Allen Building Takeover: Inherently violent or necessary reaction

The New Left movement in the 1960s and 1970s contributed to the world a new discourse of narrating a range of issues such as race, gender, war, and social justice. However, in the year 1968, the new left coalition started to split and violent tendencies were seen in various places of the world. Fierce confrontation between activists and police forces was evident in France, Germany, Mexico and the US, etc. In this project, I wish to reexamine Allen Building Take over that happened at Duke University on Feb 13, 1969 as a gateway of understanding the violent radicalization of the New Left and the escalation of conflicts.

Overview

Feeling their negotiations were leading nowhere, on 8:00 am, Feb 13 1969, Afro-american students occupy the Allen building add two demands to their original four.

11:30-2:00 Large meeting of white students holding forums to discuss support blacks. 6:00 Gas-tag and clubings up and down the quad begins

In 1967, a number of black students at Duke University formed the Afro-American Society and began negotiating with the school administration to improve a campus racial climate they consider dismal

10:30, Afro-american students refuse to sent out delegation but invited administration to negotiate with the whole group

3:45 White students gather around Allen building to support Blacks.

5:30-6:00 Jeoring 11:30 1500 students confront the pigs 11:30 1500 and faculty call

5:15 Afro-ameri-

leave Allen. 5:30

liberate already

empty building.

can students

Pigs arrive to

11:30 1500
Duke students
and faculty call
for three day
student strike to
gain amnesty of
suspended
blacks

Who initiated the violence?

In order to answer the question was this movement inherently violent or was violence a necessary reaction. We have to look into what did the students really want? Fortunately, as I delve into the Allen Building Takeover collection from Rubenstein archive, I found the original list of demands from the black students:

1. What did they want?

As the demand list shows, black students were hoping to achieve mostly if not merely educational goals: they were asking for fully credited Afro-American studies department, increase in the black student's population, black advisor, and financial aid to black students. From my humble understanding, none of the demands borders on being politically radical.

Afro-American studies.

2. We want the right to establish a black dorm on campus.

3. Since Duke claims to be representative of the Southeast, and since the percentage of blacks in the area is 27%, we want the black student population to reach that figure by the fall of 1973.

4. We want the reinstatement of black students who, because of the stifling social and educational environment at Duke were unable to achieve the required academic standing and were forced to leave the university.

5. We want financial reassurance for black students. Decreased scholarships threaten to limit the number of students returning in the fall.

6. We want a black advisor selected only by direct consultation with black students.

7. We want black students' fees which are presently paid to the student union to be earmarked for a black student union.

8. We want academic achievement in high school to be the criterion for black students for admission to this university. We believe the criteria for entering black students are oriented toward white middle class students, and therefore are inadequate for determining academic potential.

9. We want the non-academic employees to have the power to determine the basis for their working conditions, rights, and other employment matters.

10. We want an immediate end to tokenism of black representation in university power structures.

11. We want an immediate end to police harrassment of black students and demand protection of all black students added the following demands:

1. Amnesty for all involved.

2. What were they trying to tell each other?

Secondly, a look into their Guide or Manual would help us understand what message Black student leaders wish to send out to other participants: a valuable Guide to successful street fighting included in the Allen Building Takeover Collection provides students with the following bullet points.

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tips-
 -stay in groups of 5-10, work together and don't let a brother get
 busted
-don't panic, walk, never run
-always keep an escape route open, don't get trapped, know the land-
 scape, fences, trees etc. around you
 -protect your head, neck, and groin
-if you anticipate mace or tear gas, cover all exposed skin with vase-
 line, keep a wet cloth over your nose and mouth, stay upwind of tear
 gas, if maced, don't rub you eyes, use lemon, milk, or water to soot!
-unless you have gloves, don't pick up gas cannisters
-remove contact lens, (gas collects around them and burns) and remove
 glasses if possible
-remove chains, beads, earrings, scarves, or ties
-carry i.d.'s, telephone numbers for legal and medical aid, a dime for
 a telephone, and money for bail if you have it
-don't advertise your's and other's heroics, giving agents or plain-
clothesmen names to work with
-get badge numbers of pigs assaulting brothers
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As we can see, this Guide to street fighting given to students is essentially defensive instead of offensive, demonstrating that the students are primarily not concerned about how to create a chaotic situation but concerned about how to protect themselves under police violence. They were trying to tell each other to stay safe and stay calm, instead of teaching each other how to engage violently.

A poster from these students shows that students acted in solidarity in the strike that comes right after the Takeover, demanding amnesty and reinstatement for all black students instead of taking any sort of violent retaliation.

