in Vietnam. The majority of the marchers were members of Logos and students from the Memphis colleges and universities. Those who took part in the march included Cleve Lanier Anderson, Joe Ravizza, Peter Quinn, David Dybek, Dale Caldwell, Rodney Gates Jr., Brian and Bruce Murphree, James Brown, J. Kenneth Lipner, and Wanda Stovall Donati. They were joined by three African American students: Verni Owen and Hattie Stanley from Owen College, and an un-identified male wearing his MSU ROTC uniform. The FBI reports characterized the marchers as "beatnik type looking crowds, girls with long stringy hair, many young men with beards and grotesque wearing apparel-- cowboy boots and vests." At the Post Office, William Earl Stanback, a sophomore at Christian Brothers College and former Vice President of the Intercollegiate Chapter of the NAACP, joined the marchers. MSU professors Abe Kriegel, Reva Kriegel, and Kell Mitchell, as well as Reverend James Lawson, also participated in the march. The faculty members led the demonstrators downtown, while Reverend Lawson, pastor of Centenary Baptist, continued in the rear of the march.

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[21] FBI Report, 6 May 1966, 24-26; "Apathy Advised, Not Violence," *Tiger Rag,* 26 April 1966; "Police Break Up Anti-War Scuffle," *Memphis* Commercial *Appeal,* 23 April 1966.

The march that took place in Memphis was not directed against the soldiers. According to Rev. Lawson there were three reasons for the march: "1) If there is no active resistance to the war the human race will perish. 2) The Great Society has fallen by way side; took a backseat to the Vietnam War and 3) The war in Vietnam is against our national interest." The marchers obeyed all local traffic rules and were guarded by Memphis police as a number of eggs were thrown (all misses) at them. Captain G.H. Parker of the Security Squad of the Memphis Police Department wanted to maintain law and order at all costs and "to keep traffic moving with as little interference as possible." Various anti-war signs held by the demonstrators read: "Would you kill a commie for Christ?;" "And Jesus Wept;" "Ban the Bomb;" "Make War on Poverty -- not on the Vietnamese;" "Napalm does not make U.S. welcome in Vietnam;" and "Bring Our Boys Back." The peaceful march downtown was considered a success by its participants.[22]

The participation of African American students drew the concern of Maxine Smith, Executive Secretary of the Memphis NAACP. Smith was worried that, given Rev. Lawson's popularity among black Memphis youth, "he would have an adverse influence on some of them." More importantly, Smith expressed her displeasure in William Stanback, whom she believed had tarnished the reputation of the NAACP by aligning himself with "possible pro-Communists and beatniks." In respect to the Vietnam War, Smith felt that African American students should not take part in speaking out against the

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[22] *LOGOS*, vol.1, no. 6, University and Student Publications, Box 10, University of Memphis Special Collections, Memphis.; "Anti-war Protestors March Down Union," *Commercial Appeal*, 24 April 1966; FBI Report, 6 May 1966, 27-28; 31-37. John Andrew pointed out that between 1965 and 1972, the U.S. spent over $128 billion dollars to finance the war in Vietnam as opposed to $15 billion dollars spent to eradicate poverty in the United States. John Andrew, *Lyndon Johnson and the Great Society* (Chicago: Ivan Dee, 1998), 83.

war.[23] Moreover, even though MSU African American students sympathized with Logos's anti-war message, recruiting them for Memphis's anti-war march proved difficult. James Brown, a supporter of Logos, acknowledged that black students did not want to risk getting expelled from the university.[24]

Nearly forty five years later, Abraham "Abe" Kriegel, who had arrived as an assistant professor of History in 1964, recalled his participation in the anti-war march. With student marchers dressed in what became the stereotypical radical student, "tattered jeans, bearded unshaven men and women who weren't dressed as students who were expected to dress and did dress," Kriegel and other History faculty Reva Kriegel, Kell Mitchell, and Paul Mitchell dressed nicely in "jackets" and led the march downtown. They knew that the radical students looked "fairly disreputable in the eyes of whomever was watching" the demonstration.

As Kriegel helped lead the march downtown, accompanied by police protection, a hostile crowd followed. Approached by Norman Brewer, a newscaster for WMC radio Memphis, Kriegel answered questions about the march and reiterated that that the participants "weren't opposed to the troops." Kriegel believed that the march was not anti-patriotic, despite the views of most Memphians. The anti-war demonstrator vividly remembered how during the march Paul Mitchell's father visited from Wisconsin. Mitchell's father, a Mennonite minister, met up with the four faculty members toward the end of the march. Kriegel asserted that since Mitchell possessed a Wisconsin license plate, it "provided verification that the march was being planned by outside agitators or out of state folk" to the Memphis public. In the aftermath of Memphis's first anti-war

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[23] FBI Report, 6 May 1966, 37.

[24] James Brown, interview by Jack Lorenzini, Memphis, Tennessee, 3 February 2013.

march, Kriegel maintained that while he did not see any eggs tossed at demonstrators, Kell Mitchell's home was egged later in the day. After the demonstration, Kriegel acknowledged that he never experienced opposition from the administration or "fairly conservative, apolitical" faculty. However, he did notice hostility evident among students. On one occasion, Kriegel walked down the halls of the Administration Building, where a couple students passed and said to each other, "There is one of those communists."[25]

The FBI paid close attention to the recent march. They tried to determine whether or not the Wisconsin Madison Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) organized the march. The Memphis bureau went to J. Kenneth Lipner's employer Owen College, a historically black college, to inform school administrators about the anti-war activist. Upon hearing rumors circulating throughout the campus that the FBI discussed the activities of Lipner and his colleague, James Brown, Lipner invited the FBI agents over. Agents William Lawrence and Wester showed pictures of marchers and mentioned the international communist conspiracy. Lipner did not know any of the people in the pictures. Before the FBI agents left, Lipner requested a copy of the FBI transcript. The agents agreed to the request. Later on in the day, Lipner arrived at the Bureau office to obtain a copy of the transcript. When he asked for the transcript, the agents declared, "What transcript? We didn't promise you anything."[26] This was the second time in a year that Lipner was under surveillance for his opposition to the war. In a letter to *The Commercial Appeal*, Lipner expressed his opposition to the war. Shortly after, he

[25] Abe Kriegel, interview by author. Kriegel mentioned at one time that he protested against a faculty member of the Art Department for his racist depiction of Reverend James Lawson. Kriegel believed that this conservative faculty member crossed the line.

[26] J. Kenneth Lipner, interview by Jack Lorenzini, Memphis, Tennessee, 21 March 2013.

received a visit from an agent claiming to be "an extermination specialist," who was dressed in a business suit. While there was not a specific COINTELPRO program targeting the New Left at this point, the FBI made frequent reports on the civil rights and anti-war activities.

The recent attention received by Logos coupled with the anti-war march triggered reactions from editors of the *Tiger Rag*. Editors noted the contrast between those students who attended a patriotic gathering in support of U.S. policy in Vietnam at the Coliseum chanting praises of America and freedom and those who demonstrated in the anti-war march. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, editors of the *Tiger Rag* were notorious for condemning student apathy on campus. However, due to the recent tensions on campus created by the distribution of Logos, editors for once encouraged restraint. An editorial entitled "Apathy Advised, not Violence," maintained that underground student newspapers cannot survive without readers. This editorial declared that "students wishing to show their dislike for any publication should not resort to violence, just stop picking it up." By praising apathy, the editors believed that "properly used it can be a very effective tool which the student must personally decide how to use." While it was admirable that the newspaper condemned any kind of violence, it suggested to students to ignore dissenting views in American society.[27]

The anti-war march led to a concerned minister writing a letter to the editor in *The Commercial Appeal.* The Memphis newspaper had given little attention to the anti-war march, relegating it to a small column on the inside of the paper. Regardless, Rev. C.O. Baysinger of the First Congregational Church condemned the activities of the MSU

[27] "Apathy Advised, Not Violence," *Tiger Rag*, 26 April 1966.

faculty members who participated in the march. Baysinger, who maintained that he helped pay their salaries as state employees, believed that the faculty "should have been adult enough to recognize their responsibilities to the public welfare." As a member of clergy who valued his freedom of speech from the pulpit, Baysinger declared that his speech "could not begin to compete with the snowballing of blind fury, the potential inciting to riot, and the disunity which ensures from public agitation and demonstration."[28]

The scuffle between Logos members and students after the distribution of issue no. 5 prompted MSU faculty members to take action. On April 26, 1966, nearly a dozen faculty members stood in front of Jones Hall and demanded that students be entitled to free speech. Led by Professor Ronald Roberts, MSU sociology instructor, the faculty picketed and erected signs declaring "Free Speech for all MSU Students." Those desiring free speech included Rollo Newsom, instructor of Sociology; John Dolphin Bass, German instructor; and Dalvan Coger and Marcus Orr, members of the History faculty. They wanted the administration to provide a platform or podium for the students to express themselves. Dr. Humphreys was personally against a podium. He believed that "it would lead to the ultimate distribution of all sorts of hate material and possibly filthy and pornographic material, all under the guise of free speech and would keep the campus in constant turmoil if it were to transpire." A free speech platform at MSU did not appear until three years later in 1969.[29]

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[28] "Letters to the Editor," *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, 27 April 1966.

[29] FBI Report, 6 May 1966, 42-43. It was in April that Prof. Roberts took Logos members Joe Ravizza, Peter Quinn, Brian Murphree and Jay Thomas to Carbondale, Illinois to attend a SDS rally. None of these members were affiliated with SDS. "Logos Hand-Out Fires Incident," *Tiger Rag*, 4 May 1966; "Liberals Stomp for SGA Change," *Tiger Rag*, 1 April 1969. The platform was first used when students insisted on better representation in student government.

As some faculty and Logos pressed for free speech, one of its most important members, Joseph Ravizza, faced expulsion from Memphis State. The reason for the possible expulsion stemmed from the fact that Ravizza obtained an illegal IBM card. For twenty dollars, a student known as "Little Caesar" altered Ravizza's IBM card. Because of this Ravizza, an out of state student, was able to pay the in state tuition rate of $82.50, thereby committing fraud. On April 29, 1966, the MSU Discipline Board determined Ravizza's fate. After deliberating, the board chose not to expel Ravizza, instead allowing him to finish out the spring semester, but also barred Ravizza from enrolling in classes during the 1966-1967 school year. Ravizza was ordered to reimburse MSU $82.50. After the Discipline Board decided Ravizza's fate, members of Logos planned to publish issue no. 6.[30]

On May 2, 1966, issue no. 6 was passed out on campus in front of the student union shortly after noon. The issue reiterated the group's purposes for distribution. Issue number 6 also contained a political cartoon by Jere Cunningham comparing the tensions at MSU with those of Germany in 1938. Directly above the cartoon is a quote by H. Heine that asserted "Where they burn books, they burn people." This portrayed the limitations of free speech on the Memphis State campus. In this short two page issue, the reasons why Logos and others participated in the anti-war march were addressed along with an article by C. L. Anderson on Arkansas Senator James Fulbright's views on Vietnam. Fulbright believed that trying to contain communism would "lead to an endless series of military and ideological struggles with China." Due to the possibility of violence, Logos members were surrounded by campus police and administrative officials

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[30] FBI Report, 6 May 1966, 19, 56.

for a short period of time. Logos members Joe Ravizza, Peter Quinn, and Bruce Murphree eventually headed toward the western edge of the patio and into the street near Mynders East Dormitory. Once there, Logos members proceeded to the Brister library and continued with a police escort to Johnson Hall. As the crowd followed the members of Logos, they stopped near the corner of Patterson, where debates about the Vietnam War began. The differing opinions about the war made conflict between Logos and the crowd almost inevitable.[31]

The crowd on May 2 was estimated between 200 and 1,000 people. While only a few students believed that Logos should have the right to distribute its publication, the majority of students tore up or threw to the ground copies of the paper. As debates over Vietnam became heated, an individual in the crowd hurled mud into the group. Vernon Cox, a Logos supporter, dropped to the grass. Pushing and shoving began, while campus police attempted to maintain order. The Memphis City Police waited for the crowd on Patterson Avenue, which now began to surge on the west side. Here, various speeches were given. One of the more powerful came from a Cuban refugee student "who kept yelling, 'Remember Cuba' and telling them that Castro got his start in Cuba through such tactics as those perpetrated by Ravizza." The crowd headed back towards the lawn of Mynders West. The members of Logos continued to move down Patterson toward Southern Avenue. Tensions heightened between Logos and the crowd. Pushing and shoving continued, scattered fistfights were evident, and several members of Logos including Ravizza, Quinn, and Bruce Murphree were knocked down. Logos staff members broke away from police protection and sought refuge.

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[31] *LOGOS*, Issue vol. 1 no. 6, University and Student Publications, Box 10, University of Memphis Special Collections, Memphis; "Logos Hand-Out Fires Incident," *Tiger Rag*, 4 May 1966

Abe Kriegel saw members of Logos heading to the Baptist Student Union. Kriegel stated that "the Baptists kicked them out; they wouldn't let them in and these kids were getting pummeled." However, the Newman Foundation, the Catholic Student Union, believed that as a Christian organization that it had the responsibility to protect those in immediate danger. Ed Wallin, chaplain of the Newman Foundation and labeled by the Memphis John Birch Society as the number two communist in Memphis, recalled, "Our students were lined up with broomsticks…Girls inside the Newman Club were ready with pots and pans…students put up a huge American flag on the house."[32] The large American flag intimidated the mob of students, including some ROTC students in uniform, who waved a confederate flag. The Memphis police told the chaplain to take down the flag. Standing in the bed of a pickup truck, other campus chaplains attempted to alleviate the tense situation outside the Newman House, but eggs and tomatoes were thrown at them. Wallin was not hit. He credited this to the jacket he wore: "I wore a Memphis State Tigers jacket. They respected the tiger."[33] By 1:45 p.m., police with nightsticks dispersed most of the crowd. A few students remained outside the Newman Club for a few hours. No injuries or significant property damage were reported. An FBI report maintained that "the only known property damage was a broken watch crystal of Ravizza and his glasses were either broken or bent." There were no arrests made in the skirmish between the crowd and members of Logos because the police could not identify the perpetrators.[34]

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[32] Ed Wallin, interview by author.

[33] Ibid.

[34] "Logos Hand-Out Fires Incidents," *Tiger Rag*, 4 May 1966; FBI Report, 6 May 1966, 64-66. Abe Kriegel, interview by author. *Memphis Press Scimitar,* 3 May 1966; "The Mousetrap," *Tiger Rag*, 6 May 1966.

Under the leadership of Chief James Macdonald, the Memphis city police sent forty officers to keep order at MSU. At one point, Logos members asked the police to place them in squad cars. According to Inspector J.A. Brasher "it is against regulations to place anyone in a police vehicle unless they have been arrested." Logos members believed the protection that was provided to them was inadequate. Ravizza and Quinn thought that it was necessary to "have a minimum of 10 state troopers with riot sticks." In addition to police escorts, members of the Memphis football team were utilized by C.C. Humphreys to protect Logos. But the football players were not sympathetic to the Logos members. At one point, quarterback Billy Fletcher, pushed one distributor to the ground. Logos members believed that the lack of protection was a plot by the MSU administration to prevent them from delivering their message to the students.[35]

The campus excitement of early May generated various reactions from the MSU administration, editors of *The Tiger Rag* and other students, and faculty. R.M. Robison, Dean of Students, condemned the activities of the crowd and mentioned that the sunny weather and proximity to the end of the semester might have had something to do with the demeanor of the crowd. In addition, Humphreys, following the disturbance, asked the faculty to read his message to students stating that "Monday's action on and off the Memphis State campus destroys the atmosphere in which learning takes place. An appeal is made…to use your influence to maintain orderly procedures." Sharing a similar point of view, the editors of the student newspaper condemned the mobs and acknowledged that in order "to insure a smooth running university and the pursuit of education, these

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[35] FBI Report, 6 May 1966, 73. "Inspector Gives View of Action," *Tiger Rag*, 4 May 1966; "Logos' Leaders Claim Inadequate Protection," *Tiger* Rag, 4 May 1966. Sorrels, *The Exciting Years*, 128.

mobs must dissolve into individual students, each thinking for himself and for the good of his university." The editors stated that "only through clear thinking and mature conduct can we seek an end to confusion." The confusion that occurred in 1966 brought to the forefront the issue of how 'free' was free speech.[36]

The May 2 incident resulted in the *Tiger Rag* releasing its first special issue in school history. According to Jim Willis, then sports reporter for the newspaper, the issue came as a surprise to some staff members. When *Tiger Rag* reporters arrived into the newsroom, they were told that the story on Logos had been completed and that there was nothing else to add.[37] Only two students, Diane Thomas, the editor, and Kaye Pullen, former editor, worked to get the story printed.[38] Within the past few years, it was revealed that the administration worked with the FBI to print the special issue about the Logos incident. At a dinner in 2011, Jim Willis expressed to his friend, Diane Thomas Plunk, his aggravation about the administration taking over the student newspaper. But, to his surprise, he learned of FBI involvement. He remarked, "Diane said, 'It wasn't just the administration. It was the guys in the black suits calling the shots." She meant the FBI.[39] Other evidence linking the FBI to the publication of the recent *Tiger Rag* issue came from the photo services department, where Willis held a part-time job. Willis noticed numerous photos of the Logos incident being printed. When he asked a co-worker why he was meticulously making prints, the co-worker mentioned that the FBI wanted an

[36] "Education Grinds to Halt When Mob Rule Prevails," *Tiger Rag, 4* May 1966. "Unrest Linked to National Trend," *Tiger Rag*, 4 May 1966.

[37] Jim Willis, interview by Jack Lorenzini, Memphis, Tennessee, 15 November 2011.

[38] Diane Thomas Plunk, interview by Jack Lorenzini, Memphis, Tennessee, 12 April 2013.

[39] Jim Willis, interview by author.

8X10 print of every negative shot during the incident.[40] Willis noticed that in one of the pictures he knew one of the individuals throwing a punch at a Logos member. Leroy Clepp, a Marine and Vietnam veteran, punched a Logos member. Concerned that this picture could result in Clepp's prosecution and expulsion from Memphis State, Willis warned Clepp of the photo. Willis later found out that there was no reason for Clepp to worry. Willis commented, "when I told Diane about the pictures, she said, 'Oh, the FBI wasn't interested in Lee Clepp; they were interested in the Logos people.'"[41] In an interview with Diane Thomas Plunk, it was not confirmed that the FBI took over the *Tiger Rag.*[42]

Students reacted to the Logos incident via letters to the editor. Ernesto Tano, a freshman who lived in Cuba under Castro, feared that Logos members became martyrs. Another student referred to the Logos group as "creatures" maintaining that one of the ways to rid them of a "martyrdom complex" was to "submit in its place a case of self-consciousness. This is accomplished by the sound of laughter followed by several strains of the Halls of Montezuma or the Star Spangled Banner coupled with a total absence of violence." There were some more conservative students who had more reactionary viewpoints. After the Logos incident, a group known as SOGOL (Logos backward) appeared in university dormitories. The members applauded the violence used against

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[40] Ibid.

[41] Ibid.

[42] Jim Willis's recollection of the takeover of the *Tiger Rag* first appeared in "Calling the Shots," *The Daily Helmsman* 16 November 2011. *The Tiger Rag* changed its name to *The Daily Helmsman* by the fall of 1972.

Logos and "suggested that a fund be set up to pay for the bond of anyone arrested for taking a swing at these kooks."[43]

Other students saw the tensions at MSU as a considerable setback to progress in the university. David Patrick, sophomore, noted: "If we do not have the freedom to express dissident viewpoints without fear of reprisal from a mob… is not the first amendment of the United States Constitution a sham and hypocrisy?" Whether or not he agreed with Logos, Patrick believed that the university should be a center where an exchange of ideas occurred. Laurie Telfair, a junior, condemned the unruly students for its activities, citing that the mob was not supporting the country. Telfair declared that "One does not support a democracy by trying to kill freedom." Another student, Johnny Wampler, admitted that the controversial, thought-provoking Logos was a rarity in the South. Wampler hoped that "People who support the government's policy of murder in Asia should hurry down to their draft boards." Furthermore, Pam McLaughlin, a sophomore, condemned student apathy on campus. McLaughlin emphasized, "You can't drag most students to a pep rally or a campus election, but stage a senseless riot and they swarm to the scene like bacteria on a wound. Apathy neglects the issues and aggression subverts the issues."[44]

Another reaction to the incident came from writers of another MSU underground student newspaper, *The Rodent.* Some students viewed this paper as one run by communists, while others thought that it was run by southern conservatives. The editors of *The Rodent* disagreed with the viewpoints of *LOGOS* and its editorial policy, referring

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[43] "Letters on Logos," *Tiger Rag,* 6 May 1966; "War of Words Simmers at MSU," *Memphis Commercial Appeal,* 5 May 1966; "Creatures Reach South," *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, 6 May 1966.

[44] "Letters to the Editor," *Tiger Rag*, 6 May 1966.

to it “as dry as a camel’s hoof in Timbuktu.” Although they felt that the opinions of Logos on the Vietnam War were “baseless and rather pamphleteering,” the editors argued that Logos had the right to exercise its free speech. The writers of the underground newspaper condemned the mob and blamed the MSU administration. They declared: “We charge the Memphis State University administration with inexcusable inaction. We charge the Kampus Kops with inefficiency and comic ineptitude. We charge the students who attacked… fit for Klansmen or Viet Cong terrorists.” *The Rodent* acknowledged that the disorderly students violated regulation 19 of the MSU Student handbook entitled “Mass Disturbances,” which promised to take disciplinary action (suspension, expulsion) against those who failed to comply. It also challenged President C.C. Humphreys to ensure that another attack on members of Logos did not occur. They maintained that if another attack transpired, then “Dr. Humphreys must face the damnation of thinking men everywhere.” *The Rodent*, much like *LOGOS*, hoped to “provide a catalyst for thought on campus.” After producing eleven issues, *The Rodent* merged its publication with the *Gmxpht,* an underground newspaper noted for its pro-establishment, traditionalist views.[45]

The faculty also offered their views on May’s unrest. Harry Eugene Minetree, Assistant Professor of English, recommended that “the dispute be taken off sidewalks and carried on journalistically and oratorically. It has evolved into an emotional rather than an intellectual problem.” Moreover, Joseph Carroll, Assistant Professor of French, blamed

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[45] *The Rodent,* vol. 1, no. 11, University and Student Publications, Box 10, University of Memphis Special Collections, Memphis; *The Rodent*, vol.1, no. 5, University and Student Publications, Box 10, University of Memphis Special Collections, Memphis; *The Rodent,* vol. 1, no.3, University and Student Publications, Box 10, University of Memphis Special Collections, Memphis; *The Rodent*, vol.1, no.6, University and Student Publications, Box 10, University of Memphis Special Collections, Memphis. The writers of the Rodent admitted that they had different political views, but claimed they were not southern conservatives.

MSU's low standards for enrollment and emphasis on extracurricular activities. He noted that "until learning for its own sake dominates the campus life, Memphis State will periodically be menaced by the likes of what we saw Monday." The failure among students to exchange ideas in a sophisticated, mature manner troubled Carroll. Faculty members such as Mr. James along with the Faculty Council supported Humphreys. Dr. Marcus Orr, Professor of Ancient History and Chair of the Faculty Council, asserted: "It is the feeling of the council that the president and the security staff have within the confines of their abilities and their jurisdiction made a sincere and concerted effort to uphold the principles of academic freedom and responsibility." The decision to allow Logos to distribute copies reflected the administration's attempt to encourage academic freedom.[46]

Perhaps predictably, the Memphis public wrote letters to the editor of *The Commercial Appeal* expressing their abhorrence of Logos and anti-war protestors. One letter acknowledged the national anti-war demonstrations that involved students and professors. The writer saw the recent MSU demonstration as a "disgrace" to the Memphis community. Another "patriotic" letter came from an anonymous reader who signed the letter: Proud of MSU. This Memphis citizen applauded the mob for its activity in attempting to remove the six Logos members from campus. The reader noted that the "most patriotic Americans I know are in Vietnam today… the boys in Vietnam are shedding their blood for all America, yes, even the six. Aren't you glad we do not have to depend on the six for freedom?" The statements reflected the majority in Memphis who held the patriotic, pro-war views prevalent during the Cold War era. At this time, the

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[46] *The Rodent,* vol.1, no. 6; FBI Report, 6 May 1966, 74.

dominant voices in the society did not define a patriot as one who had the courage to tell his or her country when it was wrong. Despite the confrontation with the mob, those other kinds of patriots intended to distribute another issue of Logos.[47]

The violence that ensued on campus greatly affected some of the Logos members. The May 2 incident led some members to carry their own weapons. On May 3, 1966, Logos member Vernon Cox, along with two others, was arrested for loitering. He was also charged with carrying dangerous weapons, "a dirk and a blackjack." Cox stated that he carried these weapons because the Memphis Police Department did not offer the group protection.[48] The following week, May 10, 1966, Cox was indicted on weapons charges. Cox was fined $50 for possessing a blackjack.[49] Another Logos member affected by the violence was Cleve Lanier Anderson, editor of the paper. He was "shaken up" by the incident and disowned Logos leader Joe Ravizza for his "violent views." Anderson believed that Ravizza wanted "martyrdom." Moreover, Anderson was pressured by his parents to disassociate from the group.[50]

With issue number 7 scheduled to appear on May 9, 1966, editors of *The Tiger Rag* hoped that MSU students would conduct themselves with "maturity and dignity." Rather than passing out their mimeographed publication, Logos placed copies of the issue on a stand under the watchful eye of campus policemen. On a rainy afternoon, over 500 copies of the paper were read by students without incident, as campus police Edward

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[47] "MSU Deeds Debated," *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, 8 May 1966.

[48] United States Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation Report, "Logos," Memphis: 28 August 1966. Frank Holloman Collection, Box 1, Series II, "Memphis State University and Mid-South Medical Center Council, 1964-1967," Memphis Room, Memphis Public Library, 30.

[49] "MSU Student Pays $50 fine on Black Jack," *Memphis Commercial* Appeal, 26 May 1966.

[50] FBI Report, 28 August 1966, 1.

Fitzgerald and Charles Riggle guarded the stand. According to an FBI Report, an additional 450 copies were mailed to the Memphis State faculty.[51] In issue no. 7, members of Logos wrote an open letter to the community, attempting to explain once again their purpose, while defending themselves against misrepresentations. Members of Logos declared that they did not hold any one line of political thought, they were not sponsored by any leftist organization, and the majority of supporters were mid-South natives. Members continued to express their desire to promote the exchange of ideas and challenged the MSU administration as well as fraternities and sororities to bring more speakers and hold debates.

While Logos members promoted free speech and the exchange of ideas among MSU students, they attempted to gain support from students and faculty at Lausanne School for Girls. On May 11, Logos members Quinn, Ravizza, Cunningham, and Brian Murphree visited the private school. Thomas Eppley, history teacher at Lausanne, brought the group to the school with the intention of promoting a free speech movement. Logos members reiterated that they were not communists; they were individuals who merely wanted to express free speech and discussion on campus. The group told the Lausanne students that the May 2nd incident that erupted on campus was caused by "the vicious reactionary element in the city of Memphis, sponsored by the MSU administration and the Memphis Police Department."[52] The FBI report acknowledged that the articulate discourse by Logos members was an attempt to prey upon "the motherly instincts of these young girls" and turn them into Logos supporters and free

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[51] "Paper Passed Out on Calm Campus," *Tiger Rag*, 10 May 1966.

[52] Ibid., 7,9-11.

speech advocates.[53] While Logos gained an attentive audience, there was no evidence to suggest that a free speech movement developed at Lausanne.

Three days after their visit to Lausanne, it was believed that Logos members would picket the Selective Service Scholarship Aptitude Test. Michael Schon, Speech and Debate instructor, gave Logos members literature prepared by the Southern Student Organizing Committee and material of the National Vietnam Examination handed out by the SDS. The National Vietnam Examination was left-wing oriented. It was to be distributed to students taking the Selective Service Aptitude Test and to persuade them to adopt anti-war views. Schon, Ravizza, and Quinn took the examination and failed it. Logos sympathizer Dale Caldwell often communicated with the SSOC and SDS and desired to create a local chapter. Furthermore, Logos members Ravizza and Brian Murphree attended an SSOC meeting in Nashville in late May. Despite the interest SDS and SSOC, a local chapter of these groups did not materialize at Memphis State in 1966.

By the end of May, the group published its last issue, Issue no. 8. The issue was incomplete and not circulated to Memphis State students. This issue featured an article by Professor Ron Roberts entitled, "Intellectuals: The Strangulation of Freedom at MSU." Roberts described responsibilities of the intellectual during this campus crisis. Among these, the intellectual was called upon "to affirm the need for creatively expanding intellectual and social freedom…to convey the need for a universalistic and humanistic approach…and to oppose the insanity of latent in the social system." The issue also contained a satirical interview of Joe Jesus (Ravizza), Peter Proletariat (Quinn), and Brian Bolshevik (Murphree). The interviewer was a fictitious newspaper reporter. The interview ridiculed the belief among the Memphis media and Memphians that the three

[53] Ibid., 11.

who came from Connecticut planned a "diabolical plot to subvert and hopefully overthrow" MSU.[54]

The following year, the Memphis State University Department of Sociology completed a case study entitled "Student Reaction in a Southern University to a Liberal Student Publication." The report produced by sociology professors Dr. Arthur Crowns Jr., (MSU) and Dr. J. Rex Enoch (LSU) acknowledged that MSU was "traditionally conservative, where liberal actions on the part of students or faculty, although definitely not encouraged, are not necessarily stifled." The sociologists reported that approximately 90% of the student body read a *LOGOS* issue. Dr. Crowns provided reasons for the May disturbance, citing good weather, student anxiety over final exams, and the "spark" of Logos on campus. Crowns did not believe that a similar incident would occur in 1967, as students "just do not have a focus." Brian Murphree, one the active members of Logos, was shocked by the reaction of the students. He pronounced: "I didn't think so many would have cared. A year or so later I was in the men's room on campus and overheard a conversation… they were saying how Logos at least stirred up some excitement on an otherwise boring campus."[55]

The Logos experience demonstrated the limitations for student activism. As seen in the May 2nd violence, the campus climate made student activism difficult. In 1966, a large majority of the student population still possessed hawkish views of the war. The first seven issues of *LOGOS* that were distributed to the public since December 1965 were designed to provoke intellectual debate about current issues and promote free

[54] Ibid., 14-17.

[55] "Logos Incident Subject of Study," *Tiger Rag,* 28 April 1967; Brian Murphree, interview by Jack Lorenzini, Memphis, Tennessee, 25 January 2011.

speech, but they were long forgotten by most of the students anxious for the spring semester to end. The following semester, *The Rodent* editors sarcastically hoped that there would not be a new Logos. "For such things make us think, argue, and disagree. And that can be dangerous."[56]

Despite being subjected to negative reactions from some MSU students, the Logos incident provided possibilities for student activism. Shortly after the incident, a number of students and professors were interested in forming a Free Speech Movement on campus. On May 6, 1966, forty students attended the initial Free Speech meeting in Jones Hall. The purpose of their meeting was to discuss the next course of action for Logos and the Free Speech Movement. Professor John Bass encouraged free speech advocates to create a "united front" and gain the confidence of students who held moderate views. Bass believed that once this was accomplished, Free Speech advocates could purchase a mimeograph machine. This printing press would be made available for all students of all political persuasions. Bass envisioned "a strong and militant free speech movement" that saturated the campus with a plethora of dissident views. Various free speech meetings were held in Jones Hall until the end of spring semester. The last free speech meeting was held on June 7 at Professor Bass's apartment. Since there were only three students in attendance, the group decided to wait until fall semester to reconvene. The Free Speech Movement at Memphis State challenged students to take greater control

[56] "Paper Passed Out on Calm Campus," *Tiger Rag*, 10 May 1966; *LOGOS*, vol. 1 no. 7, University and Student Publications, Box 10, University of Memphis Special Collections, Memphis. *Rodent,* vol. 2. no. 1 (Fall '66 or 1967), University and Student Publications, Box 10, University of Memphis Special Collections, Memphis.

of their lives. Susan Macdonald, anti-war activist and Logos supporter, declared, "students must bypass the administration and control their own fates."[57]

The free speech movement and anti-war movements are connected. Free speech empowered students to fight for academic freedom and challenge censorship and *in loco parentis* restrictions on campus. Free speech was not solely confined to campus issues; it dealt with speaking out about civil rights injustices in the community and articulating opposition to U.S. foreign policy. Hence, speaking out against the war was a byproduct of the free speech movement. By distributing anti-war literature, Logos members responded to the growing military industrial complex and challenged Memphis State to become an institution that promoted the exchange of ideas. The violence and animosity towards Logos revealed how closely contested free speech was at Memphis State. Even though espousing free speech might have been taboo on a southern campus, there were possibilities for dissenting views.

Like those at Berkeley, members of Logos sought to exercise their right to free speech and the exchange of divergent ideas on civil rights and the war in Vietnam. These student activists envisioned transforming a university into a center for intellectualism and critical thinking. However, Logos failed in its effort to gain significant support from MSU students. Unlike the Berkeley movement that embraced students from all political backgrounds, Logos represented views that were to the far left of the majority of the conservative MSU students. In addition, members were never able to escape the radical label given to them by Memphians. Brian Murphree believed the failure of Logos could have stemmed from poorly expressed or faulty ideas from group members. He further acknowledged that failure could be attributed to the "part of human nature to be

[57] FBI Report, 28 August 1966, 20, 22, 24.

unreceptive to new ideas or how most college students are too concerned about their social lives." Jere Cunningham believed that the violence by the MSU students resulted in failure for Logos. Cunningham added that the greatest failure was those they failed to persuade. He recalled that Logos was "going to print and hand out the Ten Commandments and the Bill of Rights, while cameras (from the Memphis affiliate of NBC news) recorded students tearing them up without reading them." This ambitious idea was discouraged by Logos faculty sympathizer Jerry Welsh, Russian History Professor, who believed that this had the potential to make MSU the "laughing-stock of the nation." Although Logos and its supporters eventually disappeared, the organization generated a concern among students to think critically about their university and national topics of interest. Even though Logos failed, its significance and legacy was, as one student activist put it, that it "generated a certain political consciousness that was absent in Memphis."[58]

[58] Abe Kriegel, interview by author; Brian Murphree, interview by author; Jere Cunningham, interview by author.

Chapter 5

United By A Cause: Student Activists and the Memphis Sanitation Strike

In the spring of 1968, black and white students took the Memphis State community by surprise when they marched together in the cafeteria. Cafeteria workers thought that the students were responding to recent five-cent increases on food, while the *Tiger Rag* staff believed the demonstration was inspired by a recent article that provided a list of contact places in Canada for draft resisters.[1] Neither expected that students would galvanize around a civil rights issue. Concerns over justice and equality led white students of the Liberal Club to join with members of the Black Student Association in supporting the striking Memphis sanitation workers. While the historic interracial activist alliance was a watershed moment in Memphis State's white and black students, the movement was tested by pre-existing tensions of paternalism, stereotyping, and racial solidarity and disunity in the city. Polarizing comments made by students in public and in print threatened to disrupt the alliance. Despite tumultuous events testing the young alliance, however, the sanitation strike and King's assassination bridged these divides among student-activists, enabling them to work together.

Students of the Liberal Club and Black Student Association were once part of the Student Alliance. Formed in 1967, the Student Alliance sought to bring conservative and liberal students together to discuss community issues.[2] For instance, the Student Alliance planned to help combat poverty through the support of the Memphis Area Project South

[1] "Forward March: Many 'Causes' Go Begging," *Tiger Rag*, 5 March 1968.

[2] "Campus Interest in Government Stirs in the Wings," *The Memphis Statesman*, 14 March 1968.

Area. Other plans included sponsoring a Vietnam teach-in.[3] Black students were encouraged to join. At the time, the Memphis State community did not think a Black Student Association was achievable, including a dean who remarked, "Niggers ain't going to organize."[4] Black students participated in the group, but they were not as devoted to the organization. Some blacks felt it was imprudent to discuss the issues of the black community; whites would not understand them.[5] Nonetheless, over 100 students of the newly formed Student Alliance, advised by English professor Richard Geller, hoped to be recognized by the campus community. Instead, the Student Government Association (SGA) denied the group a charter. The Liberal Club provided misleading information about its members.[6] In addition, the Student Alliance was labeled as a politically left activist group. The rejection of the organization prompted some white students to join the Liberal Club, an organization chartered in 1964.

Frustrated by a lethargic black student population that appeared uninterested in local events and the activities of the Memphis NAACP, Ron Ivy and others sought to form a black student organization. Black students were also tired of being invisible. They wanted to establish themselves at Memphis State University that had the largest African American student population among desegregated colleges and universities, with a black

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[3] Ibid.

[4] Eddie Jenkins, interview by David Yellin , January 7,1969, Sanitation Strike Archival Project, Mississippi Valley Collection, University of Memphis, Memphis, Tennessee.

[5] Ron Ivy, interview by David Yellin, May 7, 1968, Sanitation Strike Archival Project, Mississippi Valley Collection, University of Memphis, Memphis, Tennessee.

[6] Reverend Richard Moon, interview by Judy Schulz, Jerry Viar, and Joan Beifuss, May 29, 1968, Sanitation Strike Archival Project, Mississippi Valley Collection, University of Memphis, Memphis, Tennessee.

student population of over 7%.[7] Established in the fall of 1967, the Black Student Association (BSA) sought to promote unity and communication among black students. Handbills recruited black students to attend meetings off campus at the Shelby County Democratic Club. After two meetings with lackluster attendance, organizers of the group thought that meetings should be moved to a central location where most of MSU's black student population congregated: the student center. Striving for solidarity, the BSA faced the challenge of transforming black students who seemed more occupied with playing cards than with injustices in the black community. The newly formed group tried to relate to the students by bringing up campus topics intended to rouse black students. In a handbill called "The Black Speakeasy," blacks were encouraged to attend the meeting. At the meeting, Ron Ivy, a BSA member, asked students; "Do you know that you don't have any Negro girls representing you on the Angel Flight? Do you know that you don't have any Negro majorettes?" The BSA also reminded students that black women were not featured in *The Tiger Rag's* "Campus Cuties," which elevated attractive white women into the campus spotlight. By making the personal political, the BSA was able to generate a new level of black consciousness on campus. The BSA brought awareness to the issues of poverty in the community, advocated black history courses, and embraced the slogan, "Black is Beautiful." Two hundred students attended the meeting.[8]

Motivated by the turnout, the BSA planned a third meeting. The BSA drafted a constitution and created a coordinating committee that oversaw the group's activities,

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[7] "Huge Negro Enrollment at MSU Has Produced Few Real Problems," *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, 6 March 1968.

[8] Ron Ivy, interview; "Black Student Association Works Toward Heritage Awareness and Pride at MSU," *Tiger Rag,* 5 March 1968.

headed by Ron Ivy. Whites were welcomed to join the organization, but they could not hold leadership roles. By winter, the organization applied for a charter through the student government to be recognized by the university. While a charter was not necessary for the BSA's survival, the fifty to seventy five member group desired to allay the concerns of black students that the club embraced Black Power, which many associated with violence.[9]

The BSA raised awareness and promoted brotherhood through its bi-weekly publication, *The Black Thesis*, and weekly forums. Reverend Richard Moon, campus minister of the Westminster House, provided the BSA with assistance. He not only opened up the religious house for black students to hold BSA meetings, but also was instrumental in providing equipment to help publish the newsletter. Eddie Jenkins, a BSA member, recalled that Moon's commitment to the student organization was "invaluable."[10] Moreover, the forums provided an outlet for black students to address their concerns with other black and white students. These forums concentrated on various aspects of African American culture.

BSA members Ron Ivy, Edwinna Harrel, and Calvin Taylor were part of the Black Organizing Project (B.O.P.). Organized in 1967 by Charles Cabbage and Coby Smith, the B.O.P. intended to unite the community through the promotion of political and black awareness.[11] B.O.P. stressed a cultural rebirth that used recreation, black art,

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[9] "MSU Negroes Seek Campus Unity," *Memphis Commercial Appeal* 7 March 1968; Ron Ivy, interview; Eddie Jenkins, interview.

[10] Eddie Jenkins, interview.

[11] Ron Ivy, interview; For a further study of the Black Organizing Project and Invaders consult: Shirletta Kinchen, "We Want What People Generally Refer to as Black Power": Youth and Student Activism and the Impact of the Black Power Movement in Memphis, Tennessee, 1965-1975 (Ph.D. diss., University of Memphis, 2011).

newspapers, and radio to engage the African American community. Members of the Black Organizing Project educated those living in impoverished areas about consumer economics.[12] The Invaders, named after a science fiction movie, served as the militant army of the B.O.P, advocating black power.[13] The Black Student Association communicated with the Black Organizing Project and the Invaders in the spirit of blackness.

White students joined the existing Liberal Club. For George Leone, the Liberal Club provided students with an outlet "to express general frustration not only in Memphis but throughout Vietnam."[14] But by 1968, the Liberal Club was in danger of becoming an irrelevant student organization. The group suffered from ineffective leadership. Abdul Massarueh, president of the club, failed to attend meetings and appeared uninterested in activities offered up by members. Due to Massarueh's laissez-faire approach, membership declined, rendering the thirty-member group inactive.[15] As a result, group members moved to oust Massarueh in a special election held in February. George Leone was chosen to replace Massarueh. Leone was the recognized leader among the group; he envisioned an organization that represented liberal students on local and national issues. He believed that learning, campus speakers, and debate were necessary to live up to this expectation.[16] According to Leone, Massarueh was more of a conservative, whose

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[12] Ron Ivy, interview.

[13] Michael Honey, *Going Down Jericho Road: The Memphis Strike, Martin Luther King's Last Campaign* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2008), 235.

[14] George Leone, interview by Jack Lorenzini, Memphis, Tennessee, 12 August 2013.

[15] "Supreme Court Rules in Favor of Massarueh in Liberals Squabble," *Tiger Rag*, 12 March 1968.

[16] Ibid.

liberalism was more political theory.[17] Massarueh indicated that students could have liberal viewpoints, regardless of the position that they took, without impeding on the beliefs of others. Under Leone, the group evolved into what he called “an informal SDS (Students for a Democratic Society).”[18]

Surprised by the election, Massarueh charged Liberal Club members Laura Ingram, George Leone, Walter Mims Ellis, and Pamela Concklin with belonging to a subversive group. The ousted leader declared that this faction passed out SDS and SSOC literature and aligned itself with the Black Power group at MSU.[19] The election impelled Massarueh to appeal to the SGA’s Supreme Court. He declared that the election violated a clause in the organization’s constitution, which stipulated that elections could only occur at the end of the year. The SGA ruled in favor of the embattled leader, making the February election invalid. Having achieved a temporary victory, Massarueh imagined a club that addressed concerns in the university community “without causing ill feeling or creating a poisonous atmosphere.” Massarueh was perceived by some to be the establishment’s president, circumventing support of striking sanitation workers. Yet Leone’s supporters promoted civil rights activism as they supported striking sanitation workers,[20] and the Liberal Club recognized Leone as its leader.

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[17] George Leone, interview by author.

[18] Ibid.

[19] FBI Memorandum on Liberal Club, 13 March 1968.Memphis, Tennessee. See http://jfk.hood.edu/Collection/Weisberg%20Subject%20Index%20Files/D%20Disk/Domestic%20Intelligence%20King/Item%2020.pdf. Accessed 13 April 2013.

[20] In the spring of 1968, the organization intended to set up a literature table that presented a gamut of political views in the attempts of promoting dialogue. Leone remarked that there was not a harsh split in the Liberal Club; it was “amicable.”

Sanitation workers in Memphis were subjected to harsh working conditions. Often paid fewer than $70 dollars a week, they qualified for welfare. On rainy days, blacks were sent home and paid for two hours, while whites earned regular pay regardless of the weather elements.[21] Workers were even ostracized for belonging to a union; it was deemed illegal. In response to the firing of thirty three public works employees who attempted to organize, T.O. Jones helped to establish the local 1733 chapter of the American Federation of State County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME). Also, the inadequate, outdated equipment of the sanitation workers posed a threat to their safety. On February 1, Echol Cole and Robert Walker, sanitation workers, were killed when a garbage compressor crushed them. In response to the tragedy, the city provided $500 to the family of the victims and gave them one month's salary. This proved inadequate compensation as the funeral's cost alone exceeded that.[22] Worker grievances, along with the death of these men, served as a provocation for 1,300 blacks to go on strike on February 11.[23]

The earliest support of sanitation workers by Memphis State white students came about a week after the strike began. In a rally held at Mason Temple on February 17, MSU students Howard Chilton and Susie Macdonald Glenn brought forth cash donations for the workers.[24] Susie Glenn, a graduate student of English, was the niece of Memphis Police Chief James Macdonald. Upon hearing of Glenn's support for striking sanitation

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[21] Honey, *Going Down Jericho Road*, 3,102, 71.

[22] Ibid., 2.

[23] Ibid., 4.

[24] "Union to Seek Delay on Debts- Rally is Held," *Memphis Commercial Appeal,* 18 February 1968.

workers, her mother encouraged Glenn not to embarrass her uncle. Glenn responded back, "Well tell Uncle Jim not to embarrass me."[25] Glenn became estranged from her uncle as a result of her activism.[26] She got into trouble when she was asked by students at a boys' Catholic school about her view on the strike. Glenn's belief that the sanitation workers should receive a living wage resulted in a number of calls by parents to school principal Sister John Allen.[27] Glenn's participation came at a time when relatively few white southern females supported the sanitation workers.[28] Other Memphis State students such as Walter Ellis and George Leone of the Liberal Club participated in downtown marches. The Liberal Club held money and food drives, wore AFSCME buttons, and wrote letters to the Memphis newspapers.[29]

Days after the sanitation workers walked off their jobs, they attended a City Council session downtown on February 23. Workers and their allies hoped that the City Council would issue a report that recognized the union and supported dues checkoff. Instead, the council deferred to Mayor Henry Loeb, acknowledging that he was "the sole authority to act."[30] Loeb believed that strikes were illegal and was not willing to concede to the demands of the sanitation workers. Troubled by the actions of the City Council,

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[25] Susie Macdonald Glenn, interview by Jack Lorenzini, Memphis, Tennessee, 29 April 2013.

[26] Ibid.

[27] Ibid.

[28] Kimberly Little, *You Must Be From The North: Southern White Women in the Memphis Civil Rights Movement* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2009), 6.

[29] Pam Machefsky, interview by Jack Lorenzini, Memphis, Tennessee, 6 May 2013; "Photo of George Leone and Walter Ellis" in *Tiger Rag* 23 February 1968.

[30] "Angry Sanitation Workers Clash Briefly with Police While Marching Downtown," *Memphis Commercial Appeal,* 24 February 1968.

sanitation workers and their allies marched down Main Street; they were granted permission to march and received police escorts.

During the march, police cars inched closer to the demonstrators, attempting to confine them near the sidewalk. At one point, a police car ran over the foot of protestor Gladys Carpenter.[31] Marchers then began rocking a police car back and forth. As a result, police used mace and nightsticks on the demonstrators, including Reverend Moon and Ron Ivy. Police pushed them up against Goldsmith's glass windows.[32] The macing incident compelled African American ministers to form the Community on the Move for Equality (C.O.M.E.) led by Reverend James Lawson. C.O.M.E. encouraged strike supporters to cancel their subscriptions of the *Commercial Appeal* and *Memphis Press Scimitar*, boycott downtown businesses, and attend meetings. It also instructed African Americans not to place trash outside for pickup.[33] C.O.M.E. followed a southern tradition dating back to the nineteenth century in which black ministers served "to protect and advance the urban black communities."[34]

Students at Memphis State intensified their support for sanitation workers after the macing. Pamela Concklin Machefsky, a student activist, recalled, "The level of outrage was raised, and our determination became stronger."[35] On March 1, 1968, members of the Liberal Club invited the Black Student Association to join their campus

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[31] "Strikers Mauled by Cops," *Tri State Defender*, 2 March 1968.

[32] *Memphis Commercial Appeal,* 24 February 1968; Reverend Richard Moon, interview.

[33] COME Appeal, March 1968, Sanitation Strike Archival Project, Container 5, Mississippi Valley Collection, University of Memphis, Memphis, Tennessee.

[34] David Goldfield, *Black, White, and Southern: Race Relations and Southern Culture* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1990), 76.

[35] Pam Machefsky, interview by author.

march. BSA members were reluctant to participate as an organization. Since the group was in the process of obtaining a charter on campus, black students did not want to "rock the boat" and jeopardize their chances of gaining acceptance from the university community. Responding to the Liberal Club's appeal, the BSA encouraged its members to march as individuals. Carrying signs such as "T.O. Jones for President,"[36] black and white students marched around campus from the old student center to the administration building on back to the patio. Seventy five students marched in support of the sanitation workers. An alliance was born.[37]

After the march, the BSA's Eddie Jenkins volunteered to discuss with students his visit to Mayor Loeb's office, which occurred the previous day. Frustrated by the biased coverage of the sanitation strike in the *Commercial Appeal* and *Memphis Press Scimitar,* Jenkins went downtown for Open House with the mayor to get answers to his questions. Jenkins wondered whether "the relationship of the city to its employees was the same as basically that of any firm." The visit to the mayor's office was futile; the responses by Loeb and Giannotti, the city attorney, did not satisfy Jenkins.[38]

Jenkins was no stranger to Mayor Loeb. In February, Jenkins, a member of MSU's ROTC Glee Club, performed at a national conference for Christians and Jews attended by the mayor. After the performance ROTC members were welcomed to stay for dinner. Having no place to sit in the crammed dinner reception, Jenkins sat at the first available seat. Unbeknownst to him, his dinner companions were Jerry Wurf, president of

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[36] "Forward March: Many 'Causes' Go Begging," *Tiger Rag* 5 March 1968.

[37] Eddie Jenkins, interview.

[38] Ibid.

AFSCME, and Mayor Loeb. Seizing the moment, Jenkins asked the mayor, "Why are you holding out on the strikers?" Loeb claimed that he could not hear the question posed by Jenkins. The mayor told him that he would give him a call. When Jenkins was not available to answer the call, Loeb sent him a letter stating, "Just as I respect your opinion I ask that you respect mine."[39]

As Jenkins relayed information about his visit with the mayor, some students could not grasp that the sanitation strike was not only a labor issue, but a racial one. They did not know why there were signs at the rally encouraging individuals to "Think Black" or why "a white boy" would want to hold such a sign. In response to these students, the BSA member declared that MSU students must "Think Black" "because the problem is black. You have basically 1300 workers down there who are predominately black. These people come from the black community. The black community is the poverty stricken area." No true solution to the sanitation strike could occur without thinking along racial lines. Despite this disconnect between Jenkins and some white students, Liberal Club members urged him to continue to speak as the crowd reached 200. The crowd was characterized by Jenkins as "apathetic, purely objective." The demeanor of the curious students discouraged Jenkins. He recalled, "Here I am preaching about something that people are ready to die for, and to them I'm another nigger out here clowning."[40] Even though Jenkins thought that his speech did not resonate with the student body, Liberal Club members were pleased that their first march on campus brought exposure to the

[39] Ibid.

[40] Eddie Jenkins, interview.

sanitation strike. They were inspired to organize another campus march, one that would be larger and solidify the alliance between white and black students.

Motivated by the promise of facilitating dialogue and raising community awareness, the Liberal Club and Black Student Association planned a demonstration for Wednesday, March 6. As white students and faculty gathered near the student center for the noon demonstration, few black students were present. The reason for the lack of support among blacks centered on the publication of *The Apex*, a paper put out by white activists. *The Apex* sympathized with sanitation workers, encouraging MSU white students from the working class to support the marches. While empathetic to the civil rights struggle, the publication generated controversy. The paper declared:

> A garbage pile up is an odd punishment for the Negroes and other poor people of Memphis. They have lived with garbage all their lives and a little more here or there is not going to affect them one way or another. The people who are going to be affected are the East Memphians who will be forced to live with the same stench and filth that the people in the slums have lived with for generations.[41]

This controversial passage threatened to destroy any momentum that was gained in the first march. The insult to the poor black community compelled many black students to remain in the student center to eat lunch and play cards.[42] Aware that the plight of the sanitation workers was much bigger than the demeaning words in the *Apex*, Eddie Jenkins urged black students to join the march, but they were reluctant to leave the student center. Frustrated by the stubbornness of the students, Jenkins stood on a chair and declared, "If you want to sit here, you house niggers, sit here and be house niggers the rest of your lives…because us yard niggers is tired. And us yard niggers are going to

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[41] *The Apex*. Frank Holloman Collection, Box 1, Series III, "Memphis Fire and Police, 1968-1970," Memphis Room, Memphis Library.

[42] Eddie Jenkins, interview.

get up… and we're going to march."[43] As a result of Jenkins's passionate appeal, most of the black students got up and joined the march.

Over 100 black and white students and faculty marched on campus. As students passed the administration building they sang, "Loeb we're gonna tear your kingdom down." They continued to sing songs and chant in support of the sanitation workers as they proceeded across campus. The excitement on campus caused curious students to leave classrooms. They either joined in the march or were spectators. While some demonstrators wanted to continue marching off campus, the march was confined to Memphis State. After students returned to the student center, speeches were held on the patio.[44]

The BSA's Eddie Jenkins and the Liberal Club's George Leone addressed the crowd of students assembled on the patio. While dialogue between students proved fruitful, there were some tumultuous moments. When Leone told students where he was from, a white student in the crowd said, "What you mean, boy." After the student made this remark, black students were incensed. Throughout the south black men had long been relegated to "boys" by southern whites. Responding to the student, Jenkins admonished the white student and mentioned that the denigration of black men had gone on too long. The BSA member compared it to how Mayor Loeb handled the strike. Loeb held a paternalistic view of the sanitation workers, treating them like 1300 "boys" who were asking for too much: union recognition, dues checkoff, dignity. Using the white student's words against him, Jenkins called the white student a "boy" for standing

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[43] Ibid.

[44] Ibid.

towards the back of the crowd and not having the courage to speak out about the injustices of the sanitation workers. According to Jenkins, Memphis State did not admit "boys" to the university. After the tense moment, Dean Jess Parrish requested that the rally end in order to avoid confrontation among students.[45]

Before the crowd dispersed, a provocative comment was made by a black student. As Leone continued to speak to the students, the black student opined to other black students, "Listen to this nut if you want. I'm going on back in the student enter and play cards and eat lunch." After these words were uttered, Leone felt hurt.[46] White students were also polarized by the black student's comment. Attempting to calm the situation, Jenkins apologized to Leone for the inappropriate behavior of the student. Coming to the Liberal Club leader's defense, the BSA member declared, "Yeah [he's a nut], because in this society, in this situation with things the way they are, with people like <u>you</u> standing over there, who will see the wrongs and won't say anything, he has to be a nut to step out and do what he knows is right."[47] The tense situation was diffused and black and white students continued to engage in dialogue, leaving shortly after.

Despite awkward moments at the rally, the march was a watershed moment in the history of Memphis State. Never before had black and white students galvanized together around a civil rights issue. The march reflected some of the change in social attitudes on campus. Moreover, it was the university's largest campus demonstration up until that point. After students marched, they continued to talk about the sanitation strike and its

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[45] Ibid.

[46] George Leone, interview by author.

[47] Eddie Jenkins, interview by author.

relevancy to Memphis State students. Communication and dialogue among students reached its crescendo. Laura Ingram, a Liberal Club member, declared, "I looked at people discussing with professors, talking into mikes from radio stations, and saw white students having dialogue with Negro students. I could not believe that this was Memphis State."[48] The march also brought greater awareness to the student body. More students showed sympathy for sanitation workers and those students deemed "apathetic" were stimulated. Jenkins stated, "If they do not support the strike, they are at least prone to consider and contemplate the current issues that confront us as students."[49]

The march on campus elicited reactions from the university community. Harv Dean, editor of *The Tiger Rag*, considered the demonstrations a campus awakening. He stated, "There is something thrilling about the awakening of a sleeping giant. We must only hope that this awakening isn't only a minute spark that will, in short time, pass on in the night." Dean regarded dissenting views as sacred and wanted to preserve the university as an institution that questions. Echoing the sentiment of the student newspaper, the university administration believed that the march was "within the process of the role of the university, for self-expression of the students."[50] University officials considered dialogue among students important. William C. Tatum, Assistant Dean of Men, believed that communication was necessary but believed that "the garbage strike has no immediate effect on students." The marches proved Tatum's assumption wrong.

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[48] "Demonstration Brings First Communication," *Tiger Rag*, 8 March 1968.

[49] Ibid.

[50] Charles Holmes, interview by Carol Lynn Yellin and David Yellin, June 22, 1968, Sanitation Strike Archival Project, Mississippi Valley Collection, University of Memphis, Memphis, Tennessee.

In addition to Memphis State students, Southwestern students supported sanitation workers. Joining over 100 demonstrators, fifty white students from Memphis State and Southwestern picketed together in a downtown youth march.[51] Between 1964 and 1965 some Southwestern students had participated in kneel-ins at Second Presbyterian, and in 1967 some participated in efforts to desegregate Givens Steak House and sought to bar racial discrimination in fraternities and sororities. As students of a private Presbyterian college, their religious convictions, coupled with their participation in community service through the Kinney Program, fostered their desire to stand up in support of the sanitation workers. For two consecutive weeks, Southwestern students arrived at sixteen white churches and distributed leaflets to parishioners.[52] These leaflets called for the end of racism.

According to participant Don Steele, nephew of Memphis Police Chief MacDonald, the purpose was to raise awareness in the white community. Steele recalled, "We wanted to change the attitude of the white community. We wanted whites to help understand the circumstances of the strike."[53] Steele went to Evergreen Presbyterian and Idlewild Presbyterian. At these churches, the congregations consisted of more liberal minded people likely to be more sympathetic to the strike. In fact, Idlewild had a history of improving race relations by discussing social issues in Adult Sunday School. Idlewild coordinated activities with Parkway Gardens, a predominately African American Presbyterian Church.

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[51] "Marchers Draw Little Attention on Main Street," *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, 3 March 1968.

[52] "Southwesterners Hit Racism at Churches in Sunday Visitation," *Sou'wester* 15 March 1968; Susan Thornton, interview by Jack Lorenzini, Memphis, Tennessee, 19 June 2013.

[53] Don Steele, interview by Jack Lorenzini, Memphis, Tennessee, 15 May 2013.

But Steele's experience was the exception, not the norm. The majority of the twenty five students who participated faced challenges. Susan Thornton distributed leaflets at Second Presbyterian, a church that attempted to deny African Americans from worshipping four years earlier. Recalling the experience, Thornton said, "people just kind of looked at us; they didn't say very much."[54] Other students were not permitted to pass out leaflets. At Lindenwood, Minister H.T. Wood did not see the role of the church as involved in politics, while a Baptist church forcibly removed a Southwestern student from church grounds.[55]

In a public relations campaign, Mayor Loeb visited Memphis State and Southwestern College to explain his views concerning the sanitation strike. Loeb continued to have the firm opinion that sanitation workers had no right to strike. He also publicized to students numerous communication breakdowns with the union. While Loeb acknowledged the need to address worker injustices, he contended that the sanitation strike was a labor, not a racial, issue. He saw no benefit in mixing the two issues.[56] When the mayor arrived at Memphis State in mid-March, C.C. Humphreys cancelled classes so that students could attend his speech. There was one problem: Black students did not know about the scheduled visit by the mayor.[57]

As news of the mayor's presence on campus spread to the BSA via the Liberal Club, black and white students intended to march towards the administration building to

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[54] Susan Thornton, interview by author.

[55] "Southwesterners Hit Racism at Churches in Sunday Visitation," *Sou'wester*, 15 March 1968.

[56] "Loeb Accuses Union of Non- Cooperation, Pleads Fiscal Deficit," *Sou'wester*, 3 April 1968.

[57] Memphis State University Black Thesis vol. 1, no. 5, March 1968, University of Memphis Special Collections, *Memphis Press Scimitar Clippings Files*, Memphis, Tennessee.

inform the mayor that a consortium of students at MSU strongly supported the sanitation workers. Carrying signs labeled "Mace Won't Stop Truth" and "Dignity for All," over 150 students encountered the mayor before he left campus. They demonstrated that not all Memphis State students agreed with Mayor Loeb's handling of the strike. Upon seeing the marchers, Mayor Loeb stopped to meet up with them. As he approached the marchers, he proceeded to greet the students with a handshake. Students were reluctant to shake his hand. Cheryl Williams and Edwinna Harrell, BSA members, asked the mayor direct and poignant questions. Harrell wondered why Loeb did not settle the strike. Loeb truly believed that sanitation workers did not want to become union members. By refusing to agree to dues checkoff, Loeb believed that he was saving the workers from an unnecessary expense. Williams wanted to know how many sanitation workers disapproved of the dues checkoff. Loeb could not provide an answer. Students asked other questions, but did not receive adequate responses by the mayor.[58] Upon leaving, Loeb opined, "I respect your opinion and I just ask that you respect mine. Each of us in our country has to do what he thinks is right."[59] The mayor urged students to come to the Open House at City Hall. After the encounter, Reverend Harold Middlebrook, a member of the strategy committee for C.O.M.E., spoke to the coalition of students.[60]

While student support for the strike peaked in March, Reverend Lawson and C.O.M.E. hoped to give the Memphis movement momentum by bringing in prominent civil rights leaders. Roy Wilkins, National Secretary of the NAACP, along with civil

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[58] Memphis State University Black Thesis vol. 1, no. 5.

[59] "Memphis State Students Group Supports the Strikers," Video 8, Container 52, Sanitation Strike Archival Project, Special Collections, University of Memphis.

[60] Memphis State University Black Thesis vol.1, no. 5.

rights organizer Bayard Rustin, offered support at a rally at Clayborn Temple.[61] The following week, Martin Luther King Jr., answered an invitation by ministers to come. In the middle of making preparations for the Poor People's Campaign, a program that aimed at bringing awareness to the economic injustices that prevailed in America, King spoke to an estimated crowd of 13,000 gathered at Mason Temple.[62] Some Memphis State and Southwestern students attended. Steele remarked, "It felt great for me as a white southerner to be sitting at a predominately black rally. I was hopeful for improved race relations in Memphis, that maybe we were in the right place."[63] During the speech, King maintained that there is dignity in all work and imagined an America where everyone possessed an adequate income. King advocated a work stoppage in support of the strike. Determined to link the sanitation strike to his planned Poor People's Campaign, King told the crowd that he would be back on March 22 to lead a non-violent march. Due to a heavy snowstorm, the march was postponed until March 28.

Although most Memphis whites believed that the snowfall was a sign that Dr. King should not lead a march in the city, African American students saw the snowstorm as an act of God in order to persuade those uncommitted to march. Kenneth Robinson, editor of BSA's *Black Thesis*, acknowledged this metamorphosis from conservatism to active involvement. He continued to stress individualism, identity, and togetherness. Understanding the need for solidarity, Eric Fair, a contributor to the newspaper, delivered a passionate appeal to fellow black students:

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[61] "Roy Wilkins, Bayard Rustin Due Here to Support Strike," *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, 13 March 1968.

[62] "King Urges Work Stoppage By Negroes to Back Strike," *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, 19 March 1968.

[63] Don Steele, interview by author.

> We, the black students of Memphis State University have been confronted with a choice. A choice of living the lives of black citizens, free from racial discrimination and prejudices, or becoming Toms for our "Great White Fathers"… Students of Memphis State rise to the occasion. Join the black people in our marches of (for) freedom. We are the Black Students of today and the leaders of tomorrow. Our success depends upon our togetherness.[64]

Heeding the call, a number of MSU black students participated in the march. They were joined by members of MSU's Liberal Club, other whites not linked to a campus organization, Southwestern students, and Lemoyne-Owen students.

On March 28, spirits were high. Dr. King, Reverend Lawson, and C.O.M.E. were determined to march for the dignity of the sanitation workers. They continued to embrace non-violence by adopting a Soul Force strategy. Soul Force was characterized as "peaceful, loving, courageous, yet militant."[65] However, the demeanor of the crowd changed considerably throughout the morning. Some grew restless waiting for Dr. King to lead the march, others consumed copious amounts of alcohol, and some believed rumors that a Hamilton High School student had been killed by the Memphis police.[66] The rumors of the student's death turned out to be inaccurate. The atmosphere was not conducive to a non-violent march. Calvin Taylor, an MSU student and intern for the *Commercial Appeal*, observed people walking around saying, "This is the day to get whitey. This is going to be our day."[67] In fact, Ted Carter, a marshal on the march, noticed the restless nature of the crowd and recalled that Invader Orie McKenzie "pointed

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[64] Memphis State University Black Thesis, no.6, March 1968, University of Memphis Special Collections, *Memphis Press Scimitar* Clippings Files, Memphis, Tennessee.

[65] COME Flier, March 1968. Sanitation Strike Archival Project, Container 5, Mississippi Valley Collection, University of Memphis, Memphis, Tennessee.

[66] Calvin Taylor, interview by Bill Thomas, August 17, 1968, Sanitation Strike Archival Project, Mississippi Valley Collection, University of Memphis, Memphis, Tennessee.

[67] Ibid.

to about twenty five guys standing out on Clayborn Temple's steps and they then had already torn the signs off of the sticks that the marchers were carrying."[68] An Invader warned Memphis State student Jim Gaylord to leave his young daughter behind at Clayborn Temple, an indication that an explosive incident was imminent.[69] Even though a precarious situation was unfolding, a march consisting of over 12,000 people began when King arrived.

Once the march started, BSA members intended to organize themselves in the back to keep control, but more people lined behind them. Mindful that the march could instigate police brutality, the BSA placed men to the outside, keeping women on the inside, as a means of protection. Under the banner labeled, "B.S.A. Memphis State University supports the garbage strike," demonstrators marched, sang "We Shall Overcome," and later chanted "Down with Mayor Loeb." These chants were muffled when the activists turned from Beale Street onto Main. Approximately twenty youth left the march, took the wooden sticks off of the signs, and broke store windows along Main.[70] Laura Ingram noted that once glass started breaking, her friend Michael Fisher, an MSU student and a Navy veteran, said to her, "The police guns aren't on safety. They are ready to kill us."[71] In response to the disturbance unfolding, police used tear gas and billy clubs. Marchers retreated, running down Beale Street. On Beale, youth continued breaking windows and looting stores. Reverend Lawson urged demonstrators to get back

[68] Ted Carter, interview by Jack Lorenzini, Memphis, Tennessee, 28 March 2013.

[69] Jim Gaylord, interview by Jack Lorenzini, Memphis, Tennessee, 17 March 2013.

[70] "Day's Log of Police Calls Traces Racial Disturbance Shock Waves," *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, 29 March 1968.

[71] Laura Ingram, interview by Jack Lorenzini, Memphis, Tennessee, 25 April 2013.

to Clayborn Temple. Standing in the middle of Third and Beale, BSA members insisted that people remain calm and walk back to the church. Ivy remarked that those who panicked or ran were targets of police brutality.[72]

Cary Fowler, a Southwestern student activist, declared, “You could look around and see blood; people were lying in the street. You couldn’t stop to help, because if you did, the police would come and beat you.”[73] Most white students left the city. Some members of the BSA, including Ron Ivy, returned to Clayborn Temple. During the turmoil, Memphis State students were victims of the police force. Ivy was tear gassed outside Clayborn Temple, while Calvin Taylor was maced and beaten in the head as he covered the incident for the *Commercial Appeal*. As a result of the Beale Street incident, Memphis teenager Larry Payne died, sixty two were injured, and 218 were arrested. Damage was estimated at $400,000.[74]

After the violence ceased, Ivy and other BSA members returned to Memphis State in the hopes of criticizing those African Americans who were uncommitted to the march. The group arrived to a nearly empty student center. Members discussed what happened and why violence occurred.[75] While trying to make sense of the Beale Street incident, they discovered that fellow MSU black students were victims of police brutality at the Big M, a popular downtown eatery that catered to business professionals. Even though there was no evidence linking black patrons to the looting or rioting in the city, police

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[72] Ron Ivy, interview.

[73] “Southwestern Eyewitnesses Describe Evolution of Riot, “Sou’wester, 2 April 1968.

[74] “Curfew Remains,” *Memphis Commercial Appeal* 30 March 1968; “Negro Leaders Sifting Rubble for Answers,” *Memphis Commercial Appeal* 1 April 1968.

[75] Ron Ivy, interview.

officers entered the Big M, demanding that black customers leave. Police broke car windshields and beat patrons as they tried to leave the scene.[76]

Shortly after the Beale Street incident, the *Tiger Rag* reported on its effect on Memphis State. The article focused on restrictions placed on students and discussions held on campus. It referred to the curfew and prohibition of alcohol sales as “the greatest inconvenience” for students.[77] The commentary mentioned how Greek organizations Alpha Xi Delta, Gamma Phi Beta, and Lambda Chi Alpha were forced to reschedule formals. *The Tiger Rag* itself fell victim to the curfew, as it was distributed to the student body three hours later than usual. Around campus, students predicted that more violence in Memphis would erupt. Others believed that Martin Luther King Jr. would visit Memphis State.

The article concluded with the BSA renouncing rumors that it conspired to assassinate Mayor Loeb. During the strike, an anonymous letter was distributed to Memphis Police and area businesses that accused members of the group’s coordinating committee of plans to assassinate the mayor. As a result, some BSA members were denied jobs, while others were questioned by their employers about the validity of the claims. After King’s assassination, Harold Tate, whose name was on the letter, was beaten by police while picking up his brother from Hamilton High. After the incident, Tate attempted to leave town; however, he was denied a ticket by the public transportation facilities.[78]

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[76] “Cops Attack Restaurant Patrons,” *Tri-State Defender*, 6 April 1968.

[77] “Students React Differently to Eruption of Riot,” *Tiger Rag*, 2 April 1968.

[78] “BSA Coordinating Committee Report,” Anecdote 88, Sanitation Strike Archival Project, Container 51, Mississippi Valley Collection, University of Memphis, Memphis, Tennessee.

The student newspaper's coverage of the Beale Street incident generated criticism from BSA member Eddie Jenkins. Jenkins felt that the student newspaper was out of touch with what was happening in Memphis. He declared, "I cannot believe that MSU, one of the largest, finest, and most widely supposedly, 'integrated' campuses in the South, could be so biased or conservative that they would not be interested in a full account."[79] The BSA member suspected that it was an attempt by the *Tiger Rag* to keep students misinformed or ignorant about a city issue. Jenkins questioned the newspaper's earlier sincerity to address and analyze controversial issues affecting the university, city, and nation. In fact, in February of 1968, editor Harv Dean hoped to bring a sensibility to the paper that came with the times. He believed that one of the responsibilities of the paper was "to provide an atmosphere of questioning." The editor desired to discuss controversial local, national, and issues affecting students.[80]

Relatively few articles in the student newspaper were devoted to the sanitation strike. The earliest article related to the sanitation strike appeared on March 1. It was written by Abdul Salam Massarueh, Liberal Club "president" and contributor to the *Tiger Rag*. In his column "Sermon From the East," Massarueh, who objected to the strike, acknowledged that the sanitation strike evolved into a racial problem that threatened to ruin the city. Seeing the strike as "immoral" because it endangered the health and safety of Memphians, Massarueh believed that negotiations were the only effective tools for

[79] "Negro Students Voice Opinions on Black Thursday's Riot," *Tiger Rag*, 5 April 1968.

[80] "An Editorial: The Key to A Semester: Involvement," *Tiger Rag*, 6 February 1968. In March, the newspaper published a list of contacts in Canada for draft resisters. President Cecil Humphreys and the head of the journalism department harshly condemned the editor's decision to publish the article; they believed it was not the university's role to discuss such subjects. As a result, the student newspaper apologized to offended veterans and included a list of draft recruitment centers.[80]

ending the strike, not marches in the city.[81] Aside from Massarueh's column, the only time that the newspaper issued a stance and editorial concerning the sanitation strike was on April 5, 1968. While the student newspaper acknowledged sanitation workers as second-class citizens, it failed to see the sanitation strike as a racial issue. In an editorial entitled "Interpreting, Identification, Misinterpretation," the paper argued, "racists, because of the fervor, inject racial issues artificially many times where there is no racial issue at stake. The garbage strike is such a situation. Clearly the dispute is actually a labor relations problem."[82] This conclusion came even after Massarueh's earlier acknowledgement that the strike was a racial issue and an article entitled, "Garbage Strike Might Ignite Racial Disorder in Memphis."[83]

Conversely, staff members of Southwestern's student newspaper *The Sou'wester* realized that the sanitation strike was both a labor and a racial issue. Mindful of the 1967 Newark Race Riot, when blacks reacted to police brutality and economic injustices, an editorial urged black equality in Memphis. Supportive of black Memphis, the editorial stressed that failure by the city to give equal rights to black Memphians could incite a "mid-South Newark."[84] Throughout the sanitation strike, *Sou'wester* staff believed as journalists that their main responsibility was to acquire facts. The paper put out two special editions following the Beale Street Incident. In an announcement to the Southwestern community, staff members declared, "Both as students and as members of the student press, we reserve the right to know what is happening in Memphis. We want

[81] "Sermon From The East," *Tiger Rag*, 1 March 1968.

[82] "Interpreting, Identification, Misinterpretation," *Tiger Rag*, 5 April 1968.

[83] "Liberal Club will Sponsor Faculty Forum," *Tiger Rag,* 19 March 1968.

[84] "Give Negro Equality; Avoid Fiery Newark," *Sou'wester,* 22 March 1968.

to gather facts for ourselves instead of reading facts."[85] *Sou'wester* editor Bill Casey and reporters attempted to convey information that was not presented in the Memphis dailies.[86]

Disheartened by the violence that erupted on Beale, King insisted on returning to Memphis to lead a non-violent march. He had to get assurances from the B.O.P. and Invader members that violence would not break out. In an April 3 meeting, B.O.P. and Invader members, including Memphis State students Ron Ivy, Edwinna Harrell, and Calvin Taylor, met with King and leaders of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. In an agreement, the Invaders promised to be marshals in the next march, while the SCLC agreed to provide "financial and administrative assistance" for the Black Organizing Project.[87] However, before King could lead a non-violent march, he was assassinated on April 4, 1968, at the Lorraine Motel.

As news of the tragedy reached campus administrators, Cecil Humphreys closed MSU on April 5 to observe a day of mourning. In addition, the president moved spring break up a week to alleviate the possibility of student unrest.[88] Campus police received a tip by an informant of the black community of threats to burn down Memphis State.[89] While the school was closed, Charles Holmes, MSU's Director of Community Relations, volunteered to provide information to the outside media that arrived in Memphis.

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[85] "Special Editions," *Sou'wester*, 22 March 1968.

[86] Southwestern students, interview by Modine Thompson and David Yellin, June 3, 1968, Sanitation Strike Archival Project, Mississippi Valley Collection, University of Memphis, Memphis, Tennessee; "Special Editions," *Sou'wester* 2 April 1968.

[87] Calvin Taylor, interview.

[88] "MSU Vacation to Come Early," *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, 5 April 1968.

[89] "Threat to Burn MSU," Anecdote 96, Sanitation Strike Archival Project, Container 51, Mississippi Valley Collection, University of Memphis, Memphis, Tennessee.

Holmes's purpose was to depict Memphis as "an emerging city that's trying."[90] Holmes noted the city's gravitation towards the arts, its increase in industry, and its growing acceptance of divergent ideas. Even though Holmes attempted to portray the city in a positive light, *Time* magazine referred to Memphis as a "decaying Mississippi River town" and blamed the Memphis police for failing to apprehend the murderer.[91] Reacting to the article, MSU students belonging to Sigma Delta Chi, the Professional Journalism Society, condemned the "prejudiced malice coverage" and demanded that the magazine change its depiction of the city. Touting the Memphis Police Department as one of the best in the United States, journalism students found the accusations without warrant. Frank Holloman, Director of Police and Fire, appreciated the support of the students.[92]

The closure of the campus frustrated BSA leader Eddie Jenkins. He believed that it was an opportune time to lead a demonstration that tested the loyalties of white students. He acknowledged that given the tumult and tragedy, more white students would have been sympathetic to civil rights.[93] When school resumed, the BSA held a forum concerning King's death and members asked, "Where do we go from here?" Ron Ivy asserted that the general consensus among MSU black students was, "We'll mourn Dr. King's death, but we don't follow him from the grave."[94] Ivy's implication was that non-

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[90] Charles Holmes, interview.

[91] "The Assassination," *Time*, 12 April 1968, Sanitation Strike Archival Project, Container 29, Mississippi Valley Collection, University of Memphis, Memphis, Tennessee.

[92] Letter from Sigma Delta Chi to *Time*, 19 April 1968. Frank Holloman Collections Series III, "Memphis Fire and Police 1968-1970," Memphis Room, Memphis Public Library.

[93] Eddie Jenkins, interview.

[94] Ron Ivy, interview.

violence was no longer a viable strategy for the movement; blacks had to do whatever was necessary.[95]

Not all black students embraced the militancy. In his article entitled, "I have a Dream," reminiscent of King's March on Washington Speech in August 1963, BSA member Gailor Calhoun analyzed the competing ideologies of violence and non-violence. Calhoun declared, "Violence may speed up the wheels that non-violence has put into motion; it must be tempered and used sparingly." Following King's death, Calhoun experienced an epiphany. Calhoun wanted to avenge the assassination by unleashing violence on the white community. He soon discovered that this reaction threatened any cooperation between blacks and those whites advocating civil rights. Seeing how both violence and nonviolence had the potential to divide a community, Calhoun suggested that a church campaign be implemented to eradicate prejudice, and he urged the continuation of economic boycotts. He embraced elements of non-violence and direct action.[96]

In addition to black activists, white activists and professors spoke up in the aftermath of the assassination. Susie Macdonald Glenn, along with twenty graduate students and professors, urged Mayor Loeb to end the strike. The MSU chapter of the American Association of University Professors expressed shock and sorrow for King's death. They gave a portion of their savings to the sanitation workers fund and established the Martin Luther King Jr., Foundation. The foundation provided a scholarship for prospective students along with donations to the black community. Awakened by the

[95] Ibid.

[96] Memphis State University Black Student Thesis no. 7, n.d. University of Memphis Special Collections, *Memphis Press Scimitar* Clippings Files, Memphis, Tennessee.

tragedy, the MSU AAUP took a more active role in ensuring the hiring of more African American employees at the university.[97]

The day after King's assassination, the Memphis Ministerial Association and the Memphis Ministerial Alliance met at St. Mary's Episcopal Church for a memorial service. Memphis State's Reverend Moon saw the hypocrisy of those white ministers who attended. He was furious that white ministers, who had either failed to support the sanitation strike or denounced King, now showed up to honor the slain civil rights leader. The campus minister wanted to prevent the service from continuing, but he was restrained and calmed by friends. After the service, ministers decided to march to City Hall to urge the mayor to recognize the union. Moon acknowledged the actions of the white ministers were "radical," considering that some had been Baptist ministers and went outside their comfort zones. While Loeb mentioned that flags would be lowered in memory of Dr. King, the mayor continued to hold his firm opposition to the union and dues checkoff. Dejected, ministers began to leave. Before they could do so, Reverend Moon declared, "I, for one, am going to stay in his office until he changes his mind… until the strike is over. And I'm going to stay without eating. Anyone who wants to join me, can."[98] The bold action by Moon stunned ministers. While no ministers joined Moon in solidarity, Sister Adrian Marie Hofstetter, a biology professor at Siena College, and Ed Carter, a towboat worker, supported Moon.

Moon, Hofstetter, and Carter were permitted to stay in the mayor's office that day. Throughout the day, Southwestern students, along with MSU student Jimmy Gates

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[97] "MSU Chapter of AAUP Plans King Memorial," *Tri State Defender*, 20 April 1968.

[98] Reverend Richard Moon, interview.

and MSU English Professor Richard Geller, came to city hall to join the hunger strike. Moon discouraged the group from staying and requested that they fast at a church of their choosing. Gates and Gellar continued to stay, while ten others, mainly Southwestern students, fasted at churches throughout the duration of the hunger strike.[99] After City Hall closed, the mayor sought to make arrangements for the demonstrators to continue fasting at St. John's Baptist Church. Moon expressed that he was only willing to go to a Methodist Church if Southwestern students could join the group. Due to the approach of the 7 p.m. curfew, this request was not fulfilled. Against the mayor's wishes, the group was escorted out of City Hall, despite a frost warning in the forecast. Concerned for the health and well-being of Sister Adrian, Moon and others convinced her to leave, rather than sleep on concrete without a sleeping bag. Sister Adrian continued to fast at Siena College.[100] Because of the cold weather, the Memphis police allowed the group to spend the night in City Hall. This was the only night that they were permitted to sleep inside.

During the hunger strike, the Memphis Police Department discredited the commitment and sacrifices of the demonstrators. Watching the group closely, members of the city's Homicide Bureau accused the fasters of eating fried chicken and drinking milk one evening. While the group talked nightly about chocolate pie, they refrained from eating and drank plenty of water. There was only one time where a participant cheated. Ted Carter recalled, "I cheated once. The first day I drank a Coca Cola and that was it. I didn't eat anything."[101] This lack of nourishment caused Carter to faint one day

[99] "Dr. King's Widow Leads Memorial March,"*Memphis Press Scimitar*, 8 April 1968; Reverend Richard Moon, interview.

[100] Reverend Richard Moon, interview; Ted Carter, interview by author.

[101] Ted Carter, interview by author.

and leave the group temporarily.[102] Moon asserted the group's frustration over the dissemination of inaccurate information. He believed that the claims by the MPD "creates doubts in all minds as to the validity of any testimony they might be called to make before a court of law."[103]

The goal of the hunger strike was to demonstrate that white people cared about Dr. King's death. Richard Geller recalled, "Dick wanted to show that there were white people in Memphis who cared, who sincerely cared that Dr. King had been killed and that it was more of a message to the black community that there were white people who were sympathetic to the sanitation workers."[104] The hunger strike continued for seven days. Every morning the group welcomed the mayor to City Hall to remind him of the urgency to end the sanitation strike.[105] Some workers from the Federal Building downtown came to pay their gratitude for the men on their lunch breaks.[106] The participants also hoped to challenge other white Memphians to pressure Mayor Loeb to change his position. Their protest portrayed to those outside Memphis that not all whites were supportive of Loeb's actions.[107] After a week of protest, participants in the hunger strike left City Hall to resume responsibilities. Moon kept a liquid soup diet.[108] Moon lost twenty two pounds,

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[102] "Food for Thought: Were Fasters Munching Chicken?" *Memphis Press Scimitar,* 10 April 1968.

[103] Reverend Richard Moon, interview.

[104] Richard Geller, interview by Jack Lorenzini, Memphis, Tennessee, 3 April 2013.

[105] Reverend Richard Moon, interview.

[106] Richard Geller, interview by author.

[107] "Four White Men Still Fasting in Support of Students," *Memphis Press Scimitar*, 6 April 1968.

[108] Reverend Richard Moon, interview.

while Gates lost three inches from his waist.[109] Moon's commitment to activism did not rest well in the white community. Many viewed him as the "Devil Incarnate"; his former home was bombed during the hunger strike.[110] Moon and his family received numerous threatening and obscene phone calls.

The sanitation strike of 1968 did not end with the memorial march in honor of King, in which BSA members from MSU served as marshals. Nor did it end with Reverend Moon's hunger strike. The federal government needed to bring in labor representatives to settle the strike. On April 16, 1968, after sixty seven days, the strike ended as the city and local AFSCME 1733 agreed to terms that included union recognition, dues checkoff, and a ten-cent pay increase.[111]

The alliance between black and white students was a defining moment at Memphis State. Even though George Leone contended the alliance was "never organizational," the communication and dialogue among students was unprecedented. Four years earlier, a volatile situation had emerged in response to attempts by black students to desegregate the Normal Tea Room. The diversification of the student body, coupled with the emerging familiarity of racial integration, served as catalysts for the shift in attitudes. Black students were viewed as partners; they were not marginalized. Eddie Jenkins recognized this as a time when white students viewed black students "as people not…merely as objects to be tolerated."[112] This distinction allowed for a coalition

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[109] "Hunger Strike of 3 Men Ends Today at City Hall," *Memphis Press Scimitar*, 13 April 1968; Reverend Richard Moon, interview.

[110] Reverend Richard Moon, interview.

[111] "Strike-End Terms Listed," *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, 17 April 1968.

[112] Eddie Jenkins, interview.

to exist. White students coveted black participation, and black students needed white support.[113] Without this partnership, there would not have been an effective student movement.[114]

While the alliance signified an achievement between students, activists faced numerous challenges. For black and white student activists, it was not easy organizing their classmates. Pam Machefsky remarked, "The jocks and fraternity/sorority groups had zero interest, serious academic students could not spare the time, and small-town kids were wary of doing anything 'subversive.'"[115] Other students either focused attention on their jobs that they had outside of school or opposed the strike altogether. White student activists were faced with the dual task of conveying to white students that supporting sanitation workers was genuine and of demonstrating to black activists that their participation was sincere.[116]

Meanwhile, black student activists faced the challenge of getting other black students to embrace their agenda. Since a majority of black students spurned agitation, the Black Student Association needed to adopt a less confrontational agenda. The BSA garnered support by focusing on black student concerns on campus. After achieving this goal, the organization could promote black consciousness and offer support to sanitation workers. Even after this breakthrough, there were a number of black students

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[113] Pam Machefsky, interview by author.

[114] In an article entitled, A Continuing Quest, Anne Braden, associate executive director of the Southern Conference Educational Fund, places importance on coalitions between white and black student. "There can be no effective movements unless white people can find a way to form coalitions with black people." Anne Braden, "A Continuing Quest," *The New South Student* vol. 5, no. 1 (February 1968), Sanitation Strike Archival Project, Box 28, University of Memphis Special Collections, Memphis.

[115] Pam Machefsky, interview by author.

[116] Ibid.

uncommitted to agitation. This was evidenced by the desire of Ron Ivy and others to go back to Memphis State following the Beale Street Incident in search of black students who did not participate in the march. Collectively, black and white activists had difficulty finding people with progressive views.

Perhaps the greatest challenge for white and black activists was sustaining their alliance. Since the cooperation among students marked the first time in school history that blacks and whites jointly supported a cause, a fragile alliance was inevitable. There was no way of erasing Memphis's segregation and racism; there were preconceived beliefs. The interracial rapport among students was looked upon with skepticism. Susie Macdonald Glenn indicated that some black activists thought that she was an "interloper."[117] Other instances of a fragile alliance between whites and blacks were evident in the tense moments during the marches on Memphis State. The contentious words of "boy" and "nut" uttered by students, along with the demeaning comments of the impoverished areas of Memphis by the *Apex,* threatened to destroy the coalition of student activists. After these statements polarized various students, peacekeeping by Eddie Jenkins was needed to mend the alliance.

Outside of Memphis State, the association between white students and black Memphians was equally delicate. During one of the strategy meetings at Mt. Pisgah Church, Pam Machefsky had her wallet stolen. She remembered that when she issued an appeal for the wallet to be returned, an African American man chuckled and declared, "Well, hell, whitey, didn't you know that niggers steal?" Responding to the man,

[117] Susie Macdonald Glenn, interview by author.

Machefsky said, “I didn’t until now.”[118] Machefsky’s remark ended the laughter in the church.

Despite the numerous challenges to the movement, black and white student cooperation could only be sustained by activists working together to ensure that dignity and justice were given to the sanitation workers. They worked together by holding dialogue on campus, providing monetary support for the families of sanitation workers, and participating in numerous marches on campus and downtown. The cooperation between black and white Memphis State students enriches our understanding of the 1968 Sanitation Strike and reveals not only the redemptive qualities of human beings but demonstrates that with black and white cooperation a more potent grassroots activism can exist in community.

Unlike at Memphis State, an alliance did not exist between white and black students at Southwestern College, despite “goading” by Coby Smith, Southwestern’s first African American student admitted in 1964, to get white students to participate in sanitation strike efforts. Compared with around 1700 black students at Memphis State, Southwestern enrolled six African Americans in 1968.[119] With little interaction between white and black students at Southwestern, opportunities for an alliance were stifled. Moreover, since the school desegregated only a few years prior to the sanitation strike, some black students may have been hesitant to put themselves out in the spotlight by speaking out on campus. Don Steele added that one way of explaining little coordination

[118] Pam Machefsky, interview by author.

[119] Southwestern Students, interview, Sanitation Strike Collection.

between white and black students was that black students were already involved through their congregations.[120]

Another stark difference between Memphis State and Southwestern can be found in the socio-economic background of the student body. Many of Southwestern students and activists came from privileged families. Susan Thornton remarked that "the reality was that people who went to Southwestern, unless they got really good scholarships, were pretty privileged people, and also came from families where at least one parent was educated. If people came from more moderate means they still had influence in those communities that they were from."[121] Fewer in the student body at Southwestern came from the working class, whereas, at Memphis State, a majority of students came from working and middle class backgrounds and were often first generation college students.

Throughout the sanitation strike, there was an overarching theme of expression of one's masculinity. Not only could this be seen in the iconic signs of "I AM A MAN," carried by sanitation workers, but through the "boy" incident at Memphis State and other encounters with the African American community. As Steve Estes argues, the sanitation strikers who challenged white paternalism in Memphis "created new possibilities for working class black men, black youth, and others to define their own identities."[122] Sanitation strike activism brought the Black Student Association to center stage and allowed its members to clearly express their identity at Memphis State. In their desire to uproot the status quo of Memphis State, the men of the BSA, along with help from

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[120] Don Steele, interview by author.

[121] Susan Thornton, interview by author.

[122] Steve Estes, *I Am A Man!: Race, Manhood, and The Civil Rights Movement* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 132.

powerful women, were able to establish a presence that had not existed on a large scale. The themes of manhood and paternalism was also expressed at a sanitation strike meeting attended by Susan Thornton. Shortly after the macing of the sanitation strikers in February 1968, Thornton, a Southwestern student activist, recalled, "I was surrounded by these African American sanitation workers and they said, if the police come to gas you, we will protect you."[123] At a time when many female activists were gaining female consciousness, Thornton found this paternalism rather peculiar, but this was a central tenet of masculinism, as blacks gained a new sense of assertiveness.[124]

During the hunger strike, Rev. Moon, Ted Carter, Jimmy Gates, and Richard Geller continued to fast outside city hall. Rather fitting, the men sat beneath Alcaeus's poem entitled *The City*, inscribed on City Hall:

> Not by her houses neat
> Nor by her well-built walls
> Not yet again
> Neither by dock nor street
> A city stands or falls
> But by her men.
> Not by the joiner's skill,
> Nor work in wood or stone,
> Comes good to her or ill,
> But by her men alone.

Alcaeus understood that actions and deeds of men alone were responsible for a city's unity or demise. The demonstrators saw the city of Memphis being ruined by the continuation of the strike and the assassination of Dr. King. The participants challenged Mayor Loeb to act quickly in ending the sanitation strike. Even though their action did

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[123] Susan Thornton, interview by author.

[124] Susan Thornton, interview by author; Estes, *I Am A Man,* 7.

not directly result in the mayor settling the strike, it demonstrated the desire to keep the city from falling apart in the aftermath of chaos.

The Black Student Association's emergence throughout the spring of 1968 demonstrated urgency among black students to establish an identity. They no longer accepted being second class citizens. The BSA provided black students with an outlet to voice their concerns over university and city issues. By making the personal political, they were able to unite a group of students together to embrace blackness, to create an identity necessary for true integration.[125] The BSA partnership with white activists was necessary to speak out against injustices.

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[125] "MSU Negroes Seeks Campus Unity," *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, 7 March 1968.

Chapter 6

"Walking on the Miry Clay:" The Black Student Sit-ins of 1969

"The black students wanted more power over their lives, especially as students. I think the movement would have been called "red power" if our skin had been red, or "yellow power" if our skin had been yellow. But the students believed, rightfully so, that their lack of power over the circumstances in their lives as students—and their education—was solely because the color of their skin was "black." Hence, it was easy to embrace the national refrain of "black power." The black students wanted the school to acknowledge their capacity and allow them the opportunity to fulfill their educational capacities."—Verni Owen[1]

James Pope, a leader of the Black Student Association, declared "Dr. King was our hero. He was a Moses. We saw the assassination as a crucifixion. Where crucifixions take place there are resurrections; we were part of the Resurrection."[2] Determined to having greater control over their education, the Memphis State BSA implemented a number of demands designed to eradicate inequalities between white and black students. These inequalities in education served as the impetus for student embrace of cultural and intellectual aspects of Black Power. They read black scholars to get a better understanding of their history and to provide a story left out in a predominately white university. BSA members also embraced the mantra "Black is Beautiful" by wearing Afros and dashikis. These actions allowed black students to articulate a unique cultural identity.

The BSA's agenda was consistent with that of other black students across the country. BSA members sought not only to awaken black students by providing them with

[1] Verni Owen, interview by Jack Lorenzini, Memphis, Tennessee, 9 August 2013.

[2] James Pope, interview by Jack Lorenzini, Memphis, Tennessee, 13 August 2013.

a sense of racial pride and unity via Black Power, but also to transform their education. They did not merely want to be students "in" MSU but "of" it. In the spring of 1969, the Black Student Association staged two sit-ins in the office of President Cecil Humphreys. The sit-ins not only challenged the administration and restructured the education at MSU, but also reflected the desire among Black Students to build self-confidence, preserve a unique cultural identity, and promote racial consciousness. Even when demands were not met by the administration, BSA members did not resort to violence. They were grounded in non-violence.

Ten years after the desegregation of the university by the Memphis State Eight, racism still existed on campus. The lack of black athletes on the football team, the denial of blacks on the cheerleading squad, and the lack of scholarships and jobs available to students reflected that environment. Some instructors still referred to black students as "Nigras" and gave them lower grades than expected. Speaking to over eighty students at a Human Relations Club forum entitled, "Can White Racism Be Cured?," Reverend James Lawson professed that racism must be cured at Memphis State. Referring to MSU as "a billiard ball in a machine where we bounce together," Reverend Lawson believed that only communication and dialogue could solve the racial problems.[3]According to Lawson, racism could not be cured by padding the basketball team with African American athletes; a complete re-evaluation and transformation of all aspects of the university was necessary. If racism was cured on campus, it could further the prospects of reducing the level of racism in Memphis. Echoing this sentiment, the BSA maintained

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[3] "Racism Cure Must Come From MSU Says Lawson," *Tiger Rag*, 14 February 1969.

that if academic inequities were eliminated, they could then transform black neighborhoods and uplift the community.

Lawson's plea came a few months after Charles Evers, Mississippi civil rights leader and brother of the late Medgar Evers, visited the campus. Evers condemned the university for not having a black athlete on the football team and criticized MSU's primarily homogeneous faculty.[4] The civil rights leader also urged black students to embrace a non-violent form of Black Power. He believed that advocating a violent form of Black Power was counterproductive and ineffective. Nationally, most whites linked Black Power with "violence and destruction, racism, and black domination."[5]

The views shared by most whites towards Black Power were not entirely accurate. Scholar William Van Deburg explains that the purpose of the "revolutionary rhetoric" promoted by activists was aimed to awaken the indolent African American public.[6] Seeking to "preserve" not "destroy," Black Power advocates aimed to raise racial consciousness and assertiveness. They understood that unity and solidarity were necessary to uplift the race.[7] At Memphis State, Black Power meant preservation of one's unique cultural identity. This was manifested by members of the group wearing Afros and dashikis. It was also apparent with the BSA's Black Extravaganza that featured a fashion and talent show, a dance, and an art exposition.[8] BSA members James Pope and

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[4] Only two of the university's 600 faculty members were African American. "Evers Appeals 'Work Together'," *Tiger Rag*, 13 December 1968.

[5] William Van DeBurg, *New Day in Babylon: The Black Power Movement and American Culture, 1965-1975* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 18.

[6] Ibid., 19.

[7] Ibid., 21.

[8] "Talent Show Heads Extravaganza," *Tiger Rag*, 16 May 1969.

Verni Owen believed that Black Power meant "learning about black people from a historical and cultural point of view and learning what contributions blacks made in the United States and the world."[9] BSA members did not want to destroy the university; they wanted to be treated equally along with white students.

In 1969, black student demonstrations erupted on college campuses. Over 250 black student protests occurred during the 1968-1969 school year.[10] One of the most dramatic disturbances occurred in Ithaca, New York, at Cornell University. Protesting Cornell's slow enactment of a black studies program, a cross burning at a women's dormitory, and recent disciplinary actions against blacks, over eighty black students occupied Willard Straight Hall on April 19, 1969.[11] Iconic images of some black activists at Cornell hoisting guns permeated throughout the media. Students left Straight Hall the following day. The administration gave in to the demands of the black students. Critics of the administration charged that Cornell succumbed to anarchy.[12] At Duke, the Afro-American Society occupied Allen Building, the administration building, changing its name to the Malcolm X Liberation Building after their demands were not met. Police

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[9] James Pope, interview by author.

[10] Ibram Rogers, *The Black Campus Movement: Black Students and the Racial Reconstitution of Higher Education, 1965-1972* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 123.

[11] Cushing Stout and David Grossvogel, eds., *Divided We Stand: Reflections on the Crisis at Cornell* (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1970), 17; The disciplinary actions came from "six students involved in a toy gun incident or taking furniture from a dormitory for AAS use." Vending machines were also overturned. Donald Downs, *Cornell '69: Liberalism and the Crisis of the American University* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2012), 313; Cornell students wanted to diversify university curriculum. The New York Times acknowledged that of 1,000 courses offered at the Ivy League institution, only three focused on African American subjects. The courses were: Black Literature and Its Cultural Roots, Black Ideologies, and Black Literature. "Negroes at Cornell Call Black Studies Minimal," *New York Times*, 26 April 1969.

[12] "Cornell's Surrender to Anarchy Traced," *Memphis Press Scimitar*, 1 May 1969.

shot tear gas canisters into the crowd and used clubs on retreating students.[13] Closer to Memphis, black students used violent tactics at Lane College in Jackson, Tennessee. When the demands by the Black Liberation Front were not resolved by the college's administration, the BLF burned down the I.B. Tigrett Science Building.[14]

Since its inception in 1967, the Black Student Association found ways to become better incorporated into the university. The organization received an office in the university center and student activity fees of black students were deposited in a private bank account. The organization sought to dismantle discrimination on campus. One of the first initiatives of the BSA was to acquire jobs for black students on campus. They went to the bookstore, library, and other places on campus that hired students and filled out applications. The BSA was successful in securing jobs for students at the bookstore and library. Aware of the harrowing classroom experiences of African Americans, the BSA also set up a tutoring program designed to provide study sessions in various disciplines ranging from English and Biology to Math and Sociology. The support structure enacted by the BSA required sophomores to tutor and give their books to freshmen, juniors to tutor and give their books to sophomores, and so forth.[15] Under the leadership of David Acey, James Pope, and James Mock, the BSA also obtained scholarships by going to the office of the Financial Aid director, who was a cigar aficionado, evident by the cigar box

[13] *Radish*, 13 February 1969. Students for a Democratic Society Records 1958-1970, Box 42, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison.

[14] President C.A. Kirkendoll, "Statement to Parents of Students, Alumni, Supporters and Friends of Lane College 18 April 1969," Special Collections, University of Memphis, Memphis. BLF members issued fourteen demands in the winter of 1969. Some of their demands included freedom of speech, creation of African American courses, the action to relieve those faculty members of retirement age. The other demands dealt with challenges to *in loco parentis* (end to mandatory chapel, women's right to dress, etc.)

[15] David Acey, interview by Jack Lorenzini, Memphis, Tennessee, 17 June 2013.

meticulously placed on his desk. Entering the office with their Afros and dashikis, cultural symbols of the Black Power movement, the group inquired about available scholarships. At first, the Financial Aid Director denied having any. Convinced the director was lying, the group remained in the office. David Acey recalled what transpired next: "Mock reached over the man's desk, opened the cigar box and took out three cigars. He gave one to each of us; we lit them, and stood over the Finance Director and blew smoke at him."[16] Shocked and taken aback by the actions of the BSA, the Finance Director told the students to look in the drawer for the scholarships. The BSA was able to get five scholarships for black students.[17]

The BSA also focused attention on improving disparities in extracurricular activities. For instance, it worked diligently to place black majorettes on the band and advocated the need for black females in Angel Flight, an ROTC affiliate.[18] In the fall of 1968, the group even pressed for African Americans on the Memphis State cheerleading team. In a message to Cecil Humphreys from William Youngson, Director of Memphis State Security, there was credible evidence that the BSA would engage in a direct non-violent protest during the rivalry game between Memphis State and Louisville. Youngson's message read:

> At the first basketball game at the Coliseum a group of Negroes are going to perform with a band and freedom singers to prevent the basketball game from taking place. This action will be preceded by a request to you that Negroes be permitted on the cheerleading team even though they are not properly trained. If

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[16] Ibid.

[17] Ibid.

[18] "BSA Progress on Campus," *Tri- State Defender*, 16 May 1969.

this request is denied, the above action will occur. If this request is granted, I would assume that they will carry this action out anyway.[19]

In actuality, members of BSA leadership had women in the group make Black Panther suits. Accompanied by women at the game, the leadership would run out during half-time onto the floor in the costumes.[20] Shortly thereafter, to the group's surprise, the university arranged for a black cheerleader.

In March of 1969, the BSA made ten proposals. Among these were an end to discrimination in fraternities and sororities, the recruitment of black athletes, hiring a black dean, creation of a black studies program, a call for sixty black instructors for the following year, and recruitment of black graduate students.[21] These demands confirmed the belief of Cecil Humphreys that black student activists were among the troublesome groups on campus. He expressed that black students "come in uncertain of themselves and sometimes with a chip on their shoulders. They are seeking to bring about an environment in which they will feel more comfortable."[22]

As early as the fall of 1968, MSU offered its first class devoted to African Americans. Developed by Aaron Boom, chairman and professor of History, "American Negro History" enrolled over thirty five students including six graduate students.[23] Throughout the late 1960s, black studies courses appeared. The first Black Studies

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[19] Mr. Youngson, "Message to Dr. C.C. Humphreys, 7 November 1968," Cecil Humphreys Collection, Box 4, University of Memphis Special Collections, Memphis.

[20] David Acey, interview by author.

[21] Black Student Demands Handout, 23 March 1969. Cecil Humphreys Collection, Box 4, University of Memphis Special Collections, Memphis.

[22] The other troublesome groups were radicals, anarchists, and activists. "3 Student Groups 'Creating Trouble,'" *The Nashville Tennessean*, 25 February 1969.

[23] By the spring of 1969, thirty-three students were enrolled. "Student Unrest is Involvement," *The Memphis Statesman* 20 March 1969.

program was established at San Francisco State in 1967.[24] The *Memphis Statesman* remarked that even the University of Mississippi had a black studies program a few years prior.[25] With the emergence of African American history courses at MSU, there became a greater desire among blacks to push for "equal exposure" on campus. Equal exposure on American campuses was evident by the creation of over 500 black studies courses, departments, and research centers from 1968 to 1972.[26] Martha Biondi maintains that the creation of Black Studies was "an attempt to create a humane and viable intellectual alternative to Western cultural imperialism."[27]

Prior to 1969, MSU had only two black faculty members.[28] Miriam Sugarmon, Professor of Spanish, the first African American faculty member, served as faculty advisor to the BSA. Dr. Humphreys understood the need for black instructors. In a letter to Dr. Harry Ausprich, chairman of the Department of Speech and Drama, he declared "it has been our policy for several years to seek the best faculty available to us within the limits of our resources and without regard to race, creed, or color."[29] Humphreys believed that a diverse faculty could encourage black students to follow in their footsteps.[30] The

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[24] Rogers, *Black Campus Movement*, 100.

[25] Ibid., In *Sitting in and Speaking Out,* Jeff Turner noted that Ole Miss initiated a Black Studies Program by the Fall of 1970 (222)

[26] Alexander Bloom, ed., *Long Time Gone: Sixties America Then and Now* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 140.

[27] Martha Biondi, The *Black Revolution on Campus* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 179.

[28] Letter from Dr. C.C. Humphreys to Dr. Harry Ausprich, 21 February 1969. Cecil Humphreys Collection, Box 4, Special Collections, University of Memphis, Memphis.

[29] Ibid.

[30] Ibid.

president sent similar letters to chairs of other departments. On March 4, 1969, R.N. Vidulich, chairman of the Department of Psychology, stated that his department had "been actively attempting to recruit black professionals and prospective psychologists to our program. In this respect, we have recently invited Dr. Charles Thomas, to visit the campus to discuss some problems along these lines."[31] In reference to Humphreys' letter, Leo Kelly, chairman of the Department of Special Education, also replied with a letter dated February 27, 1969. Kelly interviewed an African American, but lamented that Memphis State could not compete financially with other schools to acquire the candidate.[32] Another reply came from the Department of Mathematics chair H.S. Kaltenborn. The chair reported of a recent hire of an African American doctoral candidate from Louisiana State University.[33]

The letters by the chairs also highlighted their desire to recruit black graduate students in their programs. A number of letters reached the president's office. For instance, Dr. Kaltenborn, Math professor, offered graduate assistantships to exceptional black students.[34] Moreover, Dr. Vidulich informed Humphreys of the department's campaign to recruit students from a variety of schools with black undergraduates.[35]

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[31] Dr. Charles Thomas was the national chairman of the Association of Black Psychologists. Letter from R.N. Vidulich, to C.C. Humphreys, 4 March 1969. Cecil Humphreys Collection, Box 4, Special University of Memphis Special Collections, Memphis.

[32] Letter from Leo Kelly to Dr. C.C. Humphreys, 27 February 1969.Cecil Humphreys Collection, Box 4,University of Memphis Special Collections, Memphis.

[33] Letter from H.S. Kaltenborn to Dr. C.C. Humphreys, 3 March 1969. Cecil Humphreys Collection, Box 4, University of Memphis Special Collections, Memphis.

[34] Ibid.

[35] Letter from Vidulich to Humphreys.

A month later, the demands issued by the Black Student Association were still not resolved by the Memphis State administration. David Acey, James Pope, James Mock, and others felt it was time for direct action. BSA leaders weighed the consequences of participating in direct action protest. Addressing the group, Acey declared, "You know if we do this, we are never going to graduate. We're never going to get a job. We damn sure are going to jail and we might even get shot."[36] These possible outcomes did not matter to the BSA. Committed to advancing the visibility and opportunities for black students on campus, the BSA was also concerned with the well-being of future African American students. Acey noted, "it wasn't about us. It was about those who were going to come after us."[37] With the BSA committed to rectifying the injustices at Memphis State, the stage was set for a sit-in at the president's office.

In meetings, the BSA held rap sessions on Malcolm X and Martin Luther King Jr. James Pope remembered that a few members wanted to bring guns to the sit-in. In response, BSA leaders told those supportive of this tactic to bring their guns. Pope recalled, "Only two people came with guns. This told us that we weren't ready to implement this strategy."[38] Rather, the group committed itself to non-violent direct action, as outlined by Dr. King. These were the realities of being an African American student at a predominately white southern university. Molotov cocktails and other weapons were not going to provide the BSA with the results that they desired; continual

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[36] David Acey, interview by author.

[37] Ibid.

[38] James Pope, interview by author.

agitation working through the proper channels with the administration was the optimal approach.[39]

The first sit-in occurred on April 23, the result of the university's inability to provide money for the BSA's speaker. The student organization asked for $1750 to bring Adam Clayton Powell, the first African American from Harlem elected to Congress, to the group's Black Extravaganza, a festival celebrating African American culture and heritage. Dr. Humphreys met with BSA members James Mock and David Acey and he explained to them that there was no money available. In fact, Jack Panzeca, the assistant director of the university center, cited a budget deficit of $250 in the speaker's fund and affirmed that the university could not breach current contracts with speakers. [40] Black students persisted in their efforts to get the money for Powell. In the early afternoon, 200 black students headed toward Dr. Humphreys' office. Shortly after 1 p.m., approximately fifty members of the BSA entered the president's 'private office.'[41] Once inside the office, students continued to ask for money. They also demanded "black faculty members, a black dean, more black athletes, and a black studies program."[42] After Memphis City police arrived on the scene, students peacefully left in single file from the president's office.[43]

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[39] "Memphis State University Black Student Association Black Student Appeal Volume 1, 25 April 1969, Special Collections, University of Memphis, Memphis.

[40] "Black Students Reveal Protest Issues…Present Demands to the President," *Tiger Rag*, 25 April 1969.

[41] "Black Students Storm Dr. Humphreys Office," *Tiger Rag*, 25 April 1969.

[42] Ibid.

[43] Ibid.

Since the sit-in occurred during the peak lunch hour, many MSU students did not know about it. Rumors spread once word got out. Some students, anxious for the semester to be over, hoped for "a total occupation and class shut-down."[44] After the sit-in ended peacefully a white student lamented "I knew nothing would happen. It never does here."[45] Other students believed that the sit-in marked the beginning of the "revolution."[46] BSA members hoped to restructure Memphis State into an integrated university, where freedoms and liberties extended to all students white and black. The revolution staged at MSU would be a peaceful, non-violent one.

Although it was first believed that the sit-in was caused by the university's failure to allocate money for a speaker for the BSA, prominent leader James Mock maintained that "the real question is whether or not we as a people are going to stand up and say to this administration." He declared, "We are not slaves and we are here and we must be reckoned with."[47]

Regardless of the reason for the occupation of the president's office, the sit-in was a violation of the General Rules and Regulations of the Student Conduct and Disciplinary Proceedings at Memphis State University, which were approved in March of 1969. In compliance with the Tennessee State Board of Education, MSU made it unacceptable for "unauthorized occupancy of University facilities or blocking access to or from such

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[44] "Conference in President's Office Witnessed By Few MSU Students," *Tiger Rag*, 25 April 1969.

[45] Ibid.

[46] Ibid.

[47] "Why Did It Happen at Memphis State," *Memphis Press Scimitar*, 2 May 1969.

facilities."[48] Committed to carry on the everyday business of the university, Humphreys emphasized that the university "will use whatever force is necessary."[49] Excessive force was not used because black students peacefully left the president's office after police arrived. In a report that discussed his tenure at MSU, Humphreys stated that "a demonstration that is converted into any interference with the freedom of other members of the academic community is a threat to the freedom and openness of our society."[50]

Prominent African American leaders in Memphis supported the sit-in. They believed that the students were right to stand up against injustices and seek much needed reform at Memphis State. Following the sit-in, Reverend H. Ralph Jackson, head of the AME Church Minimum Salary Department and Vice Chairman of C.O.M.E., attended a BSA meeting and offered support as long as students practiced non-violence to convey their demands.[51] Mentioning the racism that permeated the Memphis landscape, Reverend Jackson declared that "no sane person can deny the justice of our demands."[52] Mrs. Maxine Smith, Executive Secretary of the NAACP, shared the sentiments of

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[48] In its Regularly Quarterly Session of August 9, 1968, the Tennessee Board of Education recognized "that a university must be concerned with the actions of groups or individuals that are in conflict with its welfare and integrity." The Board "instructed the Presidents of the universities and colleges under its jurisdiction to take such action as may be necessary to maintain campus conditions that accord with this directive, and that preserve the integrity of the institution and its educational environment" General Rules and Regulations Student Conduct and Disciplinary Proceedings, March 6, 1969. Approved by President Humphreys March 7, 1969

[49] "Protesters Given Warning at MSU," *Memphis Press Scimitar*, 24 April 1969.

[50] Despite demonstrations at MSU, "not a single day of classes was lost and no damage was done to the physical facilities of the campus." Dr. Cecil Humphreys. Report to the Tennessee Board of Regents (1972), 2-3.

[51] "BSA Meeting," *Tiger Rag*, 15 April 1969.

[52] Ibid.

Reverend Jackson. She pledged support for the students.[53] These black leaders provided the BSA with a solid foundation to espouse its agenda.

Not all black leaders were supportive of the black student protests that erupted throughout the country. Roy Wilkins, NAACP Executive Director, regarded the creation of Black Student Unions as "self-segregation and puzzling indeed."[54] Bayard Rustin, Executive Director of the A. Phillip Randolph Institute, spoke out about the black student demonstrations at Cornell. Rustin called on colleges "to stop capitulating to the stupid demands of Negro students and instead, see that they get the remedial training that they need."[55] Critical of black student demands for courses highlighting African American culture such as soul music and poetry, Rustin declared, "what in the hell are soul courses worth in the real world? No one gives a damn if you've taken soul courses. They want to know if you can do mathematics and write a correct sentence."[56] BSA member James Pope disregarded Rustin's views. Pope declared, "I don't agree with that—that period for us was a renaissance. We learned African American history. We began to study Black scholars."[57] Group members read from a number of intellectuals including James Baldwin, Richard Wright, and Marcus Garvey, as well as Carter Woodson's *Mis-Education of the Negro*, Elijah Muhammad's *How to Eat to Live,* and Cheikh Anta

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[53] "Group Help is Pledged After Sit-in at MSU," *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, 24 April 1969.

[54] Rogers, *The Black Campus Movement,* 131.

[55] "Negro Leader's Tough Talk About Negro Students," *U.S. News & World Report*, 12 May 1969; Rogers acknowledged that it should not be surprising that Rustin felt that way. Rogers cited Columbia's Leon Denmark's comments during an NAACP event. Denmark declared, "Given his hookups and where he gets his money, he can't do anything else but come out against black student demands." Rogers, *Black Campus* Movement, 139.

[56] "Negro Leader's Tough Talk About Negro Students," *U.S. News & World Report*, 12 May 1969.

[57] James Pope, interview by author.

Diop's *The African Origin of Civilization: Myth or Reality.*[58] This renaissance exhibited under Black Power allowed the BSA to boost their "self-determination, self-love, and sense of black solidarity."[59]

The *Tiger Rag*, *Memphis Press Scimitar*, the *Commercial Appeal*, and the American Civil Liberties Union all weighed in on the recent sit-in. An editorial in the *Tiger Rag* insisted that Memphis State could not succumb to pressures by the BSA.[60] Rather, it was necessary that compromise between students and administration be reached to settle disputes. The editors believed the sit-in could hurt MSU financially. It declared "student leaders should realize that the state legislature… is not terribly open-minded about student disorders. As a means of punishing the university… the congressmen could easily handicap MSU by withholding tax dollars."[61] The student newspaper recognized the awareness for black concerns that the sit-in generated. The editorial urged "caution and consideration."[62]

Mindful of recent black student demonstrations at Harvard and Cornell, *The Tiger Rag* charged that Memphis State African American students initiated "action they had seen on television."[63] The student newspaper appeared out of touch with the racial

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[58] "The Black Student At MSU:' Discussed at Faculty Luncheon," *Tiger Rag*, 4 March 1969; James Pope, interview.

[59] Rogers, *Black Campus Movement,* 67.

[60] "Caution and Consideration," *Tiger Rag*, 25 April 1969.

[61] Ibid.

[62] Ibid.

[63] "Caution and Consideration," *Tiger Rag*, 25 April 1969; In 1969, one of the student demands of African Americans at Harvard was an establishment of Afro-American Studies Department. In April of 1969, Harvard faculty voted for a Black Studies Department. Black students could select which candidates were ideal for the newly created department. Ibram Rogers noted that "this was the first time in history that students had ever been given a direct role in the selection of faculty." Rogers, *Black Campus Movement*,

discrimination prevalent on campus. The first sit-in was not a copy-cat performance learned by students who watched tumultuous events unfold on their television. In response to the article, Cozette Rogers, an African American student, stated that those who agree with the editorial could not possibly be African Americans. Rogers provided a litany of racial inequities among students. She remarked how the typical white student had not experienced racism:

> It is obvious that he has never gone to a basketball game to see not one black cheerleader cheering her black brothers onto victory. It is obvious that he has not moved into a dormitory room one day with a white person only to find a new roommate disappeared by the same afternoon. It is obvious that he has never done B work in a class only to receive a D on his report card. It is obvious that he has never heard anyone tell him to stay in his place like a 'good nigger.' It is obvious that he has never received threatening phone calls for running for an SGA office as I have. It is obvious that he has never been embarrassed to go to a school where not one administrator of his own kind is before him. It is obvious that he has never feared writing an article thinking that he might be suspended. It is obvious that he has never mistakenly heard a so-called friend say that 'The place for Negroes will always be in the cotton field.' It is obvious that he has not gone to school for a year and heard only one speaker of his kind out of several of the opposite race. It is obvious that he has never seen his girlfriend insulted and unjustly accused by the campus police. It is obvious that he has not seen the grievances of his people presented for a year without result of the unrelenting hearts of his school administrators. No, the black man does not feel "unimportant," but totally mistreated.[64]

The *Memphis Press Scimitar* and *Commercial Appeal* were staunch supporters of the MSU administration. The *Memphis Press Scimitar* acknowledged that the black students were "wise" to embrace non-violence, realizing the repercussions of violence on campuses.[65] The *Commercial Appeal* stated, "President Humphreys quickly set them straight! The situation on this campus must not be permitted to degenerate, as it has in

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146; "Key Moments in the Founding of the Department of African and African American Studies," available from http://www.aaas.fas.harvard.edu/about/founding; Internet; accessed 27 October 2013.

[64] *"Reader's Response," Tiger Rag*, 6 May 1969.

[65] Ibid.

places such as Cornell University to the extent that faculty and administration are intimidated at gun point."[66] Like the *Tiger Rag,* the *Commercial Appeal* implied that the actions of the students must be approached with caution so that violence did not erupt on campus.

Meanwhile, the ACLU of West Tennessee thought students had the right to protest peacefully on campus. The organization only disapproved of the methods used by the students. In a press release, the ACLU mentioned that "protest that deprives others of the opportunity to speak or be heard, or that requires physical takeover of buildings… are anti-civil libertarian and incompatible with the purpose of an educational institution."[67]

After the first sit-in, Dr. Humphreys, who was worried about potential threats to university property and the safety of the student body, sought a continued police presence. The arrival of the Memphis Police Department fueled tensions on campus, and police became the catalyst for the second sit-in held on April 28, 1969.

The leaders of the BSA made it clear that they did not want any radical groups, black or white, aiding them in their struggle to integrate the university. Citing the recent disturbances by the Students for a Democratic Society at Columbia and Wisconsin-Madison and the violent rhetoric of the national group, James Pope and David Acey did not want the local Memphis SDS to help. The BSA had developed friendships with members of the Memphis SDS; they did not want to get the group in trouble.[68] Acey declared, "We never wanted them involved because we knew white boys were crazy.

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[66] "Keeping Control At MSU," *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, 25 April 1969.

[67] West Tennessee American Civil Liberties Union Press Release ACLU Position on Memphis State University Sit-in and Other Campus Disorders, 25 April 1969," *University of Memphis Special Collections*, Memphis, Tennessee.

[68] James Pope, interview by author.

They're blowing shit up. We couldn't have that because we didn't know what they were going to do."[69] Aware of the radical tactics of the SDS in 1968, President Humphreys stifled any possible protests by members of the SDS. Jim Gaylord, a one-time "leader" of the SDS, remembered an encounter with the president. Gaylord recalled, "after the Black Student sit-in, I was called into his office. He told me that if I came back on campus and talked to more than two people, he'd have me arrested for inciting a riot and he would expel me from the school."[70]

The BSA also did not want the help of the Invaders. While the BSA and the Invaders communicated under the spirit of blackness, the organization knew from experience the risky association with the militant group. Acey stated, "if the FBI and CIA weren't watching us or had our phones tapped; they weren't doing their jobs. They will find out we are talking to a radical black group and then they will set a damn fire."[71] As it turned out, FBI informants reported on the activities of the BSA. Established in the 1950s, the COINTELPRO program of the FBI monitored the activities of black students in the 1960s. Murrell McCullough, an African American informant, spied on the group. In addition, two of the six white students arrested in the second sit-in were suspected FBI informants.[72]

Black students were joined by a small handful of white students in the president's office. According to one white participant, "I simply wanted to express my

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[69] David Acey, interview by author.

[70] Jim Gaylord, interview by author.

[71] Ibid.

[72] Max Deason, interview by Jack Lorenzini, Memphis Tennessee, 16 August 2013; James Pope interview by author.

disappointment in the college administration's failure to meet with a group of students who simply wanted to meet and discuss some of their issues of concern."[73] Max Deason, a participant on the Poor People's March, also joined with black students, sharing their notions of fairness and justice.[74]

At 12:40 p.m., over 100 students left a rally and proceeded to Dr. Humphreys's office. Once there, seventy-five to eighty students staged another sit-in, vowing to stay until police escorted them out.[75] Dr. Humphreys was not on campus. Members of the BSA told Dean Jess Parrish and Provost Ron Carrier of their intentions to stay in the office until the police left. [76] Led by BSA members James Pope, Ester Hurt, and Janice Jones, students sang popular movement songs of "We Shall Overcome" and "Oh Freedom." Other verses by the group included "No More Humphreys," "No more Moe Iba, "No more Holloman," and "No more Tiger Rag."[77] Meanwhile, Dr. Jess Parrish, Dean of Students, warned students of their impending suspension from MSU if they did not leave the premises.[78] Upon hearing this, approximately twelve students left the president's office, many of them women.[79] A white participant recalled, "We had a

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[73] John Doe, interview by Jack Lorenzini, Memphis, Tennessee, 19 September 2013. The interviewee asked to remain anonymous.

[74] Max Deason, interview by author.

[75] "109 Black Students Arrested: Black Community Moves to Support," *Tri State Defender*, 3 May 1969. Dr. Humphreys was out of his office at the time. They told Dean Jess Parrish and Provost Ronald Carrier of their intentions to stay in the office. "Black Students Arrested and Suspended From MSU," *Tiger Rag*, 29 April 1969.

[76] "Black Students Arrested and Suspended From MSU," *Tiger Rag*, 29 April 1969.

[77] Ibid.

[78] "MSU Suspends 109 Students," *Memphis Press Scimitar*, 29 April 1969.

[79] Ibid.

chance to walk away, but the need to exercise our right to be heard required a commitment. It was too important for us to just walk away from the moment with nothing more than a scolding."[80] Other activists urged students not to leave. One student declared, "the niggers are going to leave. The blacks are going to stay."[81]

By 1:20 p.m., City Fire Chief Frank Holloman and City Police Chief Henry Lux made their way to the president's office.[82] Following the arrival of the police chief, students were arrested. David Acey stressed the importance of sit-in participants. He said, "We had cadres like in the civil rights movement. When they took those to jail, another cadre was coming. They had committed to going to jail."[83] Shortly after 2:00 p.m., police escorted students onto buses.[84] Students left with toothbrushes around their neck. 109 students were arrested, six of them white.[85] Crowds of students gathered outside of the administration building. Some cheered in support of the students. Other white students wanted to get on the bus.[86] As the buses left for police headquarters at 2:15 p.m., arrested students chanted, "I'm black. I'm somebody."[87] They also clenched their fists, a symbol for Black Power. Charged with trespassing on state property, students faced **"**11 months

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[80] John Doe, interview by author.

[81] "Black Students Arrested and Suspended From MSU," *Tiger Rag*, 29 April 1969.

[82] Ibid.

[83] David Acey, interview by author.

[84] "Black Students Arrested and Suspended From MSU," *Tiger Rag*, 29 April 1969.

[85] "MSU Suspends 109 Students," *Memphis Press Scimitar*, 29 April 1969.

[86] David Acey, interview by author. Verni Owen, interview by author.

[87] The arrested students also sang civil rights spirituals. *Memphis Press Scimitar*, 29April 1969.

and 29 days in prison and or up to a $1,000 fine."[88] On April 29th, they were put on a $500 bond by Memphis court judge, Beverly Boushe.[89]

Morgan McCraw, one of the arrested BSA students and a *Tiger Rag* reporter, provided an account of his prison experience**:**

> Going to jail is Hell! We are charged with trespassing on state property (God forgive our trespasses), but we marched to jail in support of demands and proposals to the MSU administration… They searched us and took every dime, penny, cigarette, toothbrush, tiki and lord-knows- what else- from us and put it in brown envelopes…We were herded into three long, rectangular cells, each holding about eighteen students. In the back of the room was a ravished commode with a face bowl and water faucet mounted directly above it. None of the cells had toilet paper in them when we came. We rested. We thought it would be a matter of hours before we would be free.[90]

Delta Sigma Theta, the first African American sorority of Memphis State, even received reports that students were maced by the Memphis Police at the jail.[91] These allegations against the Memphis Police Department could not be confirmed.[92]

For others, the jail experience uplifted them. James Pope considered it an "awesome, cherished experience." Freedom songs were sung.[93] A white student remembered, "We spent the night in jail. I was with about eight or nine people in a big cell. We talked all night about our lives, our families, and our personal feelings. I met

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[88] "MSU Suspends 109 Students," *Memphis Press Scimitar*, 29 April 1969; According to Section 39-1214 of the Tennessee Code, "any person who trespasses in the building of any public school and who there engages in any disorderly conduct is guilty of a misdemeanor."

[89] Ibid.

[90] "Notes From Prison," *Tiger Rag,* 2 May 1969.

[91] Letter of Delta Sigma Theta to Frank Holloman, 3 May 1969. Frank Holloman Collection, Box 1 Series III, "Memphis Fire and Police 1968-1970," Memphis Room, Memphis Public Library.

[92] Letter from Frank Holloman to Delta Sigma Theta, 6 May 1969. Frank Holloman Collection, Box 1 Series III, "Memphis Fire and Police 1968-1970," Memphis Room, Memphis Public Library.

[93] James Pope, interview by author.

people I hadn't known before who became a friend that night."[94] In the end, students stayed in jail for a day. Their supporters brought them chicken boxes and sodas.[95] Students were taken to the county jail. The NAACP along with private bond companies made the bond.[96] Suspended from Memphis State due to their arrests, students had twenty-four hours to appeal the decision.[97]

Not everyone spent the night in jail. Max Deason's brother came down to the city jail to pay the bail. Deason recalled, "When the NAACP put up bail for the rest—I wasn't on the list. I didn't get the notice. I was a clerk at the Shelby Hotel. The police came and arrested me for jumping because I wasn't at the meeting."[98] Instructed by the NAACP lawyer to remain silent, the NAACP paid Deason's $150 fine for failing to show up at the meeting.

David Acey and James Mock were not among the 109 students arrested. They met with the Memphis NAACP and strategized over the next action to take. In BSA meetings leading up to the sit-ins, they chose which students would go to jail. Operating from the outside, Acey provided BSA members with ten dollars' worth of dimes to update him on the sit-in developments. Acey declared, "Generals don't get arrested. They would love to have me and Mock in jail. But if we were arrested, who was going to run the show?"[99]

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[94] John Doe, interview by author.

[95] James Pope, interview by author.

[96] Ibid.

[97] "Black Students Arrested and Suspended From MSU," *Tiger Rag*, 29 April 1969.

[98] Max Deason, interview by author.

[99] David Acey, interview by author.

The Black Student sit-in polarized the student body. Some students demonstrated their allegiances by supporting the actions of the Memphis police and President Humphreys. They favored the preservation of law and order at Memphis State. Barry Moore, representing Sigma Chi Fraternity, presented Dr. Humphreys with a petition containing over 1000 student signatures backing the decision to use police force.[100] Dr. Humphreys accepted the petition and said to the young fraternity member: “I appreciate it. But I hope that everyone realizes that we don’t need a strong polarization. I hope we all realize we are trying to present an educational opportunity for everyone.”[101] Other fraternities supported the president’s decision by providing food and drinks for the Memphis police. The fraternity Kappa Alpha, notorious for its annual celebrations of the Old South and Confederacy, along with Pi Kappa Alpha, handed out coffee and donuts to the “Soul Patrol,” the name given to the cops who patrolled the campus during the tumult.[102] The fraternities bought all the glazed donuts sold at Harlow’s Donuts.[103]

Other white students lent their support to the Black Student Association. Don Donati, student liberal and counselor for the Draft Resisters League in Memphis, recalled that white liberals tried to prevent the Memphis police from going into the administration building and arresting students. White students provided the BSA with food and supported them by organizing protests on campus.[104] Following the arrests, white

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[100] “MSU Campus Calm As Tension Eases,” *Memphis Press Scimitar,* 1 May 1969.

[101] “MSU Wrapped in Tenuous Calm,” *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, 1 May 1 1969.

[102] “Speaking Out,” *Tiger Rag*, 2 May 1969

[103] Ibid. Discounts on doughnuts were given to the fraternity, since they had bought them for police.

[104] Don Donati, interview by Jack Lorenzini, Memphis, Tennessee, 19 March 2013.

supporters of the BSA held a Free Speech Rally. Attended by 300 students, Jim Sims and James Gaylord requested the removal of police from campus. Citing other campus disruptions, they believed that continued police presence led to violence.[105] Jim Gaylord also revisited the reforms advocated by Miriam Sugarmon, faculty advisor of the Black Student Association.[106] Victor Smith, a twenty-six year old Vietnam veteran and acting chairman of the Human Relations Club at Memphis State, collected 900 student signatures for a petition calling for the adoption of Sugarmon's Five Point Program: "1. An immediate end to all forms of discrimination on the campus; 2. Active recruitment of Black personnel at all levels; 3. Formation of a Human Relations Committee; 4. Development of a Black Studies Program, and 5. employment of a Coordinator of Black Student affairs.[107]

BSA leader James Mock asserted that "the struggle is only the beginning." He encouraged suspended students to continue to attend classes at MSU. Mock told students, "Do not feel alone for we do not intend to retreat."[108] David Acey declared that "we have to stand 100% behind those brothers who went downtown on the buses… Now what we do depends on what is done to our brothers, what charges are placed and what the fines are."[109]

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[105] *Memphis Press Scimitar*, 29 April 1969.

[106] Ibid., Following the visit by Charles Evers to campus, Sugarmon drafted up a list of concerns.

[107] "MSU's Free Speech Rally Supported—and Heckled," *Memphis Press Scimitar* 29 April 1969; Pro- BSA petition, April 1969.

[108] " Suspensions from MSU Appealed," *Memphis Press Scimitar*, 30 April 1969.

[109] "MSU Suspends 109 Students," *Memphis Press Scimitar*, 29 April 1969.

Some faculty members also voiced their concerns with the president's actions. In an open letter to President Humphreys, faculty supported the administration's response on April 23 but believed that the police presence magnified tension on campus.[110] In favor of Dr. Humphreys dropping charges against the students and re-instating them into the campus community, the faculty letter concluded, "we are certainly not on the side of lawlessness, but believe that the sit-in, conducted as it was in the most orderly and restrained fashion, should be considered a symbolic act of protest."[111] Over ninety seven faculty members, including Edward L. Angus, Assistant Professor of Political Science, signed the letter.[112] In a separate letter to Dr. Humphreys, Angus believed the police force and helicopter circling above the university to be "excessive, completely unnecessary." He criticized Humphreys for failing to communicate effectively with faculty concerning the incident.[113]

Dr. Humphreys also weighed in on the recent sit-in. The president said: "I cannot shirk my responsibility to protect life and property. You don't have to go any farther away than Jackson to see that buildings can be burned."[114] Humphreys referred to the destruction of the I.B. Tigrett Science Building by the Black Liberation Front, a group of students who sought reforms at Lane College. In a statement to the university, the president outlined how he came to act on the sit-ins. Humphreys asserted that "if laws

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[110]Letter from Faculty to Dr. C.C. Humphreys, 29 April 1969.Cecil Humphreys Collection, Box 4, Special Collections, University of Memphis.

[111] Ibid.

[112] "Open Letter to President Humphreys," *The Tiger Rag*, 2 May 1969.

[113] Letter from Edward Angus to Dr. C.C. Humphreys, 30 April 1969. Cecil Humphreys Collection, Box 4, Special Collections, University of Memphis, Memphis.

[114] "Why Did It Happen at Memphis State?," *Memphis Press Scimitar*, 2 May 1969.

and established policies are to be disregarded because of threats and intimidation, the operation of an academic institution would come to an end and society would be in danger of self-destruction."[115]

The *Commercial Appeal* referred to the second sit-in as a "silly protest."[116] While encouraging student discussion, the editorial advocated law and order.[117] Mutual sentiment could be found in the *Memphis Press Scimitar*. An editorial remarked that "emotional tantrums are childish--unworthy of anyone old enough to attend a university. MSU's black students—and its white students—should be thankful for the opportunities they are enjoying…opportunities made possible by taxpayers and hard working parents."[118] This newspaper praised Dr. Humphreys and stated that the city and majority of the campus community supported his decisions.

The *Tiger Rag* differed from the other newspapers. In an editorial, the student newspaper considered BSA demands legitimate.[119] The paper challenged the administration to hire black faculty, create a black studies program, and embrace diversity.[120]

Dr. Humphreys received a considerable amount of support from the city of Memphis and citizens. Henry Loeb, mayor of Memphis, wrote, "it's time to draw a line on Berkeley, Cornell, Columbia, etc.… and Sonny's fair and firm way of handling this

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[115] Dr. Cecil C. Humphreys, "Statement of Dr. C.C. Humphreys to Students, Faculty and Friends of Memphis State University, April 29, 1969," University of Memphis Special Collections, Memphis.

[116] "MSU Should Carry On," *Memphis* Commercial *Appeal,* 29 April 1969.

[117] Ibid.,

[118] "Hayakawa's Points—and MSU," *Memphis Press Scimitar*, 29 April 1969.

[119] "Demands," *Tiger Rag*, 2 May 1969.

[120] Ibid.

matter means a lot to all of us."[121] Another reaction came from an MSU parent. W.S. asserted: "I have yet to run across one who does not agree with your firm stand. It is a shame that more university presidents around the country do not have your intestinal fortitude."[122] Along the same lines, Fina Wuppermann, a native of Cuba and Associate Professor of Spanish at Arkansas State University, congratulated Humphreys on his decision. She thought that unrest could be eradicated if other campus administrators followed Humphreys' model.[123]

The story revealed a young campus organization that fought to restructure the education at Memphis State as it saw fit. By working within the proper channels and implementing non-violent direct action in order to achieve a sense of "worth" and "brotherhood," the group believed that it could then go into black neighborhoods and effectively deal with the inequalities in the community.[124] The sit-ins demonstrated the desire to be fully recognized by the university community. The Black Student Association provided a solid foundation and outlet for black students to voice their concerns and criticisms of Memphis State.

While the foundation was cemented for future students, at any time the organization could have faltered. In what David Acey described as "walking on the miry clay," the BSA was in a precarious situation. The unity and vitality of the group could

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[121] Sonny was a nickname given to C.C. Humphreys. Loeb was mayor of the city from 1968 to 1971. Letter from Henry Loeb to Sam Hays and T.K. Robinson, 5 May 1969.Cecil Humphreys Collection, Box 4, Special Collections, University of Memphis, Memphis.

[122] Letter from W.S. Wilkerson to Dr. C.C. Humphreys, 30 April 1969. Cecil Humphreys Collection, Box 4, University of Memphis Special Collections, Memphis.

[123] Letter from Fina Wuppermann to Dr. C.C. Humphreys, 29 April 1969. Cecil Humphreys Collection, Box 4, University of Memphis Special Collections, Memphis.

[124] Memphis State University Black Student Appeal, 25 April 1969.

have been broken at any time. The administration could find subtle ways to fail black students. There were constant reminders from white secretaries of the administration, who told black students, "be careful they are trying to flunk you out." It was believed that the administration purposely set up 10:00 a.m. meetings with the group leaders to ensure that they would miss classes and fail. When group leaders were denied excused absences for attending morning meetings, they began to meet with the administration after 6:00 p.m. The strategy by the BSA to shift out leadership also kept the administration on its toes, making it difficult for it to single out group members.[125]

There were other challenges presented to the BSA. One hardship for the BSA was knowing that not all black students would follow through. In 1969, there were 1,478 African Americans out of a total enrollment of 15,526 students.[126] During the sit-in, black activists accounted for a small percentage of the student body. Some black students did not believe that segregation existed on campus. In an article entitled, "Memphis State and the Negro," H.A. Gilliam Jr. uncovered a number of black students who felt they were getting a proper education at Memphis State. Helen Ann Forbes, an African American student, expressed, "Memphis State has been all I could have expected of college. I don't think there's anything they bar you from. Matter of fact, I've been to mixed parties."[127] Forbes's experience did not reflect the overall experiences of African American students at MSU. Other black students might have been too timid to jeopardize their education. They were first generation college students; participation in a group that espoused Black

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[125] David Acey, interview by author.

[126] "Why Did It Happen at Memphis State?," *Memphis Press Scimitar*, 2 May 1969.

[127] "Memphis State and the Negro," *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, 27 August 1968.

Power could be problematic. Only a small segment of the African American population supported Black Power.[128] Joy Ann Williamson points out that this was a common occurrence and challenge during the black campus movement. She argued that black students "see themselves as students first, and then as African American students."[129] Finally, since the BSA focused on restructuring Memphis State, it paid little attention to FBI informants penetrating the group and exposing its agenda.[130]

The fight to restructure education also demonstrated the continued dialogue and alliance between white and black student activists. Members of the Human Relation Club promoted the five point program of Miriam Sugarmon, and some white students lent support to the BSA by providing food and holding free speech rallies, even when it was clear that the BSA did not want help from groups such as SDS. Although a portion of MSU's white population advocated law and order, a group of students and professors wanted demands made by the BSA to be considered and accepted by the administration. In 1969, James Pope remarked that the alliance with white students was "critical." He recalled how on one day it was revealed that police searched for two individuals causing trouble on Madison Avenue. This led to the Memphis police knocking on an apartment door of a white student, where Pope and Acey were visiting. Pope saw the alliance as critical because the white student protected them, fed them, and hid them.[131]

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[128] Van DeBurg, *New Day in Babylon*, 16-17.

[129] Joy Ann Williamson, *Black Power on Campus: The University of Illinois 1965-1975* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2003), 14.

[130] James Pope, interview by author.

[131] Ibid.

The story also revealed the determination among the administration to preserve law and order. The Black Student Sit-In at Memphis State came during a year when over seventy administrators resigned because of campus unrest.[132] Jess Parrish, Dean of Students in 1969, reflected upon the tumultuous times at Memphis State. He declared, "It's amazing how we kept the lid on. At any time, the lid could have boiled off."[133] Caught in the difficult position as being one of the strongest supporters of the BSA on campus and his administrative role, Parrish believed that at the end of the day that the university must function. He said, "No group of students should shut it down."[134] Cecil Humphreys believed in holding students accountable for disregarding rules and regulations implemented by the university. If the administration failed to hold students accountable, Humphreys thought that the university would self-destruct.[135]

The black campus movement at MSU differed from what transpired at Cornell, Duke, and Lane College. BSA members realized that non-violence was the only legitimate tactic to combat the injustices evident in academia. BSA members did not want to destroy Memphis State. They knew that continuous demands to the administration could lead to reforms. In *The Tiger Rag,* Verni Owen linked the recent developments at MSU to the words professed by Dr. S.I. Hayakawa, president of San Francisco State College. Hayakawa asserted, "Black students see disruptive tactics as the only way of getting reforms. Once they see that reforms are being made, they are willing to give up

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[132] Van DeBurg, *New Day in Babylon*, 66.

[133] Jess Parrish, interview by Jack Lorenzini, Memphis, Tennessee, 13 September 2013.

[134] Ibid.

[135] Dr. Cecil C. Humphreys, "Statement of Dr. C.C. Humphreys to Students, Faculty and Friends of Memphis State University, April 29, 1969,"University of Memphis Special Collections, Memphis.

their tactics."[136] Grounded in non-violence, BSA members believed violence or destruction of property to be immoral and counterproductive. They further believed that they were speaking the truth, and that the truth would stand.[137] BSA leaders declared, "We are convinced that as long as our complaints and our demands are just, as long as there is good within any man because of his commitment to truth, and as long as there are people dedicated to building a better world and a greater, more productive community, our non-violent tactics will win."[138] The BSA had to do their "own thing" and implement the tactics that worked best for providing necessary reform on campus.

The sit-ins reflected the desire among black students to build self-confidence, preserve a unique cultural identity, promote racial consciousness, and change the university. Implementing non-violent direct action, the BSA continued the methods first embraced by the earlier civil rights activists in Memphis. While more vocal in their demands, members of the BSA, like previous black student activists, put everything on the line to achieve reform. They were a group on a mission, determined to get Memphis State closer to a more complete form of integration. The organization played an active role in hiring Ernest Davis as the first black Dean of Student Relations, got African American women to be recognized as Campus Cuties, and were successful in picking Maybelline Forbes as the first African American Homecoming Queen. Essentially, the group forced the university to accept black students as members "of" the campus community.[139]

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[136] "Black Frustration Could Lead to Change to Militancy," *Tiger Rag*, 29 April 1969.

[137] Memphis State University Black Student Appeal, April 25, 1969

[138] Ibid.

[139] "Dean Has Wide Experience," *Tiger Rag* 26 September 1969.

Chapter 7

"Cornbread, Catfish, and Student Activism:" The Story of the Memphis State SDS

Student activism transformed the lives of Memphis State students such as Mary Ann McClure. "I felt very alive," McClure said as she recalled her time, "I felt like in some small way I was helping to change the world in the way that I wanted to see."[1] Bob Rutman described Memphis State in the 1960s as a period when activists supported one another, searched for knowledge, and shared it with fellow students. Rather than conforming to the rest of the student body, Rutman stated, "We felt like we wanted to rock the boat because that was part of our education."[2] The racial injustices that permeated the South, along with the growing military industrial complex, compelled them to activism. Instead of attacking existing institutions, Memphis State students merely sought to reform them; their southern flavor of activism was less destructive than that at Columbia, Berkeley, or Madison. From 1968 to 1970, the Memphis chapter of the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) provided the activists a centering place to espouse ideas about free speech, civil rights, and Vietnam.

Formed by a June 1959 convention, the SDS met for the first time at Ann Arbor, Michigan in 1960 to offer its support to the civil rights movement.[3] Two years later, the SDS critiqued American society, in what would be its manifesto, the Port Huron Statement. The Port Huron Statement demanded urgency in finding solutions to the problems of racial intolerance and the military industrial complex. These problems

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[1] Mary Ann McClure, interview by author.

[2] Bob Rutman, interview by author.

[3] Kirkpatrick Sale, *SDS: The Rise and Development of the Students for a Democratic Society* (New York: Random House, 1973), 23.

impeded the American values of freedom, equality, and democracy. It denounced apathy and challenged students to think critically about these issues. One of its criticisms of fellow youth was that even though college taught students to be more accepting of divergent ideas, students remain the same.[4] The Port Huron Statement intended to rouse students politically.[5] After its infancy, the SDS underwent a number of transformations. From 1962 to 1965, the organization worked to reform the American system. By 1965, the SDS removed the anti-communist clause from its constitution. Between 1965 to 1968, the SDS launched clashes against racism, the Vietnam War, and the military industrial complex.[6]

The watershed event in the history of the SDS was the takeover of Columbia University by Mark Rudd and the Columbia SDS, along with allied black students. On April 23, 1968, Rudd and others seized Hamilton Hall, an undergraduate building. As black students held Hamilton Hall, Columbia SDS seized five other buildings. Columbia's affiliation with the Institute for Defense Analysis in support of the Vietnam War and its disregard for the nearby African American community in planning to build a gymnasium in Harlem led to the students' takeover.[7] After eight days, President Grayson Kirk called in police to disperse the students.[8] Over 700 were arrested and around 150

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[4] Students for a Democratic Society, "The Port Huron Statement," June 1962, Box 1, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison.

[5] Sale, *SDS*, 51.

[6] Ibid.,6.

[7] Alan Adelson, *SDS*, (New York: Scribner, 1972), 221-223.

[8] Todd Gitlin, *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage* (New York: Bantam, 1993), 307.

injured, including fourteen policemen.[9] The takeover of Columbia University marked the emergence of new strategies that the SDS embraced. SDS members saw themselves as revolutionaries willing to destroy the status quo. In fact, "368,000 college students considered themselves revolutionaries; by 1970, there were over 1 million."[10] The takeover of Columbia revealed to the national organization that more Columbias were possible, leading to the SDS plea to its chapters, "Create Two, Three, Many Columbias."[11] Jeremy Varon argues that the activists came to define themselves by the times in which they lived; revolution was not simply an idea, but an identity.[12] This newly embraced approach frightened college administrators and made it more difficult for chapters to be recognized by universities, particularly in the South.

SDS extended its influence southward through its fraternal relationship with the Southern Student Organizing Committee. Founded in Nashville, Tennessee, in April 1964, the SSOC organized itself to bring liberal students together. Billing itself as "a sort of Ann Arbor of the South," SSOC encouraged activism but stressed less radical approaches in order to reach students alarmed by the confrontational tactics of SNCC and SDS.[13] Embracing "We'll Take Our Stand," a phrase reminiscent of earlier activism of the Southern Agrarians in the region during the 1930s, students envisioned a South that

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[9] Adelson, *SDS*, 224; Gitlin, *The Sixties*, 308.

[10] Sale, *SDS*, 457.

[11] Adelson, *SDS*, 224.

[12] Jeremy Varon, *Bringing the War Home: The Weather Underground, the Red Army Faction and Revolutionary Violence in the Sixties and Seventies*, (Berkeley, University of California Press, 2004), 37.

[13] Southern Student Organizing Committee, "A Resolution Concerning SDS's Role in the South and the Relationship between SDS and the Southern Student's Organizing Committee," May 1964, Samuel Shirah Papers, Box 1, Wisconsin Historical Society.

embodied the American values of freedom, equality, and democracy.[14] SSOC was an umbrella organization, a confederation of southern campus organizations. The SSOC embraced multiple issues, including advocating civil rights to opposing the Vietnam War to combatting *in loco parentis* restrictions implemented by southern colleges and universities.[15] Unlike SDS, SSOC advocated less radical strategies. Southern whites were attracted to the group's moderation and distinctly southern style, one steeped in beloved symbols such as the Confederate flag.[16] By embracing this approach, student dissent was more respectable.[17]With help from SSOC, SDS was able to infiltrate the region by embracing the issues that concerned southern activists.[18] As the civil rights and anti-war movement galvanized more southern students, the number of SDS chapters in the South grew from a few in 1967 to about fifty by spring 1969.[19] By the late 1960s, SDS chapters were formed at University of Alabama, Auburn, Florida State, Tulane, LSU, Duke, North Carolina, Le-Moyne-Owen, and Memphis State.[20]

Students faced ostracism for their activism on southern campuses and in southern communities.[21] The conservatism that prevailed in the South made it difficult for

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14 Southern Student Organizing Committee, "We'll Take Our Stand," April 1964, Samuel Shirah Papers, Box 1, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison.

15 Gregg Michel, *Struggle for a Better South*, 1.

16 Ibid., 4.

17 Ibid., 5.

18 Southern Student Organizing Committee, "A Resolution Concerning SDS's Role," Samuel Shirah Papers, Box 1, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison.

19 Jeffrey Turner, *Sitting in and Speaking Out*, 299.

20 These were just some of the southern schools who had SDS chapters- recognized or not. In Tennessee, one of the earliest SDS chapters to be recognized was at the University of the South in Sewanee, TN in 1964-65. Sale, *SDS*, 530.

21 Michel, *Struggle for a Better South*, 40.

potential SDS and SSOC members. Various letters to the Students for a Democratic Society discuss fear among students. In a letter to Don McKelvey, Assistant National Secretary of the SDS, in 1963, Andrea Jones, a student in Birmingham, Alabama, indicated that there would be serious repercussions if people knew of her association with the group.[22] The sentiments of Jones were echoed in a letter by George Gills, a student at University of Southern Mississippi to the national SDS. Gills, paranoid that it would be revealed he was a member, addressed the possibilities of mail censorship.[23] Those belonging in SSOC risked losing friends, estrangement from family and expulsion from university.[24] In Texas, the parents of one activist "had her institutionalized and given electric shock treatments."[25] After Memphis State student Mary Ann McClure's name appeared on the front page of the *Commercial Appeal* for involvement in voter registration in Somerville, Tennessee, her activism shamed her father. She said, "I saw him cry, because he thought I was a communist."[26] Ostracized on their respective campuses, southern student activists paid a heavy burden for their dissent.

Despite the difficulty of organizing SDS chapters in the South, an energetic chapter of the Students for a Democratic Society committed to civil rights and opposition to the war formed in Memphis in 1968. The chapter was named in honor of Larry Payne, an African American youth killed by the Memphis Police Department in the aftermath of

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[22] Andrea Jones to Don McKelvey, 14 December 1963, Students for a Democratic Society Records, Box 10, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison.

[23] George Gills to Students for a Democratic Society, undated, Students for a Democratic Society Records, Box 10, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison.

[24] Michel, *Struggle for a Better South*, 3.

[25] Rossinow, *The Politics of Authenticity,* 172.

[26] Mary Ann McClure, interview by author.

the Beale Street incident. The local chapter boasted a membership as high as eighty members.[27] In a city which seethed with racial tension for nearly a century, the Memphis SDS was strongly committed to the civil rights movement. SDS members also took an active interest in the demonstrations by black students at MSU in 1969.

One of the Memphis SDS members was Bob Rutman. A native of New York, Rutman first became acquainted with the SDS after seeing a young man in the Memphis State student center nearly beaten up for playing Nathan Joe and Bob Dylan protest songs. Rutman, an advocate of free speech, entered a different culture. Exposed to confederate flags and racist remarks at Memphis State football games, Rutman declared, "Memphis was a culture of people who deferred to authority, deferred to age, and also deferred to a culture of compliance."[28] According to Rutman, this meant not discussing race relations and avoiding anti-war rhetoric. Despite a culture different from the one he grew up in, he found people in Memphis who shared similar beliefs.

The Memphis SDS of 1968 had ten to fifteen regular members. The group consisted of professors and students of all political persuasions ranging from Republican to Marxist.[29] There were a few African Americans, women, Vietnam veterans, and Southwestern students who participated in the group. Rutman gravitated towards students not only from the northeast, but native Memphians and others from neighboring Mississippi and Arkansas coming together to fight racism and protest the war. Rutman

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[27] Ibid. Membership of the SDS was very informal. Most of these were not active in the organization. The high number accounted for those who expressed a curiosity about the organization.

[28] Bob Rutman interview by author.

[29] Jim Gaylord, interview by author.

had no intention of becoming a rabble rouser. He respected southern students and deferred to them.[30]

The Memphis SDS was influenced by SSOC. The Memphis SDS went to SSOC meetings and forums at Vanderbilt University. Although never official SSOC members, the Memphis SDS was more a "loose collection" that appreciated SSOC writings, mailings, and surveys, along with assistance related to teach-ins on the war.[31] The SSOC spoke to the sensibilities of Memphis State students. The SSOC meetings allowed the Memphis SDS to share ideas and strategies of how to effectively involve southern students in the cause. The fraternal relationship with the SSOC allowed SDS to spread its influence in the South. The Memphis SDS shared ideas with students from the University of Mississippi, Mississippi State, University of Arkansas, University of Tennessee, the University of Georgia, University of North Carolina, and University of South Carolina**.**

The Memphis SDS met at a catfish restaurant in Whitehaven. In what he called, "cornbread, catfish, and student activism," Rutman remembered the all- you-can- eat catfish on Friday nights, accompanied by the group's discussion about civil rights and the Vietnam War. He said, "After class we'd all get together. Hop in somebody's car and head down. There would be a whole bunch of state highway patrol people and other patrons. It was a little tense."[32] The appearance of the SDS members – longer hair,

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[30] Bob Rutman, interview by author.

[31] Ibid.; The earliest SSOC activity at Memphis State appeared in 1966 as activists "distributed the SDS exam to test takers and organized demonstrations against the war." Sale, *SDS*, 114.

[32] Bob Rutman, interview by author.

different dress than the young fraternity and sorority members—led to the tense atmosphere.[33]

Another member of the Memphis SDS was Jim Gaylord, a twenty-eight year old student majoring in business administration at Memphis State University. Gaylord worked in Vietnam in 1966 as a civilian employee of the Department of the Army. While in Vietnam, his views on the war changed from support to rejection. After his return to Memphis, Gaylord worked in the IRS collection office. In October 1968, an anti-war rally was held outside Memphis's downtown Federal Building, where Gaylord worked. As he left the building following a day's work, Gaylord was approached by the organizers of the rally and asked to say a few words concerning Vietnam. Gaylord introduced antiwar speakers and called for 100 Memphians to protest the war legally. Typically, more radical SDS chapters believed in protesting the war by any means necessary, not just legal means.[34] Since he was dressed in business attire, Gaylord was approached by reporters of the *Commercial Appeal* and *Memphis Press Scimitar* after the rally.[35] The articles portrayed Gaylord as the leader of the Memphis SDS, a title the activist did not dispute at the time. In reality, he was not the leader. He declared, "I was never the leader. I had not been chosen by other SDSers as the leader. If I had been smart enough to know how dangerous it was to be classified as a leader of the SDS, I would not

[33] Ibid.

[34] "IRS Studies Employees Role in Anti-War Demonstration," *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, 24 October 1968.

[35] Jim Gaylord, interview by author.

have gotten involved."[36] In fact, some of the more radical members thought that Gaylord was an undercover agent.

The Memphis SDS chapter was not as radical as other chapters. Gaylord said that most of the Memphis SDS members disapproved of the revolutionary tactics of the SDS at Columbia University. Although other SDS chapter members were commonly linked to communists as a means to discredit them, Gaylord suggested, "I don't know of any advocates of communism in our chapter. We don't like the lack of freedoms present in Russia any more than anyone else." While the Memphis SDS wanted to reform the American system, they had no intentions of destroying it.[37]

The anti-war views of the SDS troubled Memphians. In October 1968, Mayor Henry Loeb was invited to a war moratorium in Memphis. He refused the invitation by the Memphis Intercity Student Government Association, a group with a similar viewpoint on the Vietnam War as SDS, and confirmed that "our country is involved as are our soldiers, and we should back them to the hilt." Loeb's hawkish stance became evident when he declared, "It is my feeling, without disrespect to your efforts, that what you and others are doing is inadvertently prolonging the war and the trials of our men overseas." At the same time Loeb declined the invitation, he proudly supported Vietnam Veterans night.[38]

As early as the summer of 1968, the *Memphis Press Scimitar*, reacting to the more radical SDS chapters at Berkeley, Columbia, and Wisconsin-Madison, warned that higher

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[36] Ibid.

[37] "IRS Employee Defends His SDS Role," *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, 21 November 1968. *The Commercial Appea*l mentioned that the local SDS supported city hospital strikes and established rapport with the Black Student Association at MSU.

[38] "Loeb Supports Vietnam Veterans," *Memphis Press Scimitar*, 14 October 1968.

education was in danger. An editorial on June 12, 1968, declared that "there is nothing enlightening or constructive about what these students do. They seize on any convenient grip to start a ruckus. They make impossible demands on university administrators. Some things they ask may be legitimate . . . but their purpose is to disrupt." In order to deal with the problem, "stern and academic leadership was needed to combat it."

Even though he exuded stern and strong leadership at Memphis State University, President Cecil Humphreys did not play an active role in whether or not the SDS would be officially recognized as a campus organization. It was a student concern.[39] Humphreys encouraged independent thinkers on his campus as long as student opinions did not infringe on the rights of others. The case would be presented to Chip Coscia, Student Government President, and members of the Student Senate. Embracing the mantras "MY Country Right or Wrong, My Country" and "anything but a leftist," Coscia viewed the SDS as an organization that shared similar views to those of communists. Coscia declared, "I was definitely against communism at that time."[40]

The Memphis SDS faced the challenge of presenting itself as less radical than Berkeley, Wisconsin, and Columbia, but at the same time maintaining the organization's principles and goals. In December 1968, under the "leadership" of Jim Gaylord, the SDS wanted to be recognized as a legitimate organization at MSU. In a ninety-minute presentation, both Gaylord and SDS officer Bob Rutman provided a brief overview of the history of the organization. Rutman explained that SDS opposed the war in Vietnam and supported the civil rights movement. The purpose of the MSU chapter would be to

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[39] "Campus Agitators," *Memphis Press Scimitar*, 12 June 1968.

[40] Chip Coscia, interview by Jack Lorenzini, Memphis, Tennessee, 14 November 2011.

"represent leftist thought on political and social issues and serve to educate the student body on these issues." Essentially, these SDS members believed that it was fundamental for college students to think critically and "criticize society." Gaylord and Rutman distanced their organization from other radical chapters of the SDS, saying that there was "no validity to a comparison between the MSU chapter and the actions of SDS chapters at Columbia and San Francisco State." When asked by Senate members and Student Government President Chip Coscia if the SDS would bring violence, Rutman asserted that "the SDS was not posing the threat of disorder to MSU, but instead was trying to work through the administration." After the presentation, members of the Student Senate decided that they would vote on a charter for the SDS by Wednesday December 17th.[41]

Prior to the important vote, some Student Government members expressed support for granting a charter to the SDS. Coscia asserted, "Chartering, as I see it, is recognition of existence, not approval . . . There is no reason to deny a group a charter because our system presupposes innocence before guilt is proven." Judy Barlow, Women's President of the SGA, believed that if the SDS met the proper procedures for chartering, than they should be accepted as an official organization, regardless of SDS objectives.[42]

But on December 17, 1968, the Student Senate denied a charter to the Students for a Democratic Society by a 14 to 9 vote. The SGA charter vote prompted Gaylord to declare, "We didn't reject the system, the system rejected us." Rutman acknowledged that the SDS did not really need a charter. He declared, "We wanted to go through the

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[41] "SGA May Impeach Absentee, To Vote on SDS Next Week," *Tiger Rag*, 13 December 1968.

[42] "SGA Prepares For Senate Showdown," *Tiger Rag*, 17 December 1968.

motions to show people that we were trying to do the right thing. We are good Memphis State University students. We did not want to be seen as radical and what we were trying to do more than anything was to get the message out."[43] The SDS at MSU could have been more forceful in demanding a charter, but they accepted the decision and went back to the Westminster House along with two supporters from the SGA. Faced with adversity, the defeated SDS did nothing to come up with an alternative plan.[44] The Memphis SDS ignored the charter issue and continued to participate in anti-war and civil rights activities.

Even though it was a student issue, the news of SDS's failure to obtain a charter at MSU was likely greeted with excitement by Cecil Humphreys. The university president believed that the "SDS is made up of young people who really are taking advantage of the idealism of many of the young people to try to bring about a state of chaos." For Humphreys, the campus was a place of logic, not violence. He understood that the university was "created for the give and take of discussion, for thoughts, and for ideas . . . force is foreign to universities." Humphreys's opinion was similar to those of other college presidents.[45]

Humphreys did not want to influence the vote but he no doubt wanted to keep a watchful eye of the situation. In a speech given a year later to the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools on December 3, 1969, he maintained that SDS was one of the real radical groups that were "nihilist, anarchist, and bent upon destruction of existing

[43] Bob Rutman, interview by author.

[44] "SDS Denied SGA Charter in 14-9 Decision," *Tiger* Rag, 20 December 1968.

[45] "Force Decried by Humphreys," *Memphis Press* Scimitar, 8 May 1969.

institutions. They say that nothing in our society is worth saving—there must be total destruction… in order that a completely new start can be made for a perfect society." Humphreys was aware of the tense situations erupting on college campuses. In the first six months of 1969, there were over 300 disturbances on college campuses in which "20% were accompanied by bombs, fires, or destruction of property."[46] Humphreys viewed SDS as a threat to the order and the stability of the university. He believed that student activism was a growing epidemic on college campuses. He encouraged other administrators to rise to the challenge in order to deal with it effectively.[47]

After the charter failed, there was little reaction amongst the student population. Although more than fifty students attended the special session, far more students were interested in the Louisville-MSU basketball game.[48] A disappointed Judy Barlow, Women's President of SGA, alleged that "Memphis State University took a giant step backward . . . a grave injustice has been done, not only to the members of the SDS but to all the students of Memphis State." Barlow maintained that it was troublesome for students to be denied the right to hear from alternative viewpoints and equally troubling to be denied "the right to assemble, the right to dissent." If students are denied the right to think critically and to criticize, she asked, how could the university best serve the needs of the student effectively?[49]

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[46] Sale, *SDS,* 512.

[47] Speech by C.C. Humphreys to the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (December 3, 1969), University of Memphis Special Collections, Memphis.

[48] Sorrels, *The Exciting Years,* 170.

[49] "SDS Defended," *Tiger Rag*, 20 December 1968.

For all the attention that the radicals received, nationwide, only 2% of students were active in protesting. The majority of students were concerned with their own academic and social pursuits.[50] Memphis State students were more concerned for their futures, post-graduation. Coscia stated, "I believe most students being from the middle class tried to better themselves by college attendance and maybe raise their family up as certainly I was trying to do, and that was their primary interest and motivation."[51] Even when students had the right to vote on campus issues, they failed to do so. The editors of *Desoto*, the yearbook of MSU, spoke out against apathy, declaring that when "the student does not exercise his right to vote, he is negligent in his duties as a member of campus society."[52] But MSU was largely a commuter school of over 15,000 students in 1968, where students appeared to be more concerned about academics, jobs, and extra-curricular activities. A number of students came from working class families; jobs were the main priority**.** Moreover, in the late 1960s, male students faced being drafted for the Vietnam War. Some protested and appealed to draft boards. Other students belonged to the ROTC and detested political protestors.

In 1969, one of the letters to the editor in the campus newspaper infuriated students. The letter was entitled "Bumper Stickers Displeasing." Shiela Whitney, Memphis State student, complained about bumper stickers that said "America love it? Then Liberate It." Whitney mentioned that hippies came up to her asking if she would want to buy one for thirty cents. She thought it was ironic that hippies were making

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[50] "Only 2 pct. Of College Students Are Found to be Active Leftists," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 12 February 1968. Cecil Humphreys Collection, Box 4, Special Collections, University of Memphis, Memphis. Richard Peterson, psychologist of the Education Testing Service (ETS) analyzed the number of student activists in the late 1960s.

[51] Chip Coscia, interview by author.

[52] *Desoto* '68, volume 56 (Memphis State University, Memphis), 202.

money off of leftist, communist-sounding bumper stickers. From this single letter to the editor, a number of response letters to the editor arrived at the *Tiger Rag*. Some students wanted to purchase the bumper stickers, while others believed that one "could make it [America] better for future generations, even this generation" by liberating it. An editorial remark in *The Tiger Rag* lamented that "it is unfortunate that students at Memphis State University get more upset over the issue of bumper stickers than racial problems, poverty, marijuana, Students for a Democratic Society and the Vietnam War." The *Tiger Rag* complained that students at Memphis often got upset over insignificant matters, choosing issues because "it is safe."[53]

It was not often that students publicly expressed their distaste for the SDS. However, MSU student Anita Reinhardt attacked the SDS in an article in *The Tiger Rag* entitled, "Non-Creditable History." She asserted that "SDS strategy calls for pouncing on any issue that will excite students. They would lead people to believe that they alone are concerned with the ills of society and that none of us who oppose their tactics are working for reform." Reinhardt claimed that she never saw any members of the SDS "working in tutoring programs for ghetto children, nor has (she) seen them offer constructive solutions to the problems." Jim Gaylord responded to Reinhardt's statements in a letter to the editor on March 14, 1969. Gaylord declared that the SDS was "deeply involved in the Teacher Corp, VISTA, the Peace Corps, and spearheaded action in the Mississippi Delta shedding much of their own blood to help black Mississippians obtain voting rights." At the end of his letter, Gaylord alluded to Reinhardt's assertion that the

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[53] Women's President Judy Barlow and Senator Jan Rutherford accompanied the SDS back to the Westminster House. "More Sticker Complaints," *Tiger Rag*, 12 February 1969; *Tiger Rag*, 14 February 1969.

SDS does not provide solutions to problems. He acknowledged that the SDS at least realized the problems that existed in the society. He believed that once problems are discovered, then solutions could begin.[54]

The Memphis SDS centered their attention on civil rights issues in the spring of 1969**.** The SDS joined with the Black Student Association in solidarity over the sit-in. After the arrest of the students, Gaylord and others held a "Free Speech Rally." The rally was attended by 300 students, most of them white. At this rally, Gaylord agreed with Dr. Miriam Sugarmon, the first African American faculty member, and asked for the elimination of racial discrimination at MSU, equal opportunity in employment, and a coordinator of black student affairs.[55]

As Memphis SDS lent support to the Black Student Sit-In, the national SDS severed its fraternal relationship with SSOC in the spring of 1969 over what they termed the "bourgeois liberalism and southern exceptionalism of the SSOC."[56] Members complained that the SSOC was not radical enough. While SDS members were trying to build a revolutionary movement, the SDS acknowledged: "We can never make a revolution with only ¾ of a country. We who have built the first SDS chapters in the deep South have discovered that the same political ideas and organizing techniques that have built movements in the North and West will, if carried out consistently on a long range

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[54] "SDS Three Views Non-Creditable History," *Tiger Rag*, 8 March 1969; "Views on SDS Challenged," *Tiger Rag*, 14 March 1969. It was reported that the federal government fired Gaylord from his IRS job subsequent to their discovery of his SDS leadership. "Man Who Protested is Fired," *Memphis Press Scimitar*, 2 April 1969. Gaylord planned to appeal the firing. "IRS Fires Gaylord," *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, 3 April 1969 According to Jim Gaylord, he resigned from his job. He was dissatisfied working for the Federal Government.

[55] "MSU Free Speech Rally..," *Memphis Press Scimitar*, 29 April 1969. There were also students who were hecklers present.

[56] Students for a Democratic Society, "Build SDS in the South," April 1969, Box 45, Social Action Vertical Files, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison.

basis, build rooted movements in the South."[57] If true revolution was to come, SDS chapters needed to build a more solid foundation in the region.[58] The SDS and SSOC divided most sharply over issues of race. The SDS, which aimed at attacking racism and imperialism, believed "SSOC's use of the confederate flag to symbolize the rebelliousness of the South is offensive to all blacks and anyone opposed to racism."[59] Two months after this indictment, the SSOC disbanded on June 8, 1969. The SSOC was decentralized and relied too heavily on southern distinctiveness. Its commitment to black equality was questioned.[60]

Moreover, SDS grappled with increasing divisions within its own ranks over strategy and tactics in June 1969. At the national convention in Chicago, an SDS coalition of the Revolutionary Youth Movement I, which supported Third World Struggles, and Revolutionary Youth Movement II, which supported working class youth, expelled the Progressive Labor Party. In the expulsion statement, SDS reaffirmed its position. SDS supported nationalism of colonies and those combating U.S. imperialism.[61] SDS criticized PL for not lending support to struggles abroad and charged it with attacks on "Ho Chi Minh, the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam and the revolutionary government of Cuba."[62] At the convention, the SDS coalition attacked PL for its racism,

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[57] Ibid.

[58] Ibid.

[59] Ibid.

[60] Michel, *Struggle for a Better South,* 197, 223-225.

[61] SDS National Convention, "Expulsion Statement," June 1969, Students for a Democratic Society Records, Box 50, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison.

[62] Ibid.

anti-communism, and failure to attack male chauvinism.[63] According to the SDS, it was imperative for Americans to learn about the anti-imperialist movement if a revolution was to take place.[64] Since 1966, SDS was challenged by the Black Power movement to combat racism at all levels. At the convention, Black Panther Minister of Defense Bobby Rush declared, "We will judge SDS by the company it keeps."[65] Valuing its alliance with the emerging Black Power movement, the SDS removed PL from its organization. From the convention came two national offices, SDS with its headquarters in Chicago, and PL centered in Boston. From the Revolutionary Youth Movement spawned the Weathermen, a group of devoted radicals intent on using any means necessary to combat society's problems.

Over a year had passed since the tumultuous anti-war protests that erupted during the August 1968 DNC convention in Chicago. Undeterred by the resulting police violence and public backlash, SDS planned to take the war onto the streets of Chicago in October 1969. The SDS announced, "The war is on—a war against imperialism, racism and oppression."[66] SDS urged a work stoppage "to express solidarity with working people all around the world;" it "demanded release of all political prisoners" and conveyed "solidarity with the Conspiracy 8," whose trial was to coincide with SDS action.[67] In what became "Days of Rage," the Weathermen introduced themselves to the

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[63] Ibid.

[64] Students for a Democratic Society to Members, 23 June 1969, Students for a Democratic Society Records, Box 47, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison.

[65] Ibid.

[66] Students for a Democratic Society, "The Second Battle of Chicago," 1969, Students for a Democratic Society Records, Box 47, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison.

[67] Ibid.

public for the first time by blowing up a police statue commemorating the Haymarket Massacre of 1886. In a statement, the Weathermen maintained, "We came to Chicago to join the other side—to stop talking and start fighting with the VC, the Pathet Lao in Laos, the Tupamaros in Uruguay, and the black liberation struggle. We came to do material damage to pig America and all that it's about, its schools, jails, its pig armies, its fat businessmen and its greedy empire."[68] During the four days of rage, 600 participated and 287 were arrested.[69] Jeremy Varon maintained, "Days of Rage exemplified hazards of action: alienate potential supporters and turn activism into a contest of personal dedication tending toward self-destruction."[70] While few in number, the Weatherman demonstrated the radically altered New Left.

There was no one model for how the New Left should operate. All its factions claimed to be authentic agents of change.[71] After the split, many SDS chapters maintained their autonomy and independence from the national organization. In fact, in 1969, the Fayetteville, Arkansas, SDS charged, "We do not feel that either bureaucratic Stalinist group represents the politics of our chapter. All power to the people. No power to the Stalinists."[72]A member of the Penn State SDS, Jim Blythe remembered, "At Penn State, there was I think one person who was connected with PL and maybe after that there was maybe one sympathizer of RYMI. But they didn't represent us at all really…

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[68] SDS Weatherman, "Chicago '69," 1969, Students for a Democratic Society Records, Box 43, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison.

[69] Varon, *Bringing The War Home,* 82.

[70] Ibid., 75.

[71] Ibid.

[72] Sale, *SDS*, 616.

The national office would send us all of these strange things like: ALL SDS chapters must immediately swear allegiance to Albania and things like that. Who are these crazy people? We were the same SDS we always were."[73] The Memphis SDS, as a whole, did not label itself one way or the other. There were only a few who were Progressive Labor sympathizers in the Memphis SDS. They took to the airwaves to discuss draft resistance.[74]

By 1969, with SDS's continued focus on the plight of working poor and minorities, women members of the Memphis State SDS believed that women's issues deserved an equal focus. SDS members such as Phyllis Depriest demanded that the group hold elections. Depriest explained, "There was no one incident that caused us to demand elections. It was more or less a general and growing awareness that our opinions were being dismissed as frivolous."[75] Male members of the organization agreed to hold elections. In 1969, Karen Stuart was elected acting president of the Memphis State SDS. Stuart remembered what male members said to her. They said, "We're going to make you acting president so you can get the mail."[76] After the election, some of the male members stopped attending group meetings. Depriest believed that the rift hindered the group's survival.[77]

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[73]Jim Blythe, interview by Jack Lorenzini, Memphis, Tennessee, 13 October 2011.

[74] Mary Ann McClure, interview by author.

[75] Phyllis Depriest, interview by Jack Lorenzini, Memphis, Tennessee, 10 April 2013.

[76] "Kent State, A Memory," *Memphis Commercial Appeal,* 27 April 1980. Stuart admitted that getting the mail was the only task that she did as president of the SDS.

[77] Phyllis Depriest, interview by author.

One of the members who belonged to the Memphis State SDS in 1969 was Mary Ann McClure. A Philosophy major at Memphis State, McClure first became acquainted with the Memphis SDS in the fall. She started going to meetings at the Westminster House, which offered a safe haven for divergent student views. In fact, Reverend Dick Moon made it a point to communicate with students of the New Left.[78] His support for SDS drew criticism from Memphians; they distributed a pamphlet entitled, "*Is the Moon on Patterson Red*?" His support for the New Left eventually led to his dismissal from Memphis State. Financial support for the Westminster House came from local churches. Because of the local churches' distaste for Rev. Moon's political activities, financial support was withdrawn.[79] McClure estimated there were a dozen or more SDS members at the meetings. Her involvement with the SDS allowed for her to associate with other students committed to change. On her involvement, "It served for me, I'm sure, a social function. I am very satisfied or happy to have a group that I belonged to and I identified with."[80] While in the SDS, she participated in civil rights activism and the anti-war movement.

As early as McClure can remember, there was an awareness of race. "My father was clearly racist. My mother not so racist because she had experienced some prejudice herself growing up Greek in Memphis."[81] A teenager growing up during the emerging

[78] Reverend Richard Moon, interview.

[79] Ted Carter, interview by author. As a member of the pulpit committee, Ted Carter was responsible for choosing the successor to Reverend Moon. Reverend Henry Acklen became the new Westminster House chaplain. Reverend Moon left Memphis State and worked with the Tennessee Council on Human Relations.

[80] Ibid.

[81] Mary Ann McClure, interview by author.

civil rights movement of the 1950s, she remembered finding Ku Klux Klan material in her father's pant pockets. A 1962 graduate of Messick High School in Memphis, McClure later participated in civil rights activities like the voter registration effort in Somerville, Tennessee. Tenant farmers who attempted to register to vote were thrown off their property. Local people organized a boycott of merchants in Somerville and continued protesting. McClure joined other students organized out of Westminster House by Reverend Richard Moon. Students carried signs in protest. As a result, McClure was arrested and spent three days in jail.

McClure also participated in anti-war activism. She recalls, "We would go down to the courthouse and read out the names of soldiers who had died."[82] Her activism gained the attention of the Memphis police and the FBI. McClure maintained that police and FBI came up to her, questioned which classes she enrolled in at Memphis State, and kept a close eye on her. In May of 1968, following the takeover of Columbia, the FBI introduced a COINTELPRO program against the New Left, with the aim of disrupting the activities of the "subversive" SDS and also finding ways to discredit the activists.[83] Like McClure, Gaylord was followed by the FBI. In 1968, the organization sent Gaylord's parents and wife a picture of him and Minerva Johnican together, claiming the two were in an interracial relationship.[84] Some Memphians ridiculed the activists. One told McClure to "take a bath." Not surprised, she declared, "of course it was very easy to

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[82] Mary Ann McClure, interview by author.

[83] David Cunningham, *There's Something Happening Here: The New Left, The Klan, and FBI Counterintelligence* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 33,103.

[84] Jim Gaylord, interview by author. In 1968, Gaylord ran for the Shelby County Democratic Executive Committee. He served as an alternate to Minerva Johnican. A very active and successful politician, Johnican later ran for mayor. She was the first African American woman to run for mayor. Gaylord also received threatening phone calls from the Memphis Police.

get a lot of attention in Memphis, Tennessee, as a radical, revolutionary because there was so few of us."[85]

The local SDS received the attention of the Memphis Police Department (MPD), who used an undercover police agent to infiltrate group meetings. In fact, it was believed that one-fourth of those who attended the meetings were undercover agents of one group or another, ranging from the Memphis Police Department to the Tennessee Bureau of Investigation to the FBI.[86] The undercover agent from the MPD was Murrell McCullough, an African American. As typical with other SDS chapters, there were few African Americans who participated in SDS. Referring to him as the "token black," McClure mentioned that McCullough "had a reputation for sleeping with a lot of the women who were involved in political activism." Three to four years later, after her activism, McClure found out that McCullough worked for the Memphis Police Department. Feeling betrayed, McClure declared that the Memphis SDS "was a victim of its own white liberalism or that it should have been smart to realize that there weren't that many other blacks that had hung out."[87]

In the spring of 1970, the SDS tried again to gain official recognition from the university. One student SDS sympathizer suggested that the "SDS has no real need for a charter because if they want to use University facilities they can have another organization request the facilities." It was believed that even if a charter was granted, the "student group will wilt away." There was a legitimate indication that the SDS might be

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[85] Ibid.

[86] Jim Gaylord, interview by author.

[87] Ibid.

granted a charter by the student senate. Senator Bill Ross acknowledged that a more liberal student senate than in years past could vote in favor of the SDS charter.[88] New SGA president John Ridgeway believed, however, that the administration would nullify an approved charter by the student senate. The 1968 attempt to get a charter rested only on the authority of the student senate. By 1970 the proposed charter not only needed a two-thirds majority of senate membership to pass, but also needed the approval of the administration. In the spring of 1969, President Cecil Humphreys charged the SDS with causing chaos. As a result of the radical activity and the recent black student sit-in, a declaration in the Student Code of Conduct "prohibited unauthorized occupancy of university facilities or blocking access to or from such areas."[89]

On April 29, 1970, the day of decision arrived. The twelve SDS members who signed their names on the constitution were once again denied, despite support from a majority of senators. The senators voted in favor of the charter 13-11, but eighteen votes were required for the charter to be approved. Part of the reason for the failure of the SDS to obtain the necessary votes lay in the construction of their constitution. Robin Hadaway, the administrative vice president of the SGA, said "this is one of the worst constitutions that I have ever seen… There are no bylaws and you can change your constitution by a simple majority." Gaylord argued that the SDS constitution was very general because typically charters proposed to the SGA were of a general nature. Another SDS member, Ted Carter, admitted that "the charter was hastily written. It was written in

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[88] The student group was unlike some of the members of other SDS chapters. This SDS group did not contain many if any long haired members or radical looking people. "SDS Tries For Charter on Campus," *Tiger Rag*, 28 April 1970.

[89] Sherman, Bond, and Breland, *Dreamers, Thinkers, Doers*, 64.

15 minutes when we learned we still had time in this semester to get a charter." The hastily written charter demonstrated the chapter's eagerness to be a recognized organization, but it ultimately doomed their effort.[90]

Others were vehemently opposed to the SDS. David Doten, a student at the School of Law, noted that the 1964 SDS handbook declared that "the SDS (at MSU) would have to have the approval from the national SDS before seeking a charter at the university." Doten believed that the national SDS, with headquarters in Boston, sought to "turn campuses into battlegrounds." This statement demonstrated that opponents of the SDS made no differentiation between the local SDS and the national organization. Due to the decentralization of the national organization, many SDS chapters across the nation were autonomous and did not necessarily abide by the philosophy of either the RYM or Weatherman. The "unofficial" MSU chapter could not convince its opponents that it was autonomous from the national organization. This stigma resulted in what acting SDS president Karen Stuart declared the reason behind why the "senators were afraid to grant the charter."[91] Despite charter failure, the Memphis SDS was able to bring Michael Harrington, author of *The Other America*, as a speaker. Harrington's work addressed poverty in America. According to McClure, the university's decision to allow Harrington to come to campus signified that the Memphis SDS received "some kind of recognition, some kind of status."[92] In other words, the Memphis SDS received small-scale validation from the university community.

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[90] "Second Attempt Falls at SDS Chartering, Vote Short By Three," *Tiger Rag*, 1 May 1970.

[91] Ibid.

[92] Mary Ann McClure, interview by author.

Days after their defeat, national tragedy struck at Kent State University, as national guardsmen killed four students and wounded nine others. The shootings, coupled with President Nixon's recent announcement of the invasion of Cambodia a day earlier, led to widespread campus unrest throughout the nation. In their last hurrah, on May 5, 1970, a crowd composed of SDS, its sympathizers, and the Revolutionary Marxist Caucus gathered at the MSU flagpole in front of the administration building to lower the flag in honor of the victims at Kent State. SDS member Phyllis Depriest recalled, "Our impression was that it was no longer enough to vilify and jail us, now they were killing us."[93] As they attempted to lower the flag, they were met by a group of conservative students who fought to keep the flag at full mast. During the encounter, President Humphreys intervened and told the crowd how former Memphis State students fought and died during the Second World War for their country. In the ten-year commemoration of the flag pole incident, Humphreys declared: "I took the position that even if there had been bad national decisions, the flag was a symbol of not just a present set of national policies. It was still the same flag that former students had given their lives for."[94] The administration reached a compromise with those students demanding that the flag be lowered. In an hour long memorial students for the Kent State victims, the flag was flown at half-staff. Following the ceremony, the flag was raised.[95] Although many college campuses closed in response to the unrest of 1970, Memphis State remained open.

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[93] Phyllis Depriest, interview by author.

[94] "Kent State, A Memory," *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, 27 April 1980.

[95] Ibid.

Humphreys believed that if the university shut down, it would "infringe" on the students' rights to attend class.[96]

The editors of *Desoto*, the MSU yearbook, believed that the events of May 5 provided an important lesson to students. With a compromise methodically crafted by Humphreys, neither group of students had to give up their principles. The editors remembered the events of the spring of 1970:

> Those students who chose to go to class cheated themselves; those students who attended the demonstration but did not actively participate at least showed their concern for fellow students at Memphis State, and those students who joined in voicing their opinions graduated from the class of the silent majority, 1970.[97]

Thus, the campus largely consisted of the "silent majority," comprised of students who either supported the conservative policies of the government and the Vietnam War or resented the radical ideas of groups like the SDS.

The students at Memphis State University also reacted to the mid-May 1970 Jackson State College shootings, which left Philip Gibbs and James Earl Green dead and eleven others wounded. Mary Ann McClure explained, "I think there was a feeling that Jackson State was so close . . . something that was kind of in our neighborhood….The fact that black students had been shot down and the fact that there was so little national coverage made us feel that we had a responsibility to do something."[98] In response to the tragedy, over 100 students marched across campus with the intention of closing Memphis State as they chanted, 'Strike, strike, shut it down." Some faculty encouraged students to do what they felt was right; whereas, as chants of "strike, strike and 1,2,3,4, we don't

[96] "At MSU…," *Memphis Statesman,* 13 May 1970.

[97] *Desoto* '71, v. 59 (Memphis State University, Memphis), 27.

[98] "Strikers March Into Classes Ask Students to Join Boycott," *Tiger Rag*, 19 May 1970; Mary Ann McClure, interview by author.

want your fucking war'" were heard in classrooms, a music professor pushed one student.[99]

The MSU SDS went through the proper channels to obtain a charter. They did not force their opinions on the student body. They did not support violent activities in order to convey their message. Members supported city hospital strikes and aligned themselves with the Black Student Organization at MSU. The saga at MSU was a sign of the times. The SDS represented an alternative opinion to political issues; however, in the conservative atmosphere of MSU and the city of Memphis, they were not effective as an organization. Another problem of the SDS in Memphis was its inability to define itself. It was constantly haunted by the actions of the more radical SDS groups.

The story of MSU SDS also revealed the difficulty of sustaining a viable chapter. Most students had other priorities. They were concerned about their education, their social life, their jobs, their families—political activism on campus was peripheral. In fact, in 1971, a Memphis State graduate student attempted to measure the attitudes of students. James Scott Fry posed a number of questions to 1,930 Memphis State students. One question asked was "How extensively in the past year have you been involved in the activities of student government organizations?" His study revealed that nearly 85% of the students surveyed were not involved at all in any organization, while only 1.5% were involved in three or more organizations. But, when he asked students on whether or not they followed varsity and intramural athletics, he found that approximately 62% followed the news fairly or very closely.[100] Memphis State students more typically embraced the

[99] "Strikers March Into Classes Ask Students to Join Boycott," *Tiger Rag*, 19 May 1970.

[100] James Scott Fry, "A Study of Negro and Caucasian Undergraduate Students' Attitudes Toward Selected Components of University Environment (M.A. Thesis., Memphis State University, 1971), 74, 94.

culture of fraternities, sororities and sports. The SDS chapters at Berkeley and Wisconsin benefited from students who were more involved in the political happenings of the time. Essentially, MSU, nestled in a conservative community, was shielded from actions that existed at Columbia and Berkeley, areas where leftist thought thrived.

With leftist groups like the SDS, some students found an outlet to express themselves politically. The main challenge of the college administrator in the 1960s was to keep the peace and not cater to the demands of the small percentage of politically active students. At a time where administrations failed to control the student body at Wisconsin or Columbia, the MSU administration succeeded in keeping an orderly campus environment. The firmness of the administration affected the Memphis SDS's ability to organize and gain a significant following.

The greatest legacy of the national SDS was that "it shaped a generation, revived an American left, transformed political possibilities and opened the way to changes in the national life that would have not been unthought of in the fifties."[101] At Memphis State, the SDS provided an opportunity for likeminded students to gather. As McClure recalled, "We provided a meeting place, a focal point for students, who had liberal to leftist, social to political concerns…It did allow a place like Memphis, Tennessee, an opportunity for those who were concerned and not so conservative to have an outreach."[102] Moreover, the achievement of the Memphis SDS was its ability to spread a message and embrace free speech. Rutman declared, "Success was trying to fulfill the promise of being students but

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[101]Sale, *SDS*, 657.

[102] Mary Ann McClure, interview by author.

good Americans...We weren't saying that people weren't being good Americans, but we wanted to open up free speech on campus."[103]

On the other hand, the Memphis SDS suffered due to a number of factors. One constraint was the unique campus culture. Referring to the conservative climate of the city of Memphis and the university, Gaylord placed blame on the suppression of freedoms at Memphis State University. He declared, "Being in a country that claimed to have free speech, freedom of thought and so forth; that was obviously bullshit." [104] Rutman added, "Memphis State was a working class university. They came from families that they were just fortunate enough to go to a university, probably first generation college students a lot of them. These are not students who protest and demonstrate. These were students who were there who were grateful, who would acknowledge authority, and they were coming also out of strong Christian or evangelistic backgrounds."[105] McClure noted the main failure of Memphis SDS was its exclusionism. "I am not sure how interested we really were in talking to the more conservative students and really bringing them along. We were young and self-righteous and full of the joys of being revolutionary… We weren't really that savvy probably in talking to people that didn't share our views."[106]

Much like the history of the national organization, the history of the Memphis SDS is complex. Even though it was never as radical as Berkeley, Kent State, or Columbia, the most important revelation is that it demonstrates that Memphis State was

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[103] Mary Ann McClure interview by author; Bob Rutman, interview by author.

[104]Jim Gaylord, interview by author.

[105] Bob Rutman, interview by author.

[106] Mary Ann McClure , interview by author.

not monolithic. As Coscia remembers, “We had students that were radicals on both sides and others, that I would like to think that the majority were willing to say hey let’s think through this let’s work through it… let’s get along.”[107] Even in a close-minded South, groups like the SDS were present, if for a short period of time.

[107] Chip Coscia, interview by author.

Conclusion

Speaking in 1857 on the emancipation of the West Indies, Frederick Douglass, former slave and abolitionist, declared "Power Concedes Nothing Without a Demand." Douglass understood that progress in society could not be achieved without struggle. The student activists in Memphis embodied this mantra, over one hundred years later. The majority of Memphis State activists were not "red diaper babies." In other words, their families didn't come from leftist backgrounds. Memphis State activists were ordinary, everyday people determined to change the status quo of their society. They challenged their university to be an institution that accepted the exchange of divergent ideas without repercussions. At the largely commuter institutions, challenges of *in loco parentis* were more subtle than at heavily residential colleges and universities. In the late 1960s, dorm restrictions for women were lifted and clothing choices of women less scrutinized by the administration.

Memphis State activism was unique in that it was located in a more "progressive" southern city compared with those of the Deep South, where there was more resistance to desegregation attempts. Memphis prided itself as a "beacon of the south" for desegregating most of its institutions before the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Memphis did not have a Eugene "Bull" Connor, the Birmingham, Alabama, Commissioner of Public Safety, who used fire hoses and dogs on civil rights activists. Even though Claude Armour, Police Commissioner of Memphis in the early 1960s, was a segregationist, he believed that picketers had the right to protest peacefully.[1] Moreover, the Memphis NAACP was also the largest in the South, which provided great support to those committed to direct action protest. The NAACP aided student activists during the

[1] Claude Armour encouraged restaurants to desegregate to avoid financial losses.

desegregation of Memphis State in 1959, the Normal Tea Room sit-in, the Second Presbyterian kneel-in, the sanitation strike, and the Black Student Sit-in. The NAACP was not as comfortable supporting students who spoke out against the war prior to 1968.

Throughout a five year period from 1959 to 1964, Memphis State activists challenged access in secular and religious spheres. They not only joined with members of the Intercollegiate NAACP in participating in a sit-in in the Normal Tea Room, they endured a yearlong battle to desegregate Second Presbyterian Church. MSU activists fostered friendships with other student activists who came from Southwestern College, a private Presbyterian institution. Embracing the Living Gospel, students operated under the Christian principles of love, tolerance, and justice. By 1968, civil rights activism was renewed with student support for the striking sanitation workers. The sanitation strike galvanized support among both white and black students—marking the first time in Memphis State history where students engaged in dialogue and communication across racial lines. In a sense, a coalition was formed among students. Tested by polarizing comments made in public and in print, the alliance almost broke apart. Despite the fragility of the alliance, students focused their attention on the sanitation workers. A year after the assassination of Dr. King, students of the Black Student Association sought to dismantle the academic and social obstacles present at a predominately white southern institution. The diligence of these MSU activists shows the kind of grassroots effort needed to win victories toward racial equality.

Free speech was another major issue for activism at MSU in the 1960s. Steve Weissman, one of the participants of the Berkeley Free Speech Movement, delivered an address to students at Memphis State in 1965. His scheduled appearance spawned

controversy in the city for weeks. Labeled an “agitator,” “radical,” “agent of chaos” and “proponent of anarchy” by the Memphis newspapers and citizens, Weissman’s visit attracted a standing room only crowd. Some students were turned away. Of all the southern colleges and universities where Weissman appeared, his visit to Memphis attracted the largest audience.

Inspired by Weissman’s visit, Logos, a group that embraced free speech, civil rights, and the anti-war movement, emerged. Group members generated controversy by distributing their underground newspaper on campus. Most of the topics in the newspaper pertained to the Vietnam War. Logos helped to organize the first anti-war march in Memphis in April 1966. Their views were not appreciated by a student body that possessed hawkish views of the war. During one spring day, Logos members faced verbal and physical assaults by hawkish students. Heavy surveillance by the FBI, under the COINTELPRO program, kept tabs on the dissident group. In fact, the riot led to the first-ever special edition of the *Tiger Rag*, the student newspaper. The FBI took over the publication of the *Tiger Rag* to inform students and the university community about the subversive nature of Logos and its ties to the Progressive Labor Party and the M2M movement.

Members of the Students for a Democratic Society failed twice to obtain a charter on campus. Working within the proper channels of the administration, the Memphis SDS suffered from the reputation of the national SDS. The takeover at Columbia in 1968 by SDS, as well as the radical tactics implemented by the Weatherman, tarnished the image of the local, autonomous Memphis SDS. It was also difficult for the Memphis SDS to evolve into a viable chapter. The student body was more concerned with getting an

education, maintaining a social life, or working to provide income for their families. Also, in 1968, Memphis State had the largest AFROTC in the nation. Campus culture and the lack of interest by the student body hindered student activism.

MSU student activists faced repression by the FBI and the Memphis Police. The Memphis Police Department was notorious for monitoring the activism of black and white students.[2] The FBI and Memphis police examined the actions of Logos members and supporters, investigated the Liberal Club, the Invaders, and members of the Black Student Association during the Sanitation Strike, and relied on informants to gather critical information on BSA and SDS activities from 1968 to 1969. This makes the Memphis State case study all the more important for furthering the narrative of southern student activist repression. As Gregg Michel notes regarding the Southern Student Organizing Committee, the "cultivation of informants" was an important strategy of the FBI to keep close watch of the student organization.[3] Marc Perrusquia, a journalist, acknowledged that the Memphis Police Department's Red Squad paid close attention to citizens until 1976. A lawsuit against the police department prohibited further investigations in 1978.[4]

While the Bible Belt saw many Memphians who deferred to religious authority and possessed conservative thinking, religion also offered possibilities for activism. Religious organizations were more tolerant and open to civil rights, free speech, and anti-war activism. Religious houses provided students with a foundation if they needed support and a refuge from an otherwise hostile and closed campus society. These were

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[2] Cohen, *Rebellion in Black and White,* 245.

[3] Ibid., 240.

[4] "They were watching," *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, 19 December 2010.

the first integrated campus organizations. Reverend Gene Etheridge, chaplain of the Westminster House, welcomed members of the Memphis State Eight. He led efforts to set up a summer camp for disadvantaged African American youth. He later established an integrated collegiate group that discussed social problems. His successor, Reverend Richard Moon, was one of the few whites in Memphis to aid, help organize, and participate in city marches for striking sanitation workers in 1968. Reverend Moon also purposely surrounded himself with students of the New Left. He provided sanctuary to the SDS; a number of meetings were held at the Westminster House. He was also a supporter of the BSA and provided the organization help in the publication of *The Black Thesis*. In addition, Rev. Ed Wallin of the Newman Club served meals at an integrated table, supported civil rights activism, and even harbored those in jeopardy of getting injured by an angry mob of students during the Normal Tea Room Sit-In. Wallin also protected Logos members when attempts to distribute anti-war material generated tumult on campus.

Did Memphis State student activism matter? The desegregation campaigns by student activists at the Normal Tea Room and Second Presbyterian Church resulted in lunch counters and church pews open to African Americans. Steve Weissman's visit to Memphis State represented a breakthrough of academic freedom in the South. The effort by Logos to espouse anti-war views generated a political consciousness on campus that previously did not exist. It transformed the university into a center for intellectualism and critical thinking. Furthermore, sanitation strike activism resulted in a watershed moment, when black and white students engaged in meaningful communication and dialogue for the first time in school history. Coupled with the sanitation strike, the Black

Student Sit-in was culturally transformative**.** Finally, the presence of the SDS on campus gave likeminded students an outlet to express themselves politically. Even though student activists faced a number of challenges and hardships, the very fact that they continued to advocate free speech, civil rights, and anti-war activism in the South is noteworthy.

Furthermore, the campus administration came to understand the nature of activism led by black students in 1968-69. While Cecil Humphreys worked on his biography in 1987, he came across David Acey and James Pope of the BSA. Humphreys remarked, "I did not understand at the time what you young people were doing but I understand better now."[5] In another encounter at a Memphis basketball game, the Finance Director, who had cigar smoke blown in his face, stopped the two BSA members and declared, "You made men of us all."[6]

Reflecting on student activism at Memphis State in the 1960s, Verni Owen, civil rights and anti-war activist, professed, "You have a responsibility to do what you can to make the world a better place." Operating under an intense political and cultural environment of the South and facing challenges inherent to a largely commuter university, Memphis State students persevered in their efforts to alter the landscape by advocating for civil rights, free speech, and anti-war activism. Their story is a history worth knowing.

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[5] James Pope, interview by author.

[6] David Acey, interview by author.

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