


“Keep Our Black Warriors Out of the Draft”: The Vietnam Antiwar Movement at Southern University, 1968-1973

By Marcus S. Cox

During the late 1960s and early 70s, the antiwar movement gained momentum and introduced a new wave of protest and demonstrations throughout the nation. Antiwar demonstrators clashed with law enforcement officials, university administrators, and working-class hawks. At many colleges and universities, military training programs were discontinued or in jeopardy of losing their appeal. Many individuals associated with the antiwar movement used the opportunity to denounce numerous social and economic inequities that existed in American society (Isserman & Kazin, 2000).

Although anti-war protest existed at Black colleges and universities, it was quite different from the front-page confrontations at the University of California at Berkeley or Ivy League institutions. In large part, there were no sit-in demonstrations, marches, or clashes with state police or the National Guard. Most of the protests were rhetorical, in the form of a speaker


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addressing small gatherings or newspaper debates. Much of the violence that did involve students on Black campuses directly related to civil rights protest or demonstrations involving administrative policies, not military training. Compulsory ROTC was only mentioned in addition to other civil rights issues and university complaints. Black institutions with a history of military training such as Southern, Tuskegee, Prairie View, Hampton, Virginia State, and Howard Universities, did not witness any violence as a direct result of the antiwar movement (Johnson, 2001).

Many of the significant works written about antiwar protest during the Vietnam war at institutions of higher education were published throughout the 1980s and 90s. Several of those monographs such as *Telltale Hearts: The Origins and Impact of The Vietnam Antiwar Movement* (1995), *Campus Wars: The Peace Movement at American State Universities in the Vietnam Era* (1993), *An American Ordeal: The Antiwar Movement of the Vietnam Era* (1990), *Assault on the Left: The FBI and the Sixties Antiwar Movement* (1997), and *Confronting The War Machine: Draft Resistance During the Vietnam War* (2003) primarily focus on the evolution of antiwar student activism in the post World War II era, student activities at traditionally White institutions, and what prompted young Americans throughout the nation to invest so much of themselves to this ideological cause. In relation to the “Black experience,” each manuscript highlights the civil rights movement, national Black leadership, and significant organizations such as the Black Panther Party and Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. What is missing however is detailed reference to antiwar activism at Black colleges and universities, the slayings at Jackson State University, and most important, how and why was the antiwar movement different at African American institutions where military service and training had a major impact on the Black community. This study attempts to document the anti-war and ROTC protest movement at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), in particular Southern University between 1968 and 1973.

In 1968, although many students were calling for an end to compulsory ROTC at Southern University in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, the decision to abolish mandatory military training did not reflect the hostility or intensity displayed on White college campuses and universities. Throughout the late 1960s, antiwar supporters and pro-military advocates at Southern engaged in a continual debate about the merits of military service and training. Student leaders, faculty, and Black power activists argued their viewpoints with ROTC cadets, military officials, and administrators who embraced the military tradition at their institution. Most of the debate appeared in campus newspapers. The dispute included rhetorical attacks, rebuttals, and direct insults. While the civil rights movement continued to take precedence over the war in Vietnam for most African Americans, military training and service continued to offer economic benefits and opportunities that were hard for others to ignore (Neiberg, 2000). At Southern, despite a brief history of only 20 years, the ROTC program had quickly established itself as a major producer of African-American Army officers. Between 1948 and 1960, the Jaguar Battalion produced

over two hundred Army lieutenants (Vincent, 1980). By the late 1990s, nine former students from the Baton Rouge campus had reached the rank of general, arguably making Southern University's ROTC program the most successful African-American military training program and further highlighting the influence of the military tradition at America's largest Black college and university (Dabbs, 1997).

The contradiction of fighting for democracy abroad while African Americans continued to experience racism and discrimination at home buttressed the antiwar rhetoric of Black power leaders. Many African Americans criticized the federal government for sending hundreds of thousands of soldiers to fight for South Vietnamese freedom while only a few hundred law enforcement officers were assigned to protect Black American citizens in the South from brutal attacks and murders when attempting to vote (Mullen, 1973). Numerous African-American soldiers also questioned why they were serving in the armed forces and became less tolerant of racism and discrimination within the military ranks. Wallace Terry (1984) believes that in 1968 and 1969 a new Black soldier emerged in Vietnam:

The war [had] used up the professionals who found in military service fuller and fairer employment opportunities than Blacks could find in civilian society, who found in uniform a supreme test of their Black manhood. Replacing the careerist were Black draftees, many just steps removed from marching in the Civil Rights Movement or rioting in the rebellions that swept the urban ghettos from Harlem to Watts. All were filled with a new sense of Black pride and purpose. They spoke loudest against the discrimination they encountered on the battlefield in decorations, promotion and duty assignments. (p. xiv)

Attitudes of African-American soldiers were also reflected in the Black community and on college campuses during this period. According to a *Newsweek* poll of African-American attitudes on the war in 1969, Blacks considered the war as a source of many of their social ills. Unlike previous military conflicts when African Americans benefited from their participation and support, the war in Vietnam redirected Black youth from addressing problems in their communities and siphoned away billions of dollars originally allocated for national social uplift programs (Mullen, 1973).

The late 1960s also witnessed an increase in campus antiwar organizing. In 1968 antiwar demonstrations occurred at over one hundred college campuses and high schools. At many Ivy-league universities including Columbia University, Black Nationalist and Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) combined efforts to protest the war in Vietnam and disrupt recruiting activities of Columbia University's ROTC program and defense contractor Dow Chemical. Student activist also protested the University's plans to eliminate area public housing to expand campus facilities. Student demonstrations lasted approximately eight weeks with nearly one thousand arrests (Boyer, 1995).

In the spring of 1968 Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated and the tragedy was devastating news on Black college campuses. In addition to being America's

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most recognizable civil rights leader, King became a staunch critic of the war. In the remaining months of his life, King repeatedly spoke out against the war in Vietnam and warned that if America did not find a way out of the immoral conflict, it may be necessary to initiate mass demonstrations and protest. King also suggested that African Americans, poor whites, and Vietnamese were being exploited by America (Shapiro, 1989).

While Black college campuses throughout the South reacted to King's assassination, in Baton Rouge over 2,000 students and community residents marched to the State Capital to protest racism and discrimination in Louisiana. Once the demonstrators reached the Capital, under the watchful eye of armed city and state police, the first speaker, SU student leader Jodie Bibbens vented his frustration to the crowd. "Today we'll be what they call responsible Negroes, good and humble, but at night we're gonna play like the KKK. We are moving from non-violence and civil disobedience to guerilla warfare and civil rebellion" (Students March On the Capital To Protest White Racist Killing, May 1968). Bibbens announced that white racism had caused the death of Martin Luther King, Jr. and contrary to what President [Felton] Clark said, there is a great deal of unrest at Southern. We are not happy and we're going to show it in the future. Another student leader, Temon Hawkins, tore up his draft card and voiced his unwillingness to serve in the armed forces of a racist society (Students March On the Capital To Protest White Racist Killing, May 1968). After the death of Martin Luther King, Jr. the antiwar movement on Black college campuses appeared to take on new urgency. Many African Americans began to feel that the civil rights thrust had stalled and the war in Vietnam was another cynical attempt to further American imperialism against people of color. Shortly after the student demonstration at the state capital in Baton Rouge, a call to abolish compulsory ROTC appeared in the student newspaper at Southern:

I am opposed to compulsory ROTC program on our campus because I feel that it is of questionable academic value to most students' education; its courses are as academic as physical ed. It is often an unnecessary drain of students' time and federal funds. In bringing it closer to home—Nowhere, perhaps is the military image of the U.S. lower than it is among the Black male students especially those of Southern U. The reason is compulsory ROTC which finds its right to be in the draft. Our Black male students are forced to participate in the program and because of that, most of them hate it. (Compulsory ROTC—Give Us A Choice, May 1968)

By the fall of 1968, Southern University President Felton G. Clark decided to retire from Southern University. After 30 years as president, Clark decided to let someone else take the burden of leading the institution through some of its most turbulent times. As Southern's strongest supporter of military training and the individual most responsible for the existence and success of the ROTC department, even in his final year as president Clark was busy writing letters to the Department of Navy for the establishment of a Naval Reserve Officers Training Corps Unit (Letter, D. H. Guinn to G. Leon Netterville, 1970, October 17). Clark's desire to

promote the virtues of military training was not only a function of student character but what he believed as an obligation as a land-grant institution established under the guidelines of the 1890 Morrill Act (Letter. F.G. Clark to Howard C. Petersen, 1947, June 24). While the language of the 1862 Morrill Act that established white land-grant institutions included instruction in agriculture and mechanical arts (A&M), it also specified the inclusion of military tactics in the curriculum, according to Rod Andrew (2001, p. 40). African-American southern land-grants schools that existed under these same guidelines that did not incorporate the military feature until after World War I included North Carolina A&M, Prairie View A&M, Southern, and Tennessee A&I (p. 93). Clark's attitude toward military training was shared by many African-American administrators during this period. Despite his efforts to promote the virtues of military training, students at a Student Leadership Conference in Baton Rouge decided to push harder for the abolition of compulsory ROTC, noting that land grant colleges [were] no longer obligated to force it upon its students (Highlights of Student Leadership Conference October 1968).

Throughout the fall semester of 1968, compulsory ROTC continued to be a hot topic on Southern's campus. Critics of compulsory military training proudly announced that colleges and universities throughout the nation were changing from mandatory training programs to voluntary programs:

Should compulsory ROTC be eliminated as a degree requirement at Southern? Campus-wide sentiments indicate that abolition of compulsory ROTC courses would be more beneficial to the University. The latest trend by college and universities to shift from compulsory to voluntary ROTC programs has been rapid since 1963. In eleven Southern States, there are 40 schools with voluntary programs and 33 with compulsory. Now less than 19 out of 68 land grant schools of which Southern University is one, have compulsory ROTC. (Comment November 1968)

Southern Digest staff writer Frank Williams reported that most students on campus did not support compulsory ROTC. By contrast he also remarked, Colonel Warren B. Rhodes, Professor of Military Science, feels that ROTC should be compulsory at some phase of a young black man's life in college. He firmly believes that military science teaches the basic fundamentals of being a man, especially how to stand on one's own two feet, and how to accept responsibility for himself and others. It is in this respect that ROTC strives to establish leadership. It teaches a student to accept what he really believes in and tends to enable him to speak out (R.O.T.C. Vs The Man, December 1968).

Though many land grant institutions in the South moved from compulsory to a voluntary ROTC obligation, it is worth noting that between 1968 and 1974 the Southern region of the United States represents the area where the largest growth occurred in relation to the establishment of new ROTC programs. The U.S. military shifted its focus from the East where a predominate number of Ivy-league and private institutions phased-out military training, to concentrate on military friendly

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communities that had a long standing relationship with the armed forces such as Fayetteville State near Ft. Bragg, North Carolina, Benedict College near Ft. Jackson, South Carolina, and Alabama State near Maxwell Air Force base in Montgomery, Alabama (Neiberg, 2000). In comparison, the military obligation at land-grant institutions continued to be more resilient when discussing like obligations at private institutions, liberal arts colleges, and non-land grant institutions. Because of a lack of interest in military training and low number of officer commissions, ROTC units were deactivated by the Department of Defense in schools such as the University of Michigan, the University of Illinois, Stanford, Harvard, Yale, Grinnell College, and Franklin and Marshall (Neiberg, 2000).

Southern University's commitment to military training in the face of opposition and other similar HBCUs can be explained in part by the historic relationship between its institutional missions of social uplift and first class citizenship and how military training and discipline was perceived by Black leaders and college administrators to promote organizational and leadership skills among African-American youth. By 1952, 13 Black colleges and universities in nine different states submitted applications to the Department of Defense for the establishment of senior military training programs (Memorandum, Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense to Major General Hugh M. Milton, 1952 December 22). African-American college presidents were particularly interested in:

1. Increasing the number of ROTC programs in colleges for Negroes and in high schools for Negroes in states where separate educational institutions exist[ed] for Negro and White people to the end that more Negro youth may receive the military training and acquire leadership benefits from such training.
2. Increasing the pay, benefits, and grants-in-aid to ROTC and NROTC students of all groups.
3. Pointing up the military and citizenship obligations of person involved in the total ROTC and NROTC program. (Memorandum, The Executive Committee of the Conference of Presidents of Land-Grant Colleges for Negroes to The U.S. Office of Education, 1948 April 2)

The establishment of military training programs on Black college campuses during the post-war era strengthened the link between military service and training as a citizenship obligation and the quest for African-American civil rights. In addition, the economic benefits of military service also helped expand a growing Black middle-class that played a significant role in the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 60s (Moskos & Butler, 1996).

While numerous student organizations and activists throughout the nation lobbied for the abolition of compulsory ROTC, the U.S. Army and college administrators throughout the nation met to discuss how to increase ROTC enrollment. During this period, the number of students who identified with the antiwar movement increased from 35 percent in 1967 to nearly 70 percent in 1970

(Useem, 1973). Dr. Martin L. Harvey, Dean of Student Affairs, represented Southern University at the Educators Conference held by the Fourth Army at Fort Bliss, Texas. Upon returning to Baton Rouge, Harvey presented the new president, G. Leon Netterville, with a detailed report of the Conference. Harvey (1969) announced, "Many colleges have changed the ROTC curriculum to non-military subjects. Special attention should be given to increasing the number of Negro students in the advanced course. There is only one Negro officer to every 30 enlisted men." Surprisingly, Harvey also reported that institutions that dropped the mandatory requirement for military training experienced a reduction in enrollments but noticed an increase in the number of highly motivated cadets. Harvey's memo also listed student dissident organizations located throughout Louisiana that the U.S. military was concerned about. Two of those organizations were the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee and W.E.B. Du Bois Clubs. Although Black Power activists were intensely antagonistic toward racially integrated faculty at HBCUs, Harvey (1969) further reported, "I raised the question about racial integration of the ROTC Staff, since the former President [Clark] had made it clear in writing that Southern University was interested" (Memorandum, Martin L. Harvey to G. Leon Netterville, 1968, November 18).

Even though the *Southern Digest* increasingly printed militant editorials and articles supporting the Black power movement, many students and faculty believed that those publications did not accurately reflect their convictions or opinions:

There can be little doubt that the *S.U. Digest* is fast becoming the mouthpiece of the Black Student Union and is, therefore, no longer representative of most students of S.U. I make this charge with full knowledge of the facts. As a test of this charge I challenge the editors of the *Digest* to publish this article which flies in the face of their expressed views on Blackness, or on what I have called elsewhere the Black mystique. I also challenge them to publish my letter, "The Black Militant Fad," submitted for publication in the March 7th issue of the *Digest*. (Against The Black Digest, March 1969)

In fact, the debate that persisted between antiwar supporters and pro-military advocates in student newspapers or student unions at Black colleges and universities was simply a reflection of the tension that existed in the Black community concerning the war and the political direction of African Americans. While many African Americans became more militant and less tolerant of social inequities in American society, others acknowledged those problems but continued to search for ways to advance themselves socially and economically.

While the war in Vietnam continued and America grappled with the moral issues the conflict raised, students at Southern University in Baton Rouge and New Orleans began a series of demonstrations and boycotts to protest their dissatisfaction with university facilities, curriculum, health insurance, rules and regulations, condition of streets and roads, and administration that ultimately led to the end of compulsory ROTC.

In April 1969, student activists at Southern University-New Orleans (SUNO)

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delivered a list of demands to the university administration. In addition to a Black Studies department and a course on Black Liberation that was to be taught by Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) chapter director, Jimmie “Scrooge” Lagare, demand #5 insisted that there be a Black Draft Counseling Center immediately established on campus. This center is to be headed by Brother Walter Collins, the demand read, who is unofficially one of the foremost authorities on the draft. Countless numbers of Black males are taken out of school and forced to serve in the system of legal slavery every year. This is because of the inefficiency of the Registrar’s Office and the lack of student knowledge concerning the draft (SUNO REVOLTS, May 1969). Even though full-time students at Southern could receive a draft exemption, they were still vulnerable to the threat of conscription. Campus based and antiwar resistance organizations, such as SNCC, worked to expose inequalities in the Selective Service System. While full-time students were deferred, part-time students were considered potential draftees. In addition, students with poor grades could lose their deferments in contrast to students with high marks who also had the opportunity to enter graduate school. Students pursuing careers as engineers and scientist were also given special consideration as well. According to Christian Appy (1993), the Selective Service System’s class-biased channeling, the military’s wartime slashing of admission standards, student deferments, and medical exemptions, favored the well-informed and economically privileged (p. 37).

In an effort to avert trouble, President G. Leon Netterville quickly made preparations to meet with SUNO departments heads and student leaders. As president of the Southern University system, Netterville made every effort to reduce tension among students as well as keep lines of communication open between student leaders and the governing body of the Southern University system, the all-White State Board of Education. A faculty committee was organized to discuss each demand and to begin work on development of a Black Studies curriculum. Netterville attended each faculty meeting with the intention of presenting recommendations to the next meeting of the State Board of Education (Netterville Meets With SUNO Leaders, April 1969).

On the day the State Board of Education was to meet in Baton Rouge, more than 250 students from SUNO arrived at the State Department of Education building to show support for their agenda. The state police were immediately called and once they arrived, students left the building and reassembled at the Baton Rouge campus administration building. At Southern, university officials assured them that their demands would be addressed. However, when students learned that the State Board had quickly moved through its agenda and left the building without addressing their concerns, they returned and attempted to enter the office of William J. Dodd, the State Superintendent of Education. Sheriff’s deputies and state police were called out once again and after a brief standoff, students returned to the Baton Rouge campus. Again, Netterville assured students that their demands would be addressed in the coming months (Protestors From SUNO Gather Here, May 1969).

A few days later, two hundred student demonstrators at SUNO entered the administration building and refused to leave. The state police and National Guard were notified. It was reported that students were upset that nothing was done about their demands that were presented to university officials a month earlier during boycotts and demonstrations that lasted for twelve days. The demands included physical improvements to the campus as well as a Black Studies department and a course on Black liberation. Members of the Students' Afro-American Society demanded that Dean Emmitt Bashful be immediately fired or removed from the New Orleans campus because many believed that he was apathetic to student concerns (iStudents Leave SU in Orleans; McKeithen Holds Back Guard,î May 1969).

In a similar incident on the Baton Rouge campus, students placed barricades throughout the university to prevent the traffic flow onto the campus. Reports that an African-American female was assaulted by a White male and that a Black male was unlawfully arrested prompted students to act. President Netterville reported that both incidents were only rumors and were untrue. He went on to say, iThese are times when all young people feel frustratedówhat with the Vietnam War and all. And obviously Black young people feel the most frustrated of all, because of the race situationî (iSU Unrest Blamed On Untrue Reports,î May 1969). Despite the actions of many students and the position of the State Board of Education, Netterville believed that an understanding could be reached between the two parties.

On May 14, 1969 student leaders at Southern University met with Louisiana Governor John McKeithen to discuss their grievances. Both parties characterized the meeting as productive. The Governor agreed to several demands of which included a major legislative bill for \$100,000 for campus security. Of the 53 demands, many individuals believed that the most popular was that students should have a stronger voice in campus affairs. Other demands included better cafeteria facilities to more library books and better street lighting. Coincidentally while student leaders and Governor McKiethen worked on solving many of Southern's problems, the Louisiana Legislature sent a strong message to student protestors around the state when they voted unanimously for a bill that provided harsh penalties for anyone involved in occupying campus buildings or demonstrators that disrupted campus life at Louisiana institutions (iCalm Prevails at SU After Governor Meet,î May 1969).

While Southern University did not experience any protest or demonstrations solely aimed at removing ROTC programs from the campus, other Louisiana colleges did. The antiwar movement that found its base of support at colleges and universities throughout the nation caught the attention of many interested individuals who believed in the merits of military training. In the Baton Rouge city newspaper anti-ROTC agitators were described as a minority of imilitantsî who promoted revolution. Many of these sentiments were articulated in an editorial in which the author remarked, iTo the pleasant surprise of ROTC supporters and the dismay of its enemies, ROTC appears to be doing quite wellî (iROTC Is Doing OK,î

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May 1969). At Southern, Former Dean of Instruction and Vice-President, E.C. Harrison also described anti-ROTC students as a minority. “As I remember, the vast majority of students supported ROTC. You will always have a nucleus of people who disagree with the majority but they were a minority” (E.C. Harrison, personal interview, August 29, 1998). Former SU student and administrator, Frank Ransburg described anti-ROTC sentiment at Southern as talk. “The only thing you heard was talk. On a college campus there will always be different opinions circulating on everything. People didn’t pay attention to such talk” (Frank Ransburg, personal interview, April 27, 2001). Although Ransburg’s characterization of anti-ROTC reaction at Southern maybe over-simplified, one clearly gets the impression that at Southern many individuals did not share the views of anti-ROTC advocates.

In an effort to show concern Governor McKiethen toured the Baton Rouge campus with students to get a first hand account of some of the problems. Student body president William Jefferson expressed the desire of many students to have an overpass constructed connecting the campus to the surrounding community. In addition, the Governor inspected several dorms, cafeteria facilities, and was asked to address the problem of mosquitoes at a nearby lake. Hours before the Governor arrived on campus, student leaders met with State Board officials to discuss their concerns. The meeting was described as beneficial (“Gov. McKeithen Tours Southern University Campus,” May 1969).

While tensions subsided between Southern students and State Board members another Louisiana college experienced student unrest. Twenty-one Tulane University students and a faculty member in New Orleans disrupted ROTC instruction in an effort to express their frustration with the program. The incident was one of many in recent weeks designed to interfere with military training on campus. Campus police immediately arrested demonstrators and charged them with willful disruption of university activities (“21 TU Students are Disciplined,” May 1969).

As students at Southern concentrated on making physical improvements and better funding opportunities a reality on the Baton Rouge and New Orleans campuses, several predominately White institutions moved to abolish compulsory ROTC on their campuses. On April 20, 1969, the McNeese State College president announced that the ROTC evaluation committee agreed to implement a voluntary program (“Committee Set On ROTC in Lake Charles,” April 1969). A few weeks later, Louisiana State University’s (LSU) decision made front-page news when it reported, “Members of the LSU Board of Supervisors killed compulsory ROTC by a vote of 9-4” (“ROTC Made Voluntary by LSU Board,” May 1969). A couple of months later, Northeast Louisiana State College made the decision to abolish compulsory ROTC in an effort “. . . to become a stronger corps” (“Northeast ROTC Goes Elective,” August 1969). Southern’s decision to move to a voluntary ROTC program came on the heels of other Louisiana institutions. With little publicity president Netterville announced his plans to abolish compulsory ROTC in conjunction with other concessions made to students. “Dissent and demonstrations will be

tolerated but forced cessation of class activities will not be at Southern. The right of persons will be protected if they desire to attend classes (Netterville States Policy On Disruptions, September 1969). Following this statement Netterville revealed his decision to have voluntary ROTC at Southern.

Frank Ransburg believes that Southern's choice to abolish compulsory military training represented an effort to restructure its academic program. Unlike other Louisiana institutions that witnessed social unrest as a result of ROTC activities, student led protests and demonstrations were concerned with giving students a stronger voice in administrative issues, physical improvements to the campus, and more social freedom at the university. Military training did not receive the type of negative attention that it did at traditionally White institutions because either individuals supported its presence on campus or were more concerned with other issues. Ransburg also suggested that a major part of the decision to abolish compulsory ROTC at Southern was convenience of scheduling:

Students asked for 53 changes at Southern University, one of which was that they no longer wanted Saturday classes. If you were taking ROTC certain classes were scheduled during the week. So you were forced to schedule classes on Saturday. I don't think that the abolishment of compulsory ROTC was anti-military, I think that it was a scheduling concern when most colleges in Louisiana had already abolished Saturday classes except Southern University. By 1969 you (African Americans) could go to any school in the state. Why would you want to go to a school that had Saturday classes when every other institution did not? So the movement to abolish compulsory ROTC was not anti-military as much as it was a convenience in scheduling courses. (interview, 2001)

Ransburg further remarked, "I think that the recommendation came from the Committee on Student Affairs and he [Netterville] approved it. Knowing Netterville as I did, he probably cleared it with the State Board of Education. But as I said before, at that time, unless it was something outlandish, the president of the university could do pretty much what he wanted to do. The decision to abolish compulsory ROTC was sort-of routine because all of the other state colleges were eliminating compulsory ROTC on their campuses" (Frank Ransburg, personal interview, April 2001).

At Southern, the fall semester of 1969 began with the news that compulsory ROTC was officially abolished and for the first time male students could choose whether they wanted to participate. The majority of faculty members at Southern had voted to discontinue compulsory military training and student participation dropped by more than 50% and the military program experienced an immediate reduction in enrollment (R.O.T.C. Goes Voluntary, September 1969). Although the number of ROTC cadets was reduced, Lieutenant Colonel Warren Rhodes, believed that "because ROTC [was] voluntary, the cadets should be dedicated to the program; and too, that the corps should be 'as good as or better than' the past years" (R.O.T.C. Goes Voluntary, September 1969).

Despite a reduction in ROTC enrollment, the Army ROTC program continued

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to actively recruit male students and present itself as an organization with vast growth potential and much to offer young African Americans:

The fact that a considerable percentage of the student population has voluntarily registered for the program is offered by the staff as evidence that the ROTC does have a future in the S.U. Curriculum. The university, a predominantly Black institution, is the leading single producer of qualified Negro officers for service in the United States Army. This year forty-nine (49) students entered the Advanced Program, which is the highest number in the history of this university. This particular point is significant because the program presently is under a voluntary system which would suggest a decrease in participation in the advanced program; however, statistically the opposite is true. (Status of ROTC In Review At S.U., October 1969)

The ROTC department proudly reported that in addition to many social events, an ROTC Flight Program would be offered at Southern. The program was designed to stimulate college students' interest in Army aviation and expose selected ROTC cadets to an actual flight environment (ROTC Flight Program At Southern University, October 1969).

In May 1970, when President Nixon announced the invasion of Cambodia, anti-war activism intensified at college campuses across the nation. Demonstrations were held at Temple University, Villanova University, State University of New York, and the University of Arizona. Violence erupted when student protestors at the University of Maryland in College Park stormed the ROTC building and attempted to burn uniforms, files, and classroom furniture. The governor of Maryland immediately sent the National Guard and state police to restore order to the campus. A day later, the ROTC departments at Michigan State University and Princeton University were both attacked by student protestors (Spofford, 1988). Throughout the northeastern United States, students at 13 colleges and universities demonstrated their frustration at Nixon's policies by organizing sit-ins, demonstrations, and student strikes. On May 4, on the campus of Kent State University, after student protestors attempted to burn down the ROTC barracks a couple of days earlier, the National Guard and demonstrators, in a standoff, began tossing tear-gas canisters at one another while students threw rocks and verbally assaulted the troops. In a heated exchange, the guardsmen fired upon the crowd and four students were killed. Once news of the Kent State killings spread across the country, student demonstrators protested the atrocity at private and state institutions, women's colleges and parochial schools.

While student protests at Black colleges were ordinarily non-violent and uneventful, Jackson State College proved to be the exception. Located approximately 150 miles northeast of Baton Rouge in Jackson, Mississippi, Jackson State was never considered to be a trailblazer in civil rights activism. Nevertheless, the escalation of the war, the killings at Kent State University, the report that African Americans were being killed in disproportionate numbers in Vietnam, and the idea that Mississippi draft boards were making it all possible were the right combination to inspire students to action (Spofford, 1988).

Even as students assembled in front of the dormitories or congregated in the student union nine days after the catastrophe at Kent State University, the topic of discussion continued to be the draft, Cambodia, and Kent State. However, that night included a rumor that the ROTC building would be torched later that evening. By 10:00 pm, a group of individuals who were not associated with the college began throwing rocks at cars carrying white passengers passing through the campus. The campus security immediately responded but was also repelled by the youths. By 10:30 pm, 150 students gathered near the student union and began shouting antiwar slogans and voicing their disgust at ROTC training. It was not long before the crowd began to shout, "Let's burn down ROTC!" "Burn it down! Burn it down!" By the time several ROTC cadets and officers who were in the building approached the students and tried to defuse the situation, the crowd had swelled to two to three hundred students. A witness to the incident, Vernon Weakley, confirms, "It looked as if the kids had surrounded the ROTC building. They were screaming and hollering, 'Burn it down! Burn it down!' They were rushing the building, as if trying to get in or tear it down or something like that. The security guards would pull their guns and make a run, and then the kids would go back away" (Spofford, 1988, p. 39). Once the students became tired of the standoff, they quickly left the area. However, hours later three individuals returned carrying bottles filled with gasoline and tossed them on the roof and porch of the ROTC building. Although the building ignited, the fire was quickly doused by ROTC officers. The next morning, Jackson State College President John Peoples began to investigate the sequence of events. Much like Felton G. Clark and G. Leon Netterville, Peoples was a strong supporter of military training. In fact, Peoples was a former Marine drill instructor who believed that the armed forces afforded African Americans dignity and honor in a racist society (Spofford, 1988). He was especially proud of the fact that while other institutions were removing ROTC from their campuses, Jackson State had recently received approval for its unit.

The next evening an individual from off campus led a group throwing rocks while 100 students cheered the crowd on. Windows were shattered and cars were once again assaulted. "At 10:30 p.m. police, highway patrolmen and National Guard troops began to materialize out of the night, marking off their perimeter four blocks from campus with a line of sawhorses" (Newsweek, 1970, p. 35). Once a skirmish line was formed, students began to shout obscenities while several officers called students "Nigger" and other racial epithets. The loud exchange even drowned out the officer on the bullhorn addressing the students. In the heat of the moment, someone lobbed a bottle at the police and when it burst, it sounded like gunfire. "And as if on cue, the police let loose at the crowd with shotguns, pistols, and rifles. They raked the building and the squirming students on the ground. One student said that those in front of the dormitory were trying to get inside. Blood was everywhere" (Newsweek, 1970, p. 22). Although one police officer was fired upon during the incident, two female students were killed and nine others were injured.

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The Jackson State slayings were the only violence at a Black college or university motivated by the antiwar movement and ROTC training. Surprisingly, although the terrible events began with students attempting to burn down the ROTC building, military training at the institution did not suffer from a general lack of interest or student contempt. That would at least indicate that in many respects, the student outrage over military training at Jackson State was not shared by the majority of students or faculty. In fact, a year later, according to *Newsweek* (1971), less understood [was] the remarkable diffidence of the students. Perhaps their most militant act has been the formation of the first campus chapter of the NAACP. But of real activism there was virtually none; when an attempt was made to organize a march on City Hall to protest a proposed relocation of the Jackson State campus, less than ten students showed up (p. 69).

The tragic events at Kent and Jackson State Universities were atypical incidents that reflect how quickly a series of actions escalated into the unnecessary death of innocent bystanders. Furthermore, it also represents how the war in Vietnam became a springboard to student activism and the need to vent youth frustration with perceived societal injustices and the hypocrisy of fighting for South Vietnamese freedom. While the killings at Kent State elicited an emotional response from young White Americans throughout the nation that disrupted university operations at twenty percent of the nation's campuses (DeBenedetti, 1990), the reaction of students at Jackson State where a novel ROTC program existed and the military tradition had not taken root was an anomaly that embodies a combination of aggravation and mischief of three determined individuals (Spofford, 1988) with a minority of students who linked the civil rights movement and war in Vietnam. But the social and economic benefits of military service and training at HBCUs like Prairie View, Tuskegee, Morgan State, and Southern University where rhetorical confrontations became the extent of the antiwar movement on those campuses had a far greater impact on those students than the war. At those HBCUs many students were able to make the distinction between the war in Vietnam and the benefits of military service and training. A former student at Tuskegee University, James Lund explained, “For us that worked in civil rights we were often critical of the military but we also could see that it was an organization that at times made more progress in civil rights than the rest of the society. I had a number of friends at Tuskegee and other schools that became officers and were killed. I hated the war more than the U.S. military (James Lund, interview by author, interview transcript, Superior, Wisconsin, n.d.)

On the campus of Southern while the antiwar movement across the nation made headlines, many students continued to voice their displeasure with the draft even as administrators persisted with their commitment to military training. At Southern, President Netterville received good news from the U.S. Department of Navy that its application for a Naval Reserve Officers Training Corps (NROTC) Unit had been approved (1967). Chief of Naval Personnel, Vice Admiral, D.H. Guinn, wrote, “We believe that the environment and facilities at your Institution are such that a Naval

ROTC Unit there would contribute appreciably to the education and training of officer candidates with a view toward increasing the percentage of minority group officers in the Naval Service. It is desired to establish a Unit of the Naval ROTC at a predominantly Negro university with a target date of September 1971 (Letter, D. H. Guinn to G. Leon Netterville, 1970, October 17). Though military training programs continued to be criticized in the student press and at student gatherings, Netterville believed that the military tradition at Southern could successfully support another ROTC program and attract a sufficient number of cadets.

Southern Digest staff writer Wilbur Robinson continued to criticize individuals who participated in ROTC and suggested that ROTC departments were a part of a federal conspiracy by the U.S. military to control and oppress minorities:

For those of you who aren't aware of it, your friends in ROTC may, one day, have to kill you in order to protect and preserve your freedom. But in order to really understand this we must first know what the military is doing to us and how ROTC fits into this. The Army's domestic intelligence plan that you have been hearing and reading about was devised amid the city riots of 1967 and 1968 so as to enable the Army to move as rapidly as possible to deploy sufficient troops to control an outbreak with the so-called minimum amount of force. If you still aren't convinced about what is being done to you notice, where the National Guard Armory in Baton Rouge is located! It is located at a point where the Black area of Scotlandville and white Baton Rouge is separated. (RACE AND ROTC: Army Intelligence Was Devised Amid City Riots Five Years Ago, March 1971)

Robinson added, "You [ROTC cadets] can go all over the world to defend another country's freedom but when you come back home your Black brothers and sisters will be waiting for you to do some fighting for their freedom too. This is before and after you leave!" (RACE AND ROTC: Army Intelligence Was Devised Amid City Riots Five Years Ago, March 1971) Though Robinson's attitude toward military training and ROTC cadets was fairly common in the late 1960s, once compulsory ROTC was abolished most students were not as passionate concerning military training.

During the fall semester of 1971, the commission date for the NROTC program was established in addition to plans for a ceremony. Along with other invited guests, the university asked Rear Admiral Samuel Gravely, the first African American to attain the rank of admiral, to be the keynote speaker. The first commander of Southern's NROTC program was Commander D.A. Griffin. In an interview Griffin explained the purpose of the program and what students should expect:

NROTC was introduced to predominately Black schools in an effort to increase the number of Black officers in the Navy and Marines. A study was done in 1962 to determine the number of Black officers in the navy and the figures showed only 0.3 of one percent were Black. The study was up-dated in 1970 and the findings revealed that the number has risen only 0.4 and as a result of this the programs were instituted in an effort to raise the figures. (NROTC Commission Date Set; Black Admiral to Do Honors, September 1971)

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Griffin believed that NROTC held special rewards for African Americans in particular. He understood the reluctance to join and the opposition to the war, but added, “though he doesn’t agree with the War in Viet Nam he still feels that young Blacks should join the Armed Forces if they wish because the war will not go on forever and that they could be receiving invaluable training. You can serve without being a flag waver, he said” (NROTC Commission Date Set; Black Admiral to Do Honors, September 1971). During the dedication ceremony, Admiral Gravely declared that the Navy could improve the life of young African Americans and provide well-deserved social opportunities. “I know that there are problems of discrimination, but I believe, however, that the Navy of today is one of the most integrated structures in American Society. It surpasses many of our churches, most of our schools and certainly the majority of our neighborhoods. The Navy’s aim is simply this—we want one Navy, NO Black Navy; NO White Navy, asserted Gravely” (Admiral Relates Navy Efforts To Improve Lot of Minority, October 1971).

The end of 1971 held good news for military training programs throughout the nation but for African-American institutions in particular. The Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Education, Dr. George C.S. Benson, reported that ROTC programs were multiplying around the country despite recent setbacks. Benson proclaimed, “According to a recent *U.S. News and World Report*, there are more Reserve Officers’ Training Corps Units on college campuses this fall than ever before despite 400 anti-ROTC actions in 1969-70 and 110 in 1970-71. Only 11 universities have voted to end ROTC and 15 new units have formed—seven at predominately Black colleges” (Campus Militants Won Skirmishes but Lost The War, December 1971). While private White institutions were removing their ROTC programs, African-American colleges and universities continued to request the establishment of military training programs at their institutions. Benson believed that not only did Black institutions help boost the number of ROTC programs, but they provided a source of much needed African-American officers to the armed forces. “We have several new units,” observes Benson, “in what are predominately Black colleges and I would really rather have them than Harvard and the others. In the first place we need Black officers. Predominately Black colleges realize that the Negro still has to fight his way forward and the armed forces have been the fairest arena in U.S. life” (Campus Militants Won Skirmishes but Lost The War, December 1971). The Department of Defense planned to increase the number of cadets by offering financial incentives and raising the number of scholarships available to students. Students who enrolled in ROTC programs would receive \$100 per month instead of the previous amount of \$50. Over the next 5 years the Department of Defense planned to add \$50 million dollars to the ROTC budget.

In preparation for the All-Volunteer Armed Forces and America’s withdrawal from Vietnam in 1972, the Selective Service System made policy changes that reduced the number of draftees inducted. The news received front page attention

at Southern University because for the first time it afforded enlistees the opportunity to determine whether they would serve on active duty, the National Guard or Reserves. The only option to men who had received induction orders in past months was to join one of the Regular branches of the service for at least three years active duty. No Guard or Reserve enlistments or appointments were authorized after the mailing of induction orders. But under the new policy, Men who receive induction orders and desire to enter in the Guard or Reserve must locate unit vacancies on their own. They should request that their enlistments or appointments in the Guard or Reserves require at least 4 months active duty for training and the balance of six years participating in the Ready Reserve (On Induction: New SS Policy Effective July 1, (June 1972).

Before the end of the 1972 fall semester, a series of unfortunate events would lead to the saddest days the university ever experienced. In late October, the student organization Students United delivered a list of grievances to Netterville and reconvened the next day at the men's gymnasium where an additional 3,500 arrived. When student recommendations were only partially met, student leaders called for the resignation of Netterville and other top-level administrators. Nearly 7,000 students marched to the State Capital and demanded to speak with the Governor. Once the students returned to campus, Netterville closed the university and ordered students to vacate the dormitories and buildings. The Sheriff and State Police were placed on standby as well as the National Guard. The incidents at Southern in Baton Rouge were not isolated examples of Black college students in Louisiana demanding changes, asserts Charles Vincent. The students at SUNO called for a redefining of that institution, as well as the Dean of the school, Dr. Emmitt Bashful's resignation (Vincent, 1981, pp. 215-216).

On November 6, 1972, tension grew when Students United attempted to meet on campus but was turned away by sheriff's deputies. The next day, an unexplainable fire occurred in T.T. Allain Hall in which the Horticulture Barn was destroyed. The university identified eight students as campus agitators who were quickly served arrest warrants. After student leaders met with the Governor's appointed Blue Ribbon committee and state officials, many individuals believed that progress was forthcoming. But on November 16, after the arrest of four leaders of Students United, students promptly marched to the administration building and demanded to speak with Netterville. Soon reports that students had taken over the administration building reached authorities. Before they could respond, Netterville had agreed to go downtown and have the students released. Before he could return, state police and sheriff's deputies armed with shotguns, automatic weapons, and an armored vehicle converged on the campus and surrounded the administration building. Much like at Jackson State, because of crowd noise students did not hear police orders to disperse and leave the area. When State police fired tear gas canisters into the crowd, students began throwing them back at the police. Once this occurred, the police began firing more tear gas at the students. However, one police officer

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fired live rounds into the crowd and killed two students (A deadly history . . . Chronology of events that led to death of students, January 1973).

Although no one was ever arrested for the murder of the demonstrators, the incident left a lasting impression on the university and Netterville. Only months later, after blaming himself for the incident, Netterville resigned as president of Southern University (Vincent, 1981). While the killings on Southern's campus were not directly linked to military training or the ROTC department, the incident only magnified the mistrust that many students felt for symbols of authority and government officials. The tragedy at Southern was much like Kent State and Jackson State College. Young people were discouraged by the state of American society and saw themselves as victims of oppressive authority.

By 1973, Nixon's plans for withdrawal in Vietnam were well underway and the U.S. Congress had already approved the termination of the draft. Protest against the war or the armed forces did not hold the same urgency or attention that it once did on most college campuses. According to Michael Lanning (1997), "One of the most crucial factors in racial unrest and negative attitudes toward the military during the Vietnam era was the Selective Service System. Blacks believed that boards drafted them in disproportionate numbers and that liberal deferments were more readily available to Whites" (p. 276). With the end of the draft, the U.S. military attempted to make military service more attractive by improving the pay, benefits, and housing conditions. A decade of antiwar protest appeared to have little influence over the thousands of African Americans who filled recruiting stations and enlisted in the all-volunteer force. (Moskos & Wood, 1988)

Though ROTC enrollment would never equal the levels when military training was mandatory at Southern, ROTC programs reached a milestone when they began admitting women into their ranks. As early as the spring of 1972, the NROTC department at Southern became one of four higher education institutions and the first African-American university to admit female cadets ("Southern NROTC Among First to Admit Women," March 1972). During the fall of 1973, Southern's Army ROTC department proudly announced that female students were eligible for the ROTC. Army Captain Robert C. Meager, Director of Instruction, confirmed that "this is the first year that this has been authorized. The program has expanded throughout every university in the country. Presently, the ROTC program does not offer a major or minor but nonetheless, fifteen freshmen women have responded to the benefits of this program" ("Women May Train As ROTC Officers," September 1973). The fact that the armed forces had incorporated an aggressive affirmative-action program and women were now being recruited by the U.S. military had a tremendous impact on the number of females interested in military service. In addition, there were a greater number of occupational specialties available to women.

Between 1968 and 1973, the war in Vietnam caused many of the social and political problems in American society. The war unleashed political tensions between "hawks" and "doves," generational divisions between young adults and

middle-aged Americans, and political struggles between pacifist and cold warriors. In particular, African Americans and poor Americans witnessed Great Society reform efforts stall, while the under-class became marked for combat in Southeast Asia. The student antiwar movement developed from these struggles and polarized America even more (Appy 1993).

On the campuses of Black colleges and universities, the antiwar movement divided the student body and faculty on many issues. Antiwar supporters focused on political and ideological reasons not to support the war or military training, while pro-military advocates concentrated on the social and economic advantages of military service. Although military training programs at Southern University and other black colleges and universities would never again reach the height of popularity they had in the 1950s, the fact that they continued to attract interested men and women as draft calls shrank and ended altogether demonstrated that the longstanding appeal of military service at those institutions had survived its most turbulent days and continued to impact the Black community as well as the U.S. armed forces (Johnson, 2002).

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