

CHAPTER 7

Now They Know, and They Ain't Gonna Do

Planning

On February 12, 1969, members of Duke's Afro-American Society (AAS) finalized plans for the takeover of key areas of the Allen Building—the administrative hub of Duke University. Although unaware of these specific plans, some administrators and faculty close to the situation had begun to view such a confrontation as unavoidable. History professor John Cell, as close to Duke's Black students as any faculty member, saw a “sudden, swift, astonishing transformation . . . among the [Black] students” in January and February 1969. Black student participation in committee meetings had ceased. Instead, “there was a lot of talk of revolution, [and] a lot of anger.” “I honestly do not think,” Cell remarked, “that . . . there was any way that the takeover of Allen Building could have been prevented.” Assistant dean of Arts and Sciences William Griffith also saw the Black students carried along by historical forces they could not—or would not—resist. “I think they were living out an inevitability across the country,” he commented, “that you didn't gain your . . . ‘mantle of Blackness,’ until you've taken over a building. I sort of felt this was their coming of age.”²¹

It was clear by early 1969 that support among Black students for direct action was growing. They believed that a targeted protest would trigger an

immediate, definitive response to their demands from the university. However, to characterize the confrontation that occurred as *inevitable* indicates how out of touch even sympathetic Duke administrators and faculty members were with the Black students who were finalizing protest plans. In fact, for these students, the decision to occupy the Allen Building was an agonizing one. Brenda Armstrong remembered the first meeting when a takeover was discussed. “It was more like a sensitivity session,” she recalled. “Everybody talked about their fears. . . . The fact that although we needed to do it, [we] weren’t sure [we] were doing the right thing.” “A lot of people were frightened,” Armstrong recounted. “Me included.”²

Some students consulted their parents, though these conversations often only deepened their anxiety and inner conflict. “I was scared, and I had talked with my mother,” Brenda Brown said. “She was very upset. In fact, she packed up and went to California. She decided she just wasn’t going to bother about me and my militant ways. . . . She felt like that wasn’t why she and my father sent me to Duke. . . . She just didn’t feel like that was the way to do it. She felt like we had been watching too many takeovers on TV.” “It might not be the way to do it,” Brown told her mother, “but this is the way the majority wants to do it, and I feel like I’m part of the group.” Brown’s mother asked: “Why couldn’t you just go get your education and get out of there? Why do you have to cause all this ruckus?”³

For parents, their children’s physical safety was a paramount concern. “A lot of [parents]—most of them—were afraid of the fact that the campus was ripe for us to be attacked or assaulted,” Armstrong explained, “not just in verbal ways but physically. My mother, although she herself was an activist . . . did not want her children to have to grow up that way.” William Turner recalled that his father “wanted the best for his sons and daughters.” Like other parents, he had seen firsthand the consequences that activism could have. “There were many parents who marched in the ’50s and early ’60s that had the same fear for their children,” Turner explained. “It wasn’t that they didn’t want what their children wanted. It’s that [they knew] their children . . . could be severely threatened by lethal contacts with the law. . . . And they were right. We had folks [in the civil rights movement] who were beaten, battered, killed, bludgeoned, or who had their futures tarnished.”⁴

Why then did this group of Duke students decide to put aside their doubts and fears and occupy Duke’s main administration building? How were they able to overcome the grave concerns of parents who feared that such an action could derail their children’s future plans and expose them to physical harm?

How did Duke administrators understand the unfolding events and what role did race play in shaping their perceptions? Events of late 1968 and early 1969 begin to reveal the answers.

All students who participated in the Allen Building takeover came to the decision to act in their own way, operating in an environment fraught with tension, where national, local, and personal factors were powerfully converging. “The thing you have to understand,” Black student leader Chuck Hopkins noted, “is that the times were such that the things that were happening in and around campus, in the local community, the stuff that was happening nationally, the militant sixties—all of that stuff was bearing in [on us]. . . . It was all of those things that kind of set the general consciousness level.”⁵

National events provided one context for the rapidly escalating Black student activism on Duke’s campus in early 1969. Indeed, it was during this period that the Black campus movement was reaching its zenith across the country. “With the onset of Black Power, the urban uprisings in such cities as Detroit and Los Angeles, and the increasing enrollment of Black students at white institutions,” wrote education professor Joy Ann Williamson, “Black student activism turned toward their own institutions, and Black student activism grew.” “Dozens of white colleges were . . . disturbed by blacks demanding a more relevant education in November and December of 1968,” Ibram X. Kendi observed. Schools as varied as University of Massachusetts–Amherst, Bluefield State, Fordham University, Brown University, University of Wisconsin, Case Western Reserve, and the University of San Francisco saw significant protests. Moreover, “Black students on white campuses became the vanguard of the student protest movement,” Williamson explained. She reported that Black students were involved in 57 percent of campus protests at predominantly white institutions during the 1968–69 academic year.⁶

Administrators and faculty at Duke looked at Black student protests roiling campuses across the nation and saw an ominous pattern. “Our students sought out movement leaders,” Knight wrote, “and Duke in turn was sought out. In this way we became a target university—in many ways *the* target university—for the Southeast.” Cell agreed. “I knew there was . . . a national Black students’ conspiracy,” Cell noted. “That’s clear, isn’t it?” For support, Cell pointed to comments made to him by AAS member Michael McBride after returning from the November 1968 Towards a Black University conference

held at Howard University and attended by two thousand students. “I know there was a meeting to which our people sent representatives and delegates,” Cell recalled. McBride “came back and I remember . . . he said: ‘Well, things are going to be shaking this year.’”⁷

“Allen Building was there in all of our minds,” Hopkins explained, “because it was happening all over the country.” Moreover, escalating events at other campuses created a “pressure to act.” But there was no organized Black student conspiracy, according to Armstrong. Rather, it was like a “contagion,” she explained. “The media had helped to put the . . . grievances of various Black [student] groups in the fore . . . and that whole aura of student activism was on the scene. There was not a unified effort among any of the schools to pull this off at the same time.” Instead, Armstrong recounted, this was “the simultaneous expression of the dissatisfaction that Black students were feeling.” Williamson agreed, noting that no “umbrella organization coordinating protest on several individual campuses” existed.⁸

Still, the absence of a “conspiracy” did not mean Duke’s Black students acted in isolation. “Students on various campuses,” Williamson explained, “talked to one another about strategy, published their demands in one another’s newspapers, and even travelled to one another’s campuses for support.” These interactions led to similar events occurring on different campuses, even if they did not reflect conscious collaboration. “No matter where they were located,” Williamson wrote, “Black students demanded similar concessions from administrators and used a common ideology to understand their role in the Black liberation struggle.” This was true for the Black students at Duke. “We had made connections at Cornell, at Princeton, and at Berkeley,” Armstrong recalled. “Once we had a chance to figure out we had the same issues, we felt empowered that we weren’t stupid and that we weren’t isolated.” Not only did Duke students learn from events at other schools, but, because the university was a “southern, very traditional school,” the impact of developments at Duke was all the more significant. People said, according to Armstrong, “if it works [at Duke], maybe it will work at Cornell.”⁹

Given this context, Cell was mistaken in concluding that the Howard University conference in November 1968 was part of a national conspiracy among Black students. According to Kendi, the Towards a Black University conference attended by Duke representatives in November 1968 was “quite possibly the most activism-inducing” program held during the period. Yet even with Stokely Carmichael imploring the two thousand student attendees “to quit talking and start acting,” the conference was only one piece of

a much larger picture. “I’m sure [the meeting in Washington] . . . did have an impact,” Hopkins stated. “But Duke’s Black students didn’t have to go to Washington [because] there was stuff happening in Durham. Howard Fuller was here. Neighborhood organizations were protesting. . . . So the Washington [conference] was . . . not a turning point. . . . It was just one . . . part of a whole activist era.”¹⁰

Events in the local Durham community were important for Duke students. Since desegregation, Duke’s Black students had found purpose and acceptance through their work with Durham community organizations and local political activities. Some were active in the local YMCA or the Durham Big Sister program, while others participated in voter registration. A number of Duke’s Black students, including Hopkins, participated in a community-based summer internship program sponsored by the Foundation for Community Development under the direction of Fuller. “This involvement” in the community, Hopkins explained, “created a new atmosphere of cooperation between Black college students and neighborhood people. During this time, Black students at Duke underwent some important ideological changes,” he noted. “The students began to think and talk about [the] relevance of the entire educational process to the needs of the Black community. They concluded that the process as it exists is, in fact, irrelevant.”¹¹

Fuller’s role in all this was important as well as misunderstood by many. By 1967, with his organizing efforts in Durham, Fuller had become the most visible Black activist in North Carolina. Adopting the ideology, terminology, and tactics of Black Power, he became identified as a leader of the local movement. Duke’s Black students were among those who felt a strong connection to Fuller, who was not only a bridge to Durham’s Black community but also an experienced sounding board and adviser.

The white community, however, viewed Fuller differently. In his memoir, Fuller wrote that by late 1967, he was “one of the most hated Black men in North Carolina in certain circles of white people with power.” “To them,” Fuller described, “I was an ‘outside agitator’ stirring up discontent wherever I went.” For their part, Durham’s newspapers referred to Fuller as a “Negro activist,” “militant,” “Black Power Advocate,” “revolutionary,” and an “Advocate of the destruction of the Capitalist system.”¹²

Most Duke faculty and administrators embraced this negative view of Fuller. They also believed that he played a critical role in shaping the tactics that Duke’s Black students employed in dealing with the university. “Clearly, they turned to [Fuller] as one who knew how to do things,” Alan

Kerckhoff commented. Fuller “clearly was attempting to foment something,” he cynically observed. “When one thing failed, he seemed to turn to another.” In the view of law school dean Kenneth Pye, it was inconceivable that Duke’s Black students arrived at the decision to occupy the Allen Building on their own. Pye felt that “only someone who wanted to exacerbate the [Duke] situation for broader political purposes . . . would have recommended” a takeover. Pye saw Fuller particularly as giving the students “bad advice.” The Black students, in Pye’s analysis, were “susceptible to people [like Fuller] who had a quite different agenda than reforming the university.”¹³

Duke’s Black students acknowledge that Fuller was important to them. Still, he did not, as administrators imagined, play a key role in directing events. Fuller “did nothing to suggest a course of action,” Charles Becton reported. “The decision to sit-in at the president’s office, to picket Hope Valley Country Club, to march to the president’s house, and to take over the Allen Building were made in meetings . . . without Howard being present,” he explained. Fuller “did not instigate any of this.” Indeed, Hopkins said that Fuller was “totally out of” the decision to occupy the Allen Building. Duke students informed Fuller “*after* we had made the decision.” The Black leader “had absolutely no part.”¹⁴

Why then were Duke faculty and administrators so ready to believe that outsiders were responsible for Black student activism at Duke? One explanation is provided by historian Jason Sokol, who saw a similar readiness on the part of white southerners to blame Black activism in the civil rights movement on a communist conspiracy. “White southerners continued to equate attacks on remnants of segregation with communist conspiracies,” Sokol observed, “because red cries fit snugly into their traditional racial views. Anti-communism occupied the place it did because of its unique ability to explain changes in African-Americans, and to do so in ways that reinforced rather than disrupted stereotypes. Black southerners were happy, docile, and susceptible to manipulation, many whites believed. When they suddenly looked organized, discontented, and autonomous in the 1960s, whites attributed it to a communist plan.”¹⁵

Similarly, at Duke, by attributing Black campus activism to external forces, administrators and faculty were able to maintain their view that Black students lacked the agency, intelligence, and skill to plan a sophisticated protest. “They never gave us credit,” Armstrong observed, for “the brilliance in the planning for Allen Building.”¹⁶ By adopting such a perspective, university officials were

also able to blame Black activism on external forces rather than the failure of the school to exercise responsible leadership on racial matters.

Against the backdrop of national and local events, the focus on Black Power ideology grew more intense among Black campus activists. “No generation of students,” Kendi wrote, “read more political literature than these black campus activists.” “I read everything I could find by Black authors,” Becton recalled. His racial consciousness evolved as he read books like *The Wretched of the Earth* by Frantz Fanon as well as works by James Baldwin and Dick Gregory. “For a while I didn’t go to class,” Turner remembered. “I just sat around and read. . . . I almost flunked out.” “I’m willing to . . . say,” Becton recounted, “that every junior and senior [who participated in the Allen Building takeover] had read fifteen books on Black awareness and had a good idea about what it takes to get what you want.”¹⁷

Issues raised in these books were dissected and debated for hours. “We would always stay up at night talking,” Hopkins recalled. “I was saying stuff about our situation at Duke and our situation in this country.” “I still see that house on Cornwallis,” Turner commented wistfully fifty years later. “We were laying up in that house, reading and rapping and talking, discussing.”¹⁸

In these interactions, Biondi explained, “students began using a new language: embracing ‘revolution’ and ‘revolt,’ questioning ‘working within the system’ and openly challenging the ‘white power structure.’” The strategy of nonviolent protest also came under intense scrutiny. A study of Black high school students conducted in 1970, Biondi reported, determined that “nearly half of the activists agreed with the statement [that] ‘violence is cleansing,’ as did more than a third of the nonactivists.” Just as significant, the study found that “only 7 percent of all the Black students thought that whites could be ‘persuaded’ to change.” Still, despite the new terminology of “revolution,” Biondi insisted that at most campuses, “even as students embraced many aspects of Black nationalism, they remained nonviolent in both theory and practice.” Kendi agreed. “Most activists seem to have been moderates,” he observed, “juggling (and separating) the politico-cultural struggle with their academic and social lives, while also ideologically juggling radical and liberal thoughts, socialist and capitalist ideas, the desire to work in and outside of the ‘system,’ protest tactics with negotiations, . . . and optimism and pessimism for American institutions.”¹⁹

The cumulative impact of national, local, and ideological factors remained transformative. “The attempt was [made] to put us in our place,” Armstrong recalled, to tell us “that we were not good enough to come to Duke. . . . Most

[of] us came from schools and families that were so strong and came from such traditions of surviving,” she explained, “that we thought they were crazy. We did not feel the least bit intimidated by them. . . . It was empowering,” she recounted. “I wasn’t the same person by 1969,” Turner remembered. “I wasn’t the same person as when I came. I wasn’t reading the same things. I wasn’t having the same conversations.” For Turner, the transformation had a powerful religious dimension. He explained:

You have a generation of young [people] that are involved in some serious, serious existential conflicts. What does it feel like to wake up one morning and realize everybody you trust has been lying to you or speaking out of both sides of their mouth? You teach all of this wonderful stuff in Bible school and church and you come and arrange your society in an antithetical way. . . . You got to live out what you know is a lie. You know it’s a lie. You feel it inside. The tension is palpable. You’re talking about good Sunday school children who took seriously what the . . . preacher said.²⁰

Triggered by events on campus, soon these “good Sunday school children” would be discussing strategies on how to force the university to respond conclusively to their concerns.

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Returning to campus in January 1969, members of the AAs received shocking news—approximately fifteen of eighty-two Black undergraduates had either been dismissed from school for academic reasons or voluntarily dropped out of school following the fall semester. This equaled an 18 percent attrition rate for Black undergraduates after one semester, twice the university’s overall annual attrition rate of 9 percent. Later in January, Griffith advised the Administrative Council that “11 of the 22 freshman black students in Trinity College had failed academically the first semester, and others are barely holding on.”²¹

This accelerating attrition rate among Black students escalated tensions within the university dramatically. For one thing, as Bertie Howard described, “there were a lot of people we liked” in the group that was forced to leave. More broadly, the timing was problematic. “While we’re in there talking to them about some of the things that were happening,” Armstrong recalled incredulously, “they’re out there putting somebody out.” Hopkins remembered “Black students having to leave for academic reasons” as a “new [issue] that was inserted. There were strong feelings about it,” he recounted. “I had [Black]

students . . . who had never participated in [the AAS], who had never spoken to me, [come to me and say], ‘Chuck, we need to do something.’”²²

Throughout January, the tempo of internal discussions accelerated among Black students. “Many of us weren’t going to classes,” Hopkins recalled. “It happened rapidly in terms of our consciousness.” Events on campus “began to move in rapid succession,” he wrote later. “We met more frequently,” Brown said, and “it just generally escalated.” “The only reports [of negotiations] that we got were of stalemate,” Turner remembered. “It seemed like every time it was the same thing over and over.” “We had presented demands and hadn’t gotten any answer,” Brown recounted. “People were tired of [the] committees . . . we were sitting on.”²³

In tandem with these developments, plans for Black Week in early February were being finalized. Since “Negro History Week” was first celebrated in 1926, early February had been important in the Black community as a time to focus on the study of African American history. Arriving at Duke, the school’s Black students found that the university’s all-white students, faculty, and administrators did nothing to mark the special time. “Black History [Week] has always been . . . part of our culture,” Janice Williams remembered. “They weren’t going to do anything,” she recalled bitterly.²⁴ This omission became even more glaring in the late 1960s when Black student organizations across the country began to organize annual Black Cultural Weeks on campus.

Duke’s Black students had organized their own small Black Cultural Week program in early 1968. In 1969 they undertook planning for a far more ambitious celebration of Black history and culture. Scheduled for February 4 through February 11, Black Week had two stated purposes. First, it provided an opportunity for Duke’s Black students to celebrate their history, culture, and identity. Second, the week was to “educate the whites at Duke,” the *Duke Chronicle* reported, “attempting to dispel their ignorance and myths about black culture and the demands of the black movement.” While the university paid the out-of-pocket costs for Black Week, all programming, scheduling, and logistics were handled by Duke’s Black students.²⁵

As Black Week approached, the AAS was finalizing a “Ten-Point Program” laying out “What We Want and Why We Want It.” A combination of specific demands and more sweeping pronouncements, the program showed how much the thinking of those in the AAS had evolved since October 1968 when the group first met with university administrators to present their “concerns.” The AAS now demanded “the power to determine the basis for our educational environment,” calling any academic program not developed in tandem with

Black students “indoctrination.” Recognizing the “necessity for revolutionary change,” the AAS wanted “an education which will sustain the culture of black people” while providing skills that would address “the needs of our people in this racist society.” Asking for “an equitable representation of Black students at Duke,” the program called for the student body to be 29 percent Black by the fall of 1973. The ten-point program also included a call that the university “dis-employ grading” in evaluating the academic achievement of Black students and support the struggle of its nonacademic employees for “unionization and liberation.” It demanded an end to “racist living conditions” on campus, “police harassment of Black students,” and “tokenism of Black representation in university power structures.”²⁶

Reproduced in *Harambee*, a Black student-sponsored newspaper published at the beginning of Black Week, the ten-point program of the AAS addressed issues Black students had been facing at Duke for many years. In addition, the program set forth a number of new issues and demanded changes to the racial status quo that went well beyond prior discussions with the university. Historian Allen B. Ballard viewed Black student demands in this period from a historical perspective. “The Black students’ demands,” he wrote, “often from fewer than 50 people on a campus of 10,000—carried with them the weight of every slight and injury suffered by Africans from the time they were stolen from their ancestral villages.” “Behind the . . . demands,” he explained, “some clearly logical, some apparently absurd—lay a deeper unarticulated demand: to be taken seriously as human beings and to be treated as any respected human being would be treated.” In retrospect, Knight appeared to grasp the message the demands communicated. “The nonnegotiable demands often meant,” the Duke president wrote later, “‘Hey, look at me. I want to talk as an equal, and I want to keep all of my differences intact. I want to be visible to you *as myself*.’”²⁷

Griffith was growing frustrated. “It seemed like the demands were . . . always in a state of flux,” he recalled. “This was . . . one of the problems we had in trying to deal with them. We would talk about one [demand] and then another one would surface. And it was very hard to tie down what they wanted.”²⁸

More broadly, as events were unfolding, university administrators were unable to comprehend—let alone respond to—the anguish and frustration the school’s Black students were expressing. At a meeting of the Administrative Council held on January 30, the group of senior administrators received a report from Griffith on “requests from the Afro-American Student Group.” Griffith told the council that the ad hoc committee formed in October 1968

had “resolved several requests” and that “other problems are under close consideration.” He acknowledged, however, that the committee was “without prerogative” to deal with the Black students’ more significant requests, including those seeking additional Black faculty members, more Black students, a Black student adviser, and summer and tutorial programs. Referring to the 50 percent attrition rate experienced by Black freshmen following the fall 1968 semester, Griffith warned that “frustrations are mounting.”²⁹

Presiding over the Administrative Council, Knight remained unwilling to think outside the box in responding to Griffith’s report. Knight asked Duke provost Marcus Hobbs to “pursue the establishment of an advisory committee composed of Academic Council members to sit with Mr. Griffith in meetings with students, including disadvantaged students, on non-academic affairs.” Resisting demands that the university address the distinctive needs of Duke’s Black students, the committee agreed that the problems presented by the AAS “involve all disadvantaged students, not just a special few, and will be approached from this viewpoint.” Vice provost and dean of Arts and Sciences Harold W. Lewis appeared focused on optics. “We must show at least that some program is coming,” he told the group. Lewis suggested that “the most graceful way is that we have a committee . . . to look at the academic situation of all students who have failed to make it this semester and why, and further, at what can we do to [get] them up to standard.”³⁰

Rather than move toward decisive action, Knight requested additional information. He asked the group to look into “(1) the academic problem and (2) the black student situation from the viewpoint of (a) what response to their situation have we already developed (b) the visible committees for the continuation of our efforts (c) what have we done over the past several months and whether this is the direction we want to move.” The administrators should come back to him, Knight said, in “all due haste.”³¹

On January 31, the AAS held a forum on the quad to discuss the high attrition rate among Black students. According to the *Duke Chronicle*, nearly all of Duke’s Black students attended the forum, along with three hundred white students and professors. In “speech after speech,” the Black students discussed the causes of the high attrition rate. Among the factors cited, the *Duke Chronicle* reported, were “academic weakness, racism, cultural shock, hostility, difficulty in adjusting to dorm life, frustration and bigoted professors.”³²

At the conclusion of the forum, a “progress report” on the AAS demands was provided by Black student leaders along with a discussion of each. Listening to the report, Griffith heard no mention of progress the university

had made on issues like a Black barber, library holdings, dedicated office space for the AAs, financial support for Black Week, and the playing of “Dixie” at school events. Griffith felt he had no choice but to correct the record. “At a forum on the quad,” he said later, “I just went down item by item, because I was really so upset that they were putting out material that was just untrue.” However, Griffith had no progress to report on key issues such as Black studies, recruitment of Black faculty, and the president’s Hope Valley membership.³³

Many Duke administrators and faculty now perceived the school’s Black students as more interested in confrontation than in effectuating change. “It was more for disruption than wanting any particular thing,” Hobbs commented. “If you agreed in one area, it was immediately upgraded—you needed to acquiesce in another two or three.” Some of the protesters, Hobbs believed, “wanted to run the university.” “I was convinced that [the takeover] was just an inevitability,” Griffith recollected. “I do believe that if we had opened up and said, ‘We’ll do anything you want us to do’ [a confrontation still] would have happened.” “I don’t think the Black students were interested in . . . an agreement,” Cell commented. “They were presenting demands for the purpose of creating a confrontation. The end was not the Black studies program or this or that concession. These were means; the end was a confrontation with a university that very much needed to be confronted. I’m not quarrelling with that. Except that this was very difficult to deal with. In fact, impossible to deal with.”³⁴

As for the Black students, after the January 31 forum, their internal discussions began to increasingly focus on a takeover of the Allen Building. No action, however, was imminent. “We decided,” Armstrong explained, “to see if Black Week would loosen things up.”³⁵

When Knight had learned of the Black students’ request that the university support Black Week in October 1968, he responded that there was “obviously some dynamite” in such a prospect.³⁶ With Black Week now only days away, Knight tried to mitigate the destructive force he feared the event would generate.

First, Knight wrote the trustees, alerting them to the upcoming Beauty of Black symposium. He described the weeklong program and warned that the student publication *Harambee* would include student essays, “some of which

are expected to be critical of Duke” and “use language which will be offensive.” Knight reassured the trustees that no university funds had been used to produce *Harambee*. “A careful reading [of *Harambee*] will tell us a good deal about what these students feel,” he explained, “and we need to know.”³⁷

At the same time, on February 4, Knight published a statement in the *Duke Chronicle* endorsing Black Week. Hoping to defuse growing anger, he used his comments to respond to a number of the Black students’ demands. Knight commended the AAS for “providing opportunities to consider aspects of black American culture of which they are justifiably proud” and encouraged the entire university community to take full advantage of them. Acknowledging both “genuine successes” and “undoubted failures” in the university’s dealings with its “minority group students,” Knight noted that some of the recommendations made by the AAS in October 1968 had been approved “without delay” while others “will require careful study.” The Duke president announced steps designed to deal with the “disproportionate attrition of our black students,” including implementation of a summer transition program, appointment of an adviser to all minority groups, and identification of “those students whom we have already lost” who might qualify for readmission following participation in the new summer program.³⁸

Knight’s final announcement was by far the most difficult for him. Because “there must be a clear commitment on the part of us all to the proposition that this University is *one* place and *one* community,” Knight said, “as President of the University, I can no longer be a part of organizations which practice racial discrimination.” On the same day, he advised the president of Hope Valley Country Club of his resignation, telling him that “I regret that this is made necessary by Club policy, and I retain genuine good will for my many friends who have reached conclusions which differ from my own.” His withdrawal was an “insult” to club members, Knight said later. “If you want to take something that called for real fortitude, that was a real winner.”³⁹

While Knight later characterized his Hope Valley resignation as “a matter of conviction,” his decision-making process was more complicated. Approached initially about his club membership in 1966, Knight had resisted repeated calls to resign because he feared doing so would weaken his position at Duke. “This was a very sharply defined issue,” he explained, “because it involved what were regarded as the social rights of every member of the club. . . . It was a devastating thing that I had to do. . . . It called into question the judgment of all of the people around me. It would have been a small fraction of 1 percent of

the people around me who would have taken . . . that position,” he concluded. “And yet it was the right one—so there you are.”⁴⁰

In public, Knight had defended his continued membership as necessary to allow him to work from within the club to effectuate a change in its membership policy. “I think [Knight] had really mixed emotions about that country club situation,” Griffith recounted. “He was caught pretty much between a rock and a hard place. . . . He was not happy about the [Caucasian-only] clause being in there [but] felt that if he left, he’d be doing more harm to the situation. He was the liberal Duke president who would basically cut off his connections with the segment of Durham that was important to Duke.” Griffith reported about Knight, “He felt that from within the club he could” change the policy.⁴¹

Knight eventually saw that getting Hope Valley to reverse its segregationist membership policy was impossible. “I think I knew what a forlorn hope it was when I started off,” he recounted, “but I thought I had to play it out. . . . I discovered that there wouldn’t be a bit of movement on the part of the Hope Valley folk, so that all the movement had to be mine. . . . They weren’t about to show even a slight degree of change in their membership policy,” Knight recalled painfully. “Not a flicker.”⁴²

Even after this became apparent, Knight agonized. In January 1969, with pressure on him reaching a crescendo, the Duke president asked for Griffith’s advice on what to do. “I must confess from where I sit,” Griffith responded, “my recommendation would be to resign your membership in light of the fact that there can be no anticipated change in the club membership [policy] in the foreseeable future.”⁴³

Knight’s response to Griffith showed how conflicted he was. “The public problem remains as vexed as ever,” he told Griffith, “in the sense that if I take the step we have discussed, I think I may pretty effectively neutralize whatever remains of my usefulness down town. On the other hand,” he wrote, “my own conscience bothers me so seriously that I think I may have to resolve the question on that ground alone (hardly the weakest ground, after all).”⁴⁴

Knight looked back bitterly on how little credit he got for making such a politically costly choice. “The irony of it,” he commented, was that resigning “was a very difficult thing to do. And in the temper of the student mind, this was something that they had forced and it really didn’t cost them anything. And the thought that this was just one more step in the destruction of my position,” Knight reflected, “just didn’t really cross their minds.”⁴⁵

Knight was correct that he garnered little credit from Duke's Black students for his Hope Valley resignation. "We would appreciate more him doing nothing," McBride, AAS president at the time, told the *Duke Chronicle*, "than coming out and telling [us] how liberal he is. . . . They either think that we are joking or that we'll give up and forget about it." McBride called on every Duke student to reinforce how "dead serious" they were about the changes Blacks were demanding. Hopkins dismissed Knight's announcement as a "pacification effort." "When he feels that something is imminent as far as unrest among the black students," Hopkins commented, "he comes up with a few concessions." Griffith, not surprisingly, was more positive. "I interpret [Knight's] statement," he said, "as a commitment to make considerable effort to resolve some of the remaining questions that exist."⁴⁶

The tense racial climate on campus became clear when, on the same day that the *Duke Chronicle* reported on Knight's endorsement of Black Week, it published a column by Chuck Hopkins titled "Why Duke Is Racist." White people seeking to understand the Black student experience at Duke, Hopkins wrote, must first ask what institutional changes "were undertaken when blacks were brought to this campus." Calling Duke before 1963 "a bulwark of institutionalized human degradation," he argued that "since its integration Duke has done nothing institutionally to deal with its own racism." As proof, Hopkins pointed out that "the same racist structures and personalities which ran this University in its pre-integrated state are still running it today." The problem of Black student unrest could be solved, Hopkins explained, only when the people who run the university "decide that it is necessary for them to sit down with Black people and deal effectively with the racism which prevails here. . . . But if they continue to believe they can buy time with their pacification efforts," he warned, "they are dealing with a myth that they clearly can no longer afford."⁴⁷

Rumors that a building takeover was imminent now actively spread around campus. Knight increasingly worried about a confrontation. "This is no easy road," he reminded a group of white students who wrote to him after his February 4 announcement to ask that he "give immediate attention" to the remaining AAS demands. "We could find it impossible to accomplish the very things you believe in most," he warned, "if by some grave error" Black students tried to use force to achieve their demands. An even clearer statement came at an off-campus dinner discussion at the start of Black Week when the Duke president was asked what would be done if a group of students seized a university building. Such an action

“would be a great error,” a red-faced Knight responded. “It had damn better not be taken.”⁴⁸

The road signs to disaster had become even clearer.

Black Week at Duke in February 1969 was a remarkable event. It featured twenty-one scheduled speeches, seminars, plays, and other programs as well as soul food, a boutique of African fashion, Black music (on the campus radio station), and an exhibit of works by Black artists.⁴⁹

Harambee set the tone with essays, poems, free verse, interviews, and photographs. The newspaper expressed the insight, frustration, bitterness, and pride Duke’s Black students were experiencing. In its “Statement of Purpose,” the paper spoke directly to white readers. “The motive” behind *Harambee*, the editorial board wrote, “is to dispel your ignorance and myths. Please, realize Blacks did not enter this institution on a premise of becoming hopelessly bitter. . . . Blacks believe that blatant racism, subtle bigotry, dehumanizing effects of shallow liberalism and the belief that a white ‘superior’ culture is liberating the minds of Black people generated our present mentality. . . . The essays [in *Harambee*] show the epiphany of Blacks who were once negroes.” “To be Black,” the Statement of Purpose concluded, “is to emerge from the shackles of lies and deceit that make people niggers.”⁵⁰

Hopkins published an essay in *Harambee* called “Black Rap,” discussing the educational system in America. “It is crystal clear,” Hopkins wrote, “that the intellectual bullshit which is taught on campuses today is directed towards maintaining the established ruling class in this country. The Black student,” he explained, “must cleanse himself of all value teachings from the reactionary American educational system.” Hopkins argued that a new ideology would emerge “from the bosoms of the loving, hating, destructive, creative, and beautifully passionate masses of Black people.”⁵¹

Other essays and poems conveyed direct or implied threats of violence. “We now see a new Black man,” freshman Larry Weston wrote, “who is willing to utilize any means necessary to ensure that his voice is not only heard, but respected. . . . It must be increasingly recognized,” he wrote, “that the Black man . . . must wield the awesome power which he controls if he is to survive. . . . Like it or not world, your time has arrived. . . . Move over, baby, or we shall move over you.”⁵² In his poem “A New Language,” McBride was equally direct:

*There is one language
that even pigs understand
It's spoken with lead teeth,
A mouth of steel,
And a tongue of hot, burning powder. . . .
Now all you people who
don't know this language
You'd better learn it fast
'Cause we all are going to need it
To talk to our "pig chowder."⁵³*

Trustees, alumni, and administrators who saw a copy of *Harambee* were deeply offended. One trustee who had seen excerpts from the newspaper called them “vile, filthy, and obscene. . . . No Duke student,” he wrote Knight, “should be permitted to remain in school who would write . . . any of these thoughts” for publication. The contents of the newspaper triggered alumnus William Werber’s worst fears. *Harambee*, he said, “advocated teaching young blacks to murder white people” and contained threats to “burn white homes and white businesses.” Another alumnus, Sim A. DeLapp, asked what defense the university had to “the depraved minds who give utterance to these filthy, dangerous comments? An administration that will allow this to pass unnoticed,” he charged, “is not worthy of the respect of decent, free men.”⁵⁴

Black Week began when Howard Fuller spoke on Thursday, February 6, at a seminar called No More Orangeburgs. Fuller told the group he saw “no distinction between the physical violence which took place in Orangeburg, and the killing of minds that is taking place in our school systems.” “Black people cannot allow people to be slaughtered,” he argued, and “must stop turning the other cheek.” Fuller dismissed a system of education that is “brutally destroying black minds” and called for the creation of a Black studies program at Duke that would “meet black needs and goals.”⁵⁵

President Knight attended a number of Black Week events, including a performance of *God's Trombones* by James Weldon Johnson. First published in 1927, the work's subtitle is *Seven Negro Sermons in Verse*. Its penultimate message, “Let my People Go,” is based on the book of Exodus and tells the story of the liberation of the Hebrews from Egypt. Performed by William Turner, the sermon carried a special message for the Duke president. Knight “was there in Branson that night in the audience,” Turner recalled. “The words ‘Let my

People Go' [in the sermon] were directed explicitly and clearly right to him in his face. 'Let my people go!'"⁵⁶

Cell also attended the plays. Afterward, he offered some unsolicited tactical advice to Black student Tony Axam. "Don't go into Allen Building," he told the Black student leader. "Once you do, [the administration] will know exactly what to do. . . . It's your trump card," Cell cautioned, "but it's the last one you've got. Don't play it." The suggestion, Cell thought, "got nowhere."⁵⁷

The most anticipated event of the week was the appearance of comedian and activist Dick Gregory. During the late 1960s, Gregory spoke at hundreds of academic institutions. "I spend about 98 percent of my time today on college campuses," Gregory commented, "and for a reason. I feel that you young folks in America today are probably the most morally committed, ethical group of dedicated young people that have ever lived in the history of this country." Gregory's speech—titled "Nigger"—was scheduled for 8:00 p.m. on February 10.⁵⁸

Knight did not attend Gregory's speech. However, aware of Gregory's importance, the Duke president invited the Black leader, along with sixteen Black students, to dinner at University House before the speech. Knight looked forward to hosting what he hoped would be "a good and proper dinner." The evening did not turn out as planned. "Armored in our white liberal innocence," Knight recounted later, "we were a bit bewildered when . . . no one [came] for dinner—just a terse message saying that if all could not come, none would come. Our black servants (good friends by now) were far more outraged than we," Knight recounted, "and said so with considerable vigor." "You are doing the thing that's right," Knight said later. "Then you find out that the request [for a dinner] was nothing but a ploy . . . on the part of all black students [to object] that they couldn't all be there." "One gets caught," Knight concluded. "There is almost nothing you can do that's right. Almost nothing."⁵⁹

Unfortunately for Knight, the dinner snub did not end his evening. The Black students "got together in a meeting," Hopkins reported, "and said, 'Hey, these are grievances we all are going to raise. Let's all go out there.'" Joined by Gregory, "all of us walked into Knight's house. He took it well," Hopkins recalled. "It was kind of tense at first, but then we got to talking."⁶⁰

Knight and the seventy-five Black students discussed a list of nine demands the AAS was now presenting to the university. The wording of the nine demands was more urgent than in the past, focusing on the issue of control. The Black students wanted a Black studies program "right away." They insisted on a Black dorm, promising to be "just as selective as to who stays there as the fraternities on campus already are." On academic matters, they wanted reinstatement of

all Black students who “failed to make a successful academic adjustment to the University,” and an academic adviser selected by them—not “an administration appointee who identifies with the white power structure rather than us.” The language in the demands showed how wide the gulf between the administration and its students had become. “We will not be appeased by the tidbits the administration has handed out,” the first demand said. “We will not compromise our humanity. . . . We want a say in everything that involves us. . . . We want to be in on . . . any plans or decisions that have anything to do with us.”⁶¹

Gregory remained quiet through much of the discussion with Knight. “We were trying to figure out what Gregory was going to say,” Hopkins recounted, “which way he was going.” Finally, Gregory “just came out and told Knight,” Hopkins recounted, “Give the students what they are asking. They’re not asking that much.” Before departing, the students turned up the heat further. They warned the Duke president of “an unspecified action” in the “near future” if he did not comply satisfactorily with the demands.⁶²

Gregory’s speech later at the indoor stadium was attended by three thousand people. “This is the most morally polluted, degenerate, insane nation on the face of the Earth,” Gregory told the crowd. “We’re saying we’re tired of this institutionalized racism. We’re saying we want Black studies because we all at once want to find out who we are. Since we decided we ain’t your nigger,” Gregory said to cheers and clenched fists from Duke’s Black students, “we wanna know who we are.”⁶³

The next day, Knight issued a statement. His concern was not the substance of the Black students’ grievances but the process, especially their use of the word *demands*. “I didn’t have a group of students at University House making ‘demands’ on Monday evening,” he told the Duke community in a statement that appeared in the *Duke Chronicle*. “The way the university works, we don’t make demands of one another. I don’t accept demands from the trustees,” he went on, and “I don’t make demands of any of my faculty colleagues.” Desperate to characterize his interactions with the Black students as part of the university’s more customary decision-making process, he explained that the students on Monday had simply “described . . . matters which are of deep and genuine concern to them.” Knight said the issues raised would be considered “without any of the delays of which people are so suspicious these days.”⁶⁴ Yet by framing his remarks as a rebuke to the notion of “making demands,” Knight had further polarized the situation.

The day after he released his statement, Knight told a joint meeting of the Administrative Council and the Executive Committee of the Academic

Council that he had talked to the Black students at University House on Monday night “with what he felt was good rapport.” In fact, he was mistaken: the students viewed the evening as a turning point. “During Black Week we went to visit Dr. Knight with Dick Gregory,” Brown recounted. “That was the point everyone went back and said we’ve got to talk about something that’s gonna do something.”⁶⁵

Knight thought Gregory’s visit and speech were a direct precursor to the Allen Building takeover. “Dick Gregory was the trigger,” he said later. “I would say the speech he gave that night was undoubtedly the explosive one. It was designed to be, [and] in that sense it was a very well worked out enterprise.” Like others who blamed campus unrest on “outside forces,” once again, Knight was wrong. Gregory “might have said a lot of things that . . . firmed it up in some people’s minds,” Becton recalled, but “nothing that he said was the spark for ‘Let’s take over Allen Building.’ The idea came from within.”⁶⁶

The programming on Tuesday, the final day of Black Week, further accelerated matters. At 10:00 a.m., Fannie Lou Hamer, leader of the Mississippi Freedom Party, spoke on the “politics of liberation.” “I don’t want to hear any more talk about ‘equal rights,’” she told the audience. “I don’t want to be equal to people who raped my ancestors, sold my ancestors and treated the Indians like they did. I don’t want to be equal to that. I want ‘human rights.’” The events of the day ended at 10:00 p.m. with *six* concurrent student-led seminars, titled “Where Do We Go from Here?—Community or Chaos?”⁶⁷

Members of the AAS hoped that the events of Black Week would sensitize Duke administrators and students to the issues Duke’s Black students were facing, but this did not occur. Attendance by whites at Black Week events was largely confined to the plays that were presented. “The purpose of Black Week was to educate, not to entertain,” Hopkins commented. “I feel that we failed . . . in this respect as the only events well attended by whites were the entertaining ones.” Black Week “probably didn’t change their minds,” Bill Werner observed. “We saw the same white faces at all the seminars, the same radical few.”⁶⁸

Beyond apathy, Black students sensed a generally negative reaction to Black Week among many administrators. “They were so angry with us,” Janice Williams recalled. “They just got really upset with us pulling that off and pretty much let us know that they didn’t appreciate it,” she said. “The response to Black Week was very negative.” According to Armstrong, “Duke’s Black students came away from Black Week wondering, ‘Who’s listening to us?’ . . . Nobody cared that we were there. Nobody cared to find out anything about us.”⁶⁹

If Black Week had little impact on Duke's white community, it had a profound effect on the school's Black students. As leaders of the AAS had anticipated, Black Week brought Duke's Black students closer together as they began to coalesce around the demands of the AAS. "Black Week was very pivotal for people allowing their collective ethnicity to come out," Armstrong noted. "It was nice to congeal the interests of a lot of the 'conservative' factions with the political 'issue oriented' interests of the 'militant faction.' You could do that in the context of Black Week."⁷⁰

Speakers like Dick Gregory, Howard Fuller, and Fannie Lou Hamer, Turner said, created "a revolutionizing experience" for many Black students. Black Week is what really "radicalized me," Turner explained. "I'll never forget the people." One question Gregory asked made a particularly strong impression on Armstrong. "Dick Gregory talked to us about what we were doing at Duke," she recalled. "He said, 'They don't want you here in the first place, and they've made it so hard for you to live here and study here that you're not going to get an education. What are you doing here besides satisfying a quota?'" For Turner, Hamer, who passionately described her suffering in the racist South and a career in civil rights activism, was "probably the one with the greatest impact of all." Hamer also moved Bertie Howard. "For a lot of us," Howard recalled, she "caused us to stop and pause and think about what we were going to do."⁷¹

Planning for a building takeover was by now underway. Hamer's presence on campus solidified the resolve of a number of the participants. "To think that a woman could tolerate all the stuff that she had and go on," Howard remarked. "And here you are in a real luxurious situation. . . . In the face of that, taking a building was a very tame thing."⁷²

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Duke's Black students met at Becton's off-campus house during Black Week to consider their next steps. Despite discussions with school administrators that had started months earlier, Black students felt they had made few advances. "The people who were talking to the administration," Armstrong remembered, "proved that they had gone the 100 percent route and that they had nothing to show for it." When the option of occupying the Allen Building was brought up, it was not a new idea. "It was a time that these things were happening on other campuses," Brown explained, "and it was in the minds of many students." Until Black Week, however, occupation of a building as a way of focusing attention on university racial issues had garnered little internal support. "It was viewed

on a continuum . . . as . . . the most radical” thing to do, Hopkins said. “It had come up in previous discussions, but . . . somebody would always get up and say, ‘We’re not ready to do that.’ So it was held in abeyance.”⁷³

Although a substantial number in the group were now open to the strategy, there was still no consensus. At least one group of students felt that the right approach was to continue discussions with the administration. “Let’s try talking to the faculty some more,” Armstrong remembered these students saying. “I don’t think we’ve exhausted all the channels.” A second option—a mass withdrawal of Black students from the university—had more support. Brown favored this approach. She explained:

I just felt like the only thing that would really shock these people was for every Black student there to go see their dean and tell them that they were withdrawing, pack their bags, and leave the place all white. And the next time they . . . go out and recruit some Black students [they would have] to explain why all these Black folks left [and] maybe they would sit down and try to figure out what they needed to do to make life livable for us on campus. We sat arguing for three hours [about] alternatives.

There was “a lot of yelling,” Armstrong remembered. “There were sixty of us. Maybe thirty or forty were sure they wanted to [occupy the Allen Building]. There were five or six guys on the athletic teams who could not participate actively [because they could lose their scholarships]. Fifteen people weren’t really sure.”⁷⁴

No final decision was made that night at Becton’s house. “We talked about it and everybody went home,” Armstrong recounted. “We didn’t make a decision, we didn’t say, ‘Yes, we’re going to do this.’”⁷⁵

Still, the meeting was critical. “We decided it was the only option we had—either that or just forget about it,” Armstrong recalled. Mass withdrawal was off the table. “I don’t think 75 or 80 percent of us thought that there were any other options available to us that were reasonable,” she explained. “For the vast majority of the people in the AAS, leaving school was not an option because we knew that if we left, they would just get another group of students.”⁷⁶

When the group reconvened several days later, those supporting the occupation prevailed. “The vote was 90 percent to go in and occupy,” Becton reported. Most of those voting against a takeover, he recalled, felt it was “too drastic a measure to take.” Despite strongly differing opinions, however, Brown saw no “sense of divisiveness” in the group. “Once the group decided ‘this is what we’re going to do,’” Brown remembered, “it was up to those with indecision to

make up their minds on their own. . . . Most of us understood the reasons why [students] decided not to participate.” This “inclusiveness” reflected the maturation of the AAS and its leadership. “By the time we got to Allen Building,” Hopkins explained, we were committed to “letting everybody contribute what they want[ed] to rather than making everybody be the ‘militant.’ A lot of people felt as strongly about the issues as we did but parents were calling in to students asking what was happening, saying, ‘I didn’t send you to Duke to get involved with that.’ People wanted to keep their scholarships, the athletes didn’t want to jeopardize playing on the team. We didn’t alienate anybody,” Hopkins recounted. “We let people contribute what they were ready to contribute.” According to Brown, the vast majority of those Black students who decided they could not join the occupation of the Allen Building nevertheless “did something to help.” People acted “with one mind,” Turner remembered. “We felt like we were part of each other. We had everything at stake together.”⁷⁷

Attention now turned to planning and logistics. The group decided to occupy the central records office and the bursar’s office in the Allen Building because “that was the hub of Allen Building and we didn’t need anything else,” Armstrong recalled. The takeover would be planned for precisely 8:00 a.m., the time that the safe containing Duke’s central records opened automatically each day. “I’d go [into the Allen Building] every day and commit the floor plans to memory,” Armstrong explained. Another student, Clarence Moore, also had classes in the building. “Between the two of us, we figured out how many doors, what they were like, how they were locked. From that we could figure out how to take over the building in the most expedient way . . . and how long it would take us to do it.”⁷⁸

Other jobs were also assigned. “There were . . . people who were to find out how easy it would be to . . . get on the roofs and . . . be able to see what . . . was going on,” Armstrong explained. “There were people who had to get us walkie-talkies; there were people who were to get rations, blankets, medical supplies; there was one person who was to get the truck. There was one person who was to figure out how to establish communications once we got inside the building. There were one or two people who were to find out how to defend ourselves, or what to do if we got into a confrontation.”⁷⁹

Hopkins recalled that a transfer student from North Carolina College arranged for the truck to transport students to campus the morning of the takeover. “He had come from NCC to Duke,” Hopkins recalled, “which was a big step up. He was doing well in his courses and he wasn’t about to jeopardize all of that. So he was the one who volunteered to get the truck. That was his thing.”⁸⁰

Even as planning proceeded, differences emerged on the tactics to be used in the takeover. The biggest problem came when a small faction proposed taking guns into the Allen Building. “I said, ‘You all are crazy,’” Hopkins recalled. “What are we going to look like trying to outshoot cops and stuff holed up in Allen Building,” he said. “It was Chuck’s position and mine,” McBride recalled, “that we not do anything to give anyone an excuse to not address our demands. My concern was that I thought . . . we might die, and . . . if we had guns, I was *certain* we would die.”⁸¹

Even so, the suggestion was more than empty talk. “Some of the Black people on campus were more violence-oriented,” SDS member Hutch Traver recalled. “I was once asked by a Black student if I knew where I could get some guns.” This represented “a splinter group,” Traver noted, and the talk of guns was just “radical euphoria.” “They had no idea of what would have happened if someone had shot a gun in the air at Duke University,” he recounted. “It would have been a whole different ball game.”⁸²

The diversity of opinions in the discussions reinforced Becton’s decision to participate in the takeover. “One of my concerns was that there was a wide range of opinions about what ought to be done and how it ought to be done,” he explained. “There were . . . some freshmen who had been reading and breathing Watts and all these other places who were just basically hot heads. I was concerned that there be a balance of power [in the building] and that there be level heads. Because if the thing got out of hand, I wanted to be sure that there were enough people to be thinking clearly and rationally, as opposed to emotional sorts of things that had been present at some of our meetings. Some people went in,” he explained, “to make sure that we don’t just blow things by being totally destructive [and] lose sight of what we really want.” Michael LeBlanc recognized this dynamic. “There was a radical faction,” he acknowledged, “and there was a faction that, thank God, was a whole lot more sensible.”⁸³

One idea that initially gained acceptance was a proposal to bring kerosene into the Allen Building. Knowing that they would have control of central records, the students’ rationale was defensive. The kerosene “was an ace in the hole . . . that was protection,” Howard explained. In effect, the students were saying to anyone who tried to end the takeover by force, “If you come in here and take the building, you’ve got to remember that . . . there’s all this kerosene laying around [and all these records], so you better be careful what you do.” “We never really thought of destroying property,” Armstrong recounted. “Even if it was raised, it was objectionable. *Extremely objectionable.*”⁸⁴

Since the moderate, nonviolent Black students controlled the planning and execution of the Allen Building takeover, the decision was made, according to Brown, to avoid a “violent confrontation.” “We wanted [to get people to] negotiate with us on a serious level. . . . I don’t think we had any intentions of hurting anyone, or physically damaging the building.”⁸⁵

Despite their talk of revolution, leaders of the AAS still clung to the liberal notion that people of good will could be moved to action. “Although we were militant and outspoken,” Hopkins explained, “all of us came out of a consciousness [that said], if you show the oppressor his wrongs, he’ll change them.” “I think all of us held on in the back of our minds,” Armstrong remembered, “to that last vestige of hope for reason among those in the administration.”⁸⁶

The takeover was set for February 13. All planning had been completed and supplies and transportation arrangements were in place. On February 12, the Black students gathered for a final meeting at Becton’s house to confirm the decision to move ahead with the takeover. “It could have been called off as late as the night before,” Hopkins recalled. But “when we broke up that night, . . . the decision had been made. It was just a matter of everybody meeting at the right time and the individuals who were supposed to do certain things doing them.”⁸⁷

Duke administrators also gathered on February 12 at a joint meeting of the Administrative Council and the Executive Committee of the Academic Council. The minutes of the meeting indicate that Griffith “observed with concern that just prior to and during [Black Week], notable deterioration had taken place in University relationships with its black students.” Griffith saw “an impatience and apparent unwillingness to cooperate” among the Black students, “making it hard for him and others working with him to do anything about their petitions for changes.” McBride, the new president of the AAS, Griffith told the group, had “expressed little interest in meeting with committees” and “become demanding in talks with [Griffith] about what is to be done. . . . A demonstration was possible at any time,” Griffith warned.⁸⁸

Aware of a looming crisis, the administrators decided to form yet *another* committee. Hobbs expressed displeasure with the ad hoc committee that had been working on the Black students’ demands. “Hobbs’s foremost objective,” Cell described, “was to try to get things back into channels. It had gone all haywire. . . . Provosts and deans running around like chickens with their heads cut off.”⁸⁹ He preferred “one committee somewhat akin to a steering or a grievance committee composed of faculty and, perhaps, students having

knowledge of, rapport with, and access to all campus groups.” Such a committee would serve as a clearinghouse for all student suggestions and demands. “It would be understood,” the minutes reported, “that if one wanted to be heard, he was expected to go through this committee.”⁹⁰

Thus, at the very moment that Black students were preparing a takeover to focus attention on their demands, administrators were urgently seeking to reestablish order. All demands would go to the new committee. The minutes of the joint meeting showed that administrators had determined that, going forward, “channels must be followed.” “No other procedure is acceptable to Duke University,” Hobbs wrote at the time, “and individuals who advocate or practice violent or massive confrontation . . . will be declared *personas non grata* and procedures will be instituted to deny [them] access to the property of Duke University.”⁹¹

The two meetings, the same day, dramatically illustrated the chasm that had developed between Duke and its Black students. Six years into desegregation, Black students looked at the university and saw indifference, intransigence, and bad faith. “I guess initially we thought all you had to do was say, ‘Look, you overlooked something,’” Brown explained. “Well, now they *knew* they had overlooked a whole lot of things and they *still* weren’t doing anything. . . . It wasn’t just a matter of letting people know. Now they *know*, and they ain’t gonna do.” For their part, administrators saw the Black students’ demands as without substance and simply designed to provoke confrontation. “Everybody ought to have a voice,” Hobbs acknowledged, but matters had gone too far. The Black students “wanted everyone else to do what *they* wanted them to do,” he commented. “That’s . . . real anarchy as far as I was concerned. . . . You can’t have an institution and have anarchy at the same time.”⁹²

By morning, these two groups would face each other in a confrontation that carried enormous risk and potentially dire consequences for the university and the individuals involved. As it had from the moment Black students stepped onto Duke’s campus, race would shape how events unfolded.