

## CHAPTER 8

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### No Option to Negotiate

#### *Confrontation*

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The Black students who spent the night at Charles Becton's house on February 12 stepped inside the back of the U-Haul truck to travel to campus to take over the Allen Building just after 7:30 a.m. "There was a giddiness at first," Brenda Armstrong recounted, "but when they closed the door and it was dark . . . it jolted everyone into [a] reality of how important and . . . potentially dangerous what we were doing really was."<sup>1</sup>

For Armstrong, the short trip to campus brought to mind thoughts of her ancestors. "I remember talking to my best friend . . . about knowing what it was like in the 'Middle Passage,'" the brutal sea journey that took slaves from West Africa to the West Indies. "It was dark," she recalled. "My hands were just full of sweat. . . . It was the most frightening thing I've ever been through in my entire life." Bertie Howard had more immediate concerns. "The gas fumes were terrible," she vividly remembered. "It was early in the morning. I hadn't eaten. I hadn't slept. . . . I remember thinking to myself, 'I'm going to throw up.'" For everyone, the stakes were momentous. Students realized, as Armstrong said, that if the takeover failed, "we had put [our lives] and careers on the line."<sup>2</sup>

The takeover was planned for 8:00 a.m. That time was selected because the safe in the registrar's office containing the only copies of the permanent

academic records of Trinity and Duke students going back to 1854 opened without fail at that hour each day. At precisely the designated time, Becton recounted, “the truck stopped, the back came up, the kids jumped out, [and] ran into the back of Allen Building. At the same time, kids were coming from all four points on the quad, running toward Allen Building.” Even with this precision, not everything went exactly as planned. The last one off the truck, Stef McLeod, had brought a box of chocolate bars to use as energy food during the takeover. Chuck Hopkins described how McLeod,

as he was coming off the truck, dropped the box and had chocolate bars all over the place. . . . We were going into Allen Building, trying to get everyone in there quick, and there was Stef out there trying to gather up chocolate bars. And [the driver] Jim was trying to get the truck out of there. I yelled to Stef, “Man, leave those chocolate bars alone.” . . . So the scene was Stef holding on to the back of the truck trying to hold on to the chocolate bars. [Finally he] jumped off and ran in.<sup>3</sup>

As the students entered the building, “the adrenaline was flowing,” Janice Williams remembered. “We wanted to do things just right so that they would know we meant business.” The first step was to usher employees already at work out of the building. In the registrar’s office, Mary Seabolt tried unsuccessfully to close the vault containing the university’s irreplaceable academic records. Clark Cahow, university assistant registrar, later described the students as having been “very polite.” Upon entering the registrar’s office, he said, the students informed Seabolt and others “that they were taking over the building. [They] asked them please [to] get their personal belongings . . . so they could be escorted out of the building.”<sup>4</sup>

In a letter to the editor of a North Carolina newspaper, employee Joyce Siler described her experience in the bursar’s office very differently. “A Negro male entered the Bursar’s Office and firmly commanded that we ‘get out,’” she wrote. “Baseball bats, lengths of pipe, and chains . . . were being banged against the walls and floors of the office and shouts of ‘get out’ could be heard from all sides. I took my coat from the rack and headed toward the door when a Negro male carrying a baseball bat . . . grabbed my dress sleeve and shouted obscenities, demanding that ‘I get out now.’”

Siler felt “man-handled, pushed, [and] terrorized.” Other secretaries testified that they were “frightened to death,” “very afraid,” or “shocked.”<sup>5</sup>

However different these perceptions, no employees said they were physically harmed when the offices were vacated. Although deeply unsettling to

some of the Duke employees in the Allen Building, the takeover had been completed without violence.

The Black students then proceeded to secure the space. A metal bar and chains were inserted through the handles of the glass doors that opened to the Allen Building lobby, and furniture was piled in front of the doors. A pair of wooden doors at the opposite end of the first-floor corridor was nailed shut. Other access points were chained. Windows from the lobby into the offices on the first floor of the Allen Building were covered with a hand-lettered sign announcing that the area had been renamed the “Malcolm X Liberation School.” The entire operation was completed in just two minutes.<sup>6</sup>

William Griffith “heard some pounding on [the] back double doors” of the Allen Building as he headed up the stairs to his office on the second floor. “I went to see what was going on and I couldn’t get in,” he explained. “I looked through the crack and . . . knew it was being barricaded. I said, ‘Look, let me talk to you.’ . . . They came to the door and [said] that they couldn’t talk to me. . . . I went around the other side of the building and saw it was also barricaded.” With Douglas Knight out of town, Griffith called university provost Marcus Hobbs, telling him, “We’ve got a situation here.”<sup>7</sup>

Duke was far from the only school to experience Black activism on February 13, 1969. On the same day, historian Ibram X. Kendi wrote, “black students disrupted higher education in almost every area of the nation.” Indeed, Kendi described February 13, 1969, as “a day, or *the* day, that black campus activists forced the racial reconstitution of higher education.” “It was a day,” he wrote, “that emitted the anger, determination, and agency of a generation that stood on the cutting edge of educational progression.”<sup>8</sup>

Each school experienced Black protest in its own way, with events playing out against the backdrop of Black activism and the impact of different personalities, entrenched power dynamics, and aspirations unique to each institution. At Duke, one key part of that context was the Silent Vigil that had occurred in April 1968—only ten months earlier. Although they were very different events, the Silent Vigil and the Allen Building takeover presented those in power at Duke with many of the same agonizing decisions. Would the university negotiate or make concessions in the face of student protest? What strategies, relationships, and resources would Duke deploy to persuade the students to end the crisis peacefully? How quickly would decision makers give serious consideration to the use of force to end the occupation, and on what basis? Answers to these questions on

February 13, 1969, show how powerfully race shaped the university's response to protest.

Although planning for the Allen Building takeover had been done in secret, advance notice of an “unspecified action” the next day was provided to a small group on Wednesday night, February 12. One recipient of the news was Benjamin Ruffin, a Black community leader and close associate of Black activist Howard Fuller. Takeover planners told Ruffin, Hopkins explained, “because we wanted support from the Black community.” Black student leaders also alerted several staff members of the *Duke Chronicle*, all of whom were sworn to secrecy. The Black students “wanted to be sure that outside media were notified as soon as possible,” executive editor Tom Campbell recalled. “They felt that might help to protect them from a brutal response from the police and administration.” The student leaders also wanted to be certain that the national media were made aware of the protest. Hopkins commented: “We were smart enough to know back then that we didn’t want [the takeover] to be an isolated event down here in Durham. We wanted the nation and the world to know what was going on.”<sup>9</sup>

As requested, the *Duke Chronicle* staff members convened at approximately 7:30 a.m. on February 13 and awaited word from the students. That word arrived just after 8:00 a.m. The students released a statement to the *Duke Chronicle*, drafted the prior evening, that set forth eleven demands, along with the rationale for the takeover. The statement issued from the Malcolm X Liberation School inside the Allen Building announced in capital letters:

WE SEIZED THE BUILDING BECAUSE WE HAVE BEEN NEGOTIATING WITH DUKE ADMINISTRATION AND FACULTY CONCERNING DIFFERENT ISSUES THAT AFFECT BLACK STUDENTS FOR 2 1/2 YEARS AND WE HAVE NO MEANINGFUL RESULTS. WE HAVE EXHAUSTED THE SO-CALLED “PROPER CHANNELS.”

After contacting the *Duke Chronicle*, Hopkins called Griffith and said, “We’ve just taken over the administration building, and these are the demands.” Hopkins recalled that after hearing the demands, “Bill Griffith sort of stuttered a little bit and he finally said, ‘OK, Chuck, I’ll get back to you.’”<sup>10</sup>

*Chronicle* editor Alan Ray also received a call from a student inside the Allen Building. “He said for me to call the security cops,” Ray recounted, “and tell them the blacks would burn the records if the police were sent in.”

*Chronicle* managing editor Bob Ashley received an even stronger warning. If the demands were not met immediately, the student journalist said, and the telephone line into the Allen Building did not remain open, the records would be burned.<sup>11</sup>

Despite these warnings, the threat to burn the records did not reflect the views of the vast majority of takeover participants or of Black student leaders. Destroying university property was contrary to the wishes of the majority of the group. Although kerosene was brought into the Allen Building, Armstrong recounted how, within an hour, the group “put it in the toilet. We decided,” she explained, “that even as a final act of desperation, [burning records] would not serve any purpose.” Shortly thereafter, the *Duke Chronicle* reported that any threat to burn the university’s records had been withdrawn. “No property has been destroyed,” Hopkins commented through a window in the Allen Building, “nor is there any intention to do so.” He warned, however, that “if attacked, the black students will defend the black women in the building.”<sup>12</sup>

The students had planned for a prolonged occupation. Hopkins told the *Duke Chronicle* that they had enough food to last for a week. “We have lots of food,” Josie Knowlin wrote her parents from inside the Allen Building: “peanut butter, jelly, gum, life savers, candy, bread, coffee, sugar, coffee mate, and water, all of the essentials to or for surviving.” Supplies also included cups, pots, toilet paper, mouthwash, deodorant, bulbs, batteries, towels, a crowbar, and hammers. Walkie-talkies for communication with spotters outside the building were available. So was a police radio scanner. At least one item included in the planning proved unnecessary. “We had portable commodes,” Hopkins recalled. “And we get inside and somebody said, ‘Hey, there are bathrooms in this area we have taken.’” Everybody cheered this news, Hopkins remembered.<sup>13</sup>

Howard Fuller received word of the takeover as he was speaking at a convocation at Bennett College in Greensboro. Hearing the news, he was “immediately concerned for [the students’] safety” and canceled plans to travel to Atlanta later in the day. Instead Fuller “headed back to Durham and straight to Duke.”<sup>14</sup>

As the students settled in that Thursday morning, their mood was generally positive. Armstrong remembered “a lot of rejoicing,” because “all of a sudden [the takeover] was beginning to become successful.” Initially, “there wasn’t an atmosphere of much tenseness,” Brenda Brown recalled. Knowlin wrote her parents that the students were “playing cards, listening to the news, carrying on semi-intellectual conversations, sleeping, [and] playing ball.” “Some people

would tell jokes,” Armstrong recounted, “[and] there would be a silly tense laugh [from] everyone else.” These lighter moments, however, simply masked more intense focus. “The whole atmosphere was that we had a goal to accomplish,” Williams explained, “and by God we were going to do it.”<sup>15</sup>

Initial reactions to the takeover among administrators and faculty varied. Some were sympathetic. “I was not shocked at all,” political science professor Samuel DuBois Cook commented. “I’m sure they felt that [this] was their only way out.” Cahow, whose Allen Building office was occupied, shared Cook’s perspective. “They felt they were getting the ‘cold shoulder,’” he commented. “They were absolutely convinced that they weren’t being heard and that no action would ever be taken. . . . You just live with that kind of frustration for so long and then something has to give.” Some expressed surprise. “Many of us were startled,” Knight said. “We had come eight miles out of nine” on the Black student demands. “All of us were quite astonished,” history professor Richard Watson remarked. “We thought we were making headway.” Most others were deeply critical. “My gut reaction was ‘Jesus Christ, they’ve made another blunder,’” law school dean Kenneth Pye recalled. Before the takeover, he reasoned, “they were . . . in the best possible position to negotiate almost whatever they wanted from the president. He would have given away the Chapel!” Pye thought that by occupying the Allen Building, the Black students “had played their trump card.” History professor John Cell was more succinct. Told of the takeover by a colleague, he responded, “Shit.” Most telling was the initial reaction of dean Harold Lewis. After talking about the takeover with Cahow, his first response was “Well, we better call the police.”<sup>16</sup>

A group that eventually included as many as twenty-five senior administrators, faculty, and two student representatives began to gather in the board room on the second floor of the Allen Building around 8:20 a.m. Until mid-afternoon, this served as the “situation room” for the university in dealing with the takeover. University secretary Rufus Powell took detailed contemporaneous minutes of the meeting. Knight was not present but in New York for meetings with the Ford Foundation seeking funding, ironically, for a Black studies program. A plane was chartered to bring Knight back to Durham and he arrived on campus in the afternoon.<sup>17</sup>

The first minutes of the meeting were spent exchanging the sketchy information attendees possessed about the events that were unfolding. Hobbs

shared what he knew about the occupation. Perhaps believing that all of Duke's Black students had participated in the takeover, he said that there were "approximately 70–80 inside." In fact, only around forty Black students occupied the Allen Building. Despite only incidental physical contact between the protesters and vacating Allen Building employees, Hobbs passed along reports that the Black students "had somewhat maltreated some of the people that they put . . . out of the building. . . . Some of the girls who were in the building were pushed around a little bit," he said. More significant, the provost told the group that the students were reported to "have kerosene" and said they were insisting upon their demands as set forth in the *Chronicle*. Griffith reported on the message Ashley had received from the Black students moments earlier. "They told Bob they have the records," Griffith recounted, and "if their demands . . . were not met immediately, . . . there will be fire." Griffith also reported that the Liberal Action Committee had called for a forum on the quad at 11:30 a.m. as a show of support for the Black students. Cahow almost certainly shocked the group when he reported on the contents of the open safe in his office. "Our records from the beginning of time are open to them, from the beginning of the University," he explained, "and there are no copies." "We realized they had everyone by the short hairs," Griffith recalled.<sup>18</sup>

By 8:40 a.m., Hobbs had spoken to Knight. Immediately adopting the "no negotiations" stance that prevailed throughout the day, Knight advised Hobbs that the administration "was not in a position to accede to demands." Hobbs reported that Knight did not "intend at the present time to take police action" but also relayed instructions from the president that began to frame the rationale for the use of force against the students later in the day. If they did not vacate the offices "within an hour of notification," Knight instructed, "they are to be suspended, . . . are guilty of trespass, and their action goes beyond the Pickets and Protests policy." Hobbs went further. If the protesters did not leave the Allen Building, they "will have to get off the campus" until "a hearing under due process." Less than one hour into the takeover, the university's two top administrators had characterized the Allen Building protesters as "trespassers," and as such, they were subject to removal from campus—by force if necessary. A deadline for resolution of the takeover had also been established. It was "apparent that Knight had made the decision," Griffith commented, "that the building would be cleared *that day*."<sup>19</sup> The patience and restraint white protesters had been accorded during the University House occupation and Silent Vigil ten months earlier clearly would not extend to the Black students in the Allen Building.

The news of Knight's hard line deepened concern at the meeting. While the safety of the students was a worry, preserving the university's irreplaceable academic records was also a focus. Cahow saw the threat to burn the records as the students' "hole card" and recalled that the group "stewed and stewed over what to do." University counsel Edwin Bryson and vice provost Frank de Vyver commented that they hoped no police action would be taken because of "jeopardy of the records." Education professor and Academic Council chair William Cartwright, vice provost Barnes Woodhall, vice president of business and finance Charles Huestis, and vice president for institutional advancement Frank Ashmore suggested that an offer of amnesty be made to the students "to protect the records."<sup>20</sup>

Others were less worried. "The gasoline thing never impressed me as being a serious threat," Hobbs later explained, "because if they did [burn the records], it would endanger them as well." University registrar Richard L. Tuthill also discounted the possibility that the students had kerosene and pressed a plan for security forces to storm the registrar's office through its plate glass windows. "I just felt we could get through and get them out before any records were burned," he commented. Moreover, since the records were "very durable, high quality, rag content paper," Tuthill considered it a "seriously open question . . . how many [records] could have been burned [and] and how rapidly."<sup>21</sup>

Any thought of amnesty for the students—to preserve the university's records—or attempts at substantive discussions with protest leaders soon evaporated. Ashmore reported that in a call with Charles Wade, the chairman of the board had directed the administration to "give them one hour to vacate." There would be "no promises, no amnesty," Wade said. Only "after they leave or are removed," Ashmore relayed, would "a decision . . . be made as to what to do." Less than thirty minutes later, at 11:00 a.m., Hobbs confirmed that Knight agreed with Wade. Although the president saw no reason Duke decision makers "should not stay in touch with the students," amnesty was "not under discussion." Like Wade, the president was prepared to accept the risk of a fire in an office packed with Duke students rather than deviate from his uncompromising position. Before using force to clear the building, however, Knight wanted a statement presented to the students setting forth "all that we have done toward [addressing their] stated goals."<sup>22</sup>

Cartwright later described the hours-long meeting of administrators, faculty, and student representatives as a "full, open, long, and difficult session." Although a range of topics were discussed, minutes of the meeting indicate that only once did any participant suggest that the university consider substantive



discussions with the Black students. Sociology professor Alan C. Kerckhoff asked whether there was “anything in the proposals [that was] feasible.” Seeing the use of force approaching rapidly, Kerckhoff thought it “a shame to take this action when [action on] some goals [was] possible.”<sup>23</sup>

Kerckhoff’s suggestion gained no traction. In fact, the minutes say he was met with a “chorus of voices.” “Action has been going on [on] a great many” of the issues, Kerckhoff was told. “We cannot act under demands,” Hobbs commented. “I think the answer is no negotiations while [the] records are in their possession.” Seeking to portray the university as blameless for the confrontation, dean of Trinity College Robert L. Price reviewed what the administration had done to date on the demands, the “promptness of the university [and] the failure of the students themselves to follow-up on meetings—even today.”<sup>24</sup>

Although, as Cartwright described later, “all of us in [the] meeting were in agreement that we could not act on these demands under threat of violence,” the university did remain willing to consider the Black students’ “requests and proposals for the university” after the takeover ended. Accordingly, with students barricaded in the Allen Building and police action under active discussion, Hobbs announced the formation of the “special committee on student concerns,” chaired by Kerckhoff (Kerckhoff Committee). This committee would be the university’s central point of contact for future discussion of Black student issues. At around the same time, a general faculty meeting was called for 4:00 p.m. on East Campus, in part to announce the creation of the Kerckhoff Committee.<sup>25</sup>

Griffith, the Duke administrator with the most prior contact with the Black students, also spoke up during the discussion. Having played a central role in peacefully resolving the University House occupation and Silent Vigil, he questioned the growing consensus to use force to end the occupation. “I felt that they could be talked out,” he recalled. “I just said it was counterproductive to try to drag them out of the building. I thought [the Black students] would realize that it was counterproductive on their part to stay” and that “they would leave.” During the morning, Griffith also relayed a warning from Cell, who asked that the administration refrain from taking precipitous action. He advised the group of a mobilization taking place in the Black community and among the faculty in support of the students. “I told Griffith,” Cell recounted, “that if they brought in the cops, it would be over my dead body.”<sup>26</sup>

Griffith also heard from Cook, who considered the use of force “a very serious mistake.” Cook conceded that force was used by the students in the

takeover. “But the police are a great symbol of *naked force*,” he argued. “When you invite them into your campus, . . . you’re really asking for a lot of trouble. . . . Because [calling in the police] means . . . that you’ve abandoned completely the rule of reason and commitment to the rule of reason. . . . You’ve surrendered to *naked force*. . . . That’s when things really, really take off.” Like Griffith, Cook urged patience. He favored isolating the protest “for a while. . . . Wear them down. . . . Wait it out.” “I was hoping that someone would get to . . . the president to make the decision that they would not call in force,” he said.<sup>27</sup>

Yet, in contrast to the University House occupation and Silent Vigil, Griffith found little support for a more measured approach among other administrators. “I think there were some who agreed with me,” the dean recalled, “who were more reluctant to speak out . . . because there was a feeling of being [seen as] soft.” “The university was getting entrenched in a pretty hard line,” Griffith observed. “There was a strong feeling that something had to be done.” He sensed others thinking, “Well, Bill, you’ve said your piece, let’s get on with it.”<sup>28</sup>

Momentum toward a confrontation continued to build. Just after 11:00 a.m., Hobbs reported that the police could have fifty officers on campus within an hour.<sup>29</sup>

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At the 11:30 a.m. forum on the quad convened by the Liberal Action Committee, a crowd of more than 350 could hear in the speakers’ remarks that an escalation of the confrontation was now looming. Mark Pinsky, a student leader, told the crowd that they would “have to choose sides within the next couple of hours.” The Black students’ “struggle is your struggle,” he declared.<sup>30</sup>

An AAS spokesman described efforts to get their demands met through the “proper channels” and insisted on the need for Black students to control the implementation of university commitments made to date. “History has shown,” the speaker said, “that when we do not have control, . . . we cannot rely . . . that anything such as a Black course or a Black adviser appointed by the administration . . . will be beneficial to us.”<sup>31</sup>

Cartwright agreed that “not nearly enough [progress] has been made” on the issues presented, but he urged patience. “Although each demand has at least some kernel of justice in it,” he said, “progress on any major social issue will not be made overnight, and will not be brought about . . . as a result of violence.”<sup>32</sup>

The Student Liberation Front followed Cartwright, stating that it “fully supports the demands and actions of the Afro-American Society.” The group announced the establishment of a “freedom school” on the third floor of the Allen Building to demonstrate solidarity with the Black students “and consider the larger issue of racism in our society.” Eventually as many as two hundred students participated in these discussions.<sup>33</sup>

History professor Thomas Rainey also spoke, lauding “the patience shown heretofore by the Afro-American Society” and urging the faculty to support their demands. Rainey outlined three “levels of commitment” for faculty members to consider. He asked his colleagues to “call for reason on the part of the administration, and urge them not to use force on Blacks in the building.” He requested that his colleagues sign a petition in support of the students, and then raised the stakes even further. Rainey urged faculty “to join with a few of us that intend . . . to put our bodies on the line to keep the administration from using force at this time on the Afro-American Society.”<sup>34</sup>

Finally, Griffith summarized the status of each of the twelve issues raised by the Black students at the initial meeting of his ad hoc committee on October 4. “I think you can see,” Griffith concluded his review, “that those [issues where] there has been an ability to work [in] an immediate context have been resolved.” Other questions, like the implementation of a Black studies program, he explained, “need time and . . . input of considerable numbers of the university community.”<sup>35</sup>

Back on the second floor of the Allen Building, Griffith, Price, and Ashmore met to prepare the statement and ultimatum Knight had requested. Others, remaining in the board room, began discussing the best way to communicate with the Black students in the Allen Building. The questions they raised dramatized how little these administrators and faculty knew these Duke students. Hobbs asked whether there was “any group through which they can be reached, with whom they relate.” In contrast to the vigil, where Griffith, political science professor John Strange, and Huestis, among others, were able to call on long-standing relationships with moderate white student leaders to defuse the protest, the university could think of no “trusted advisor” who could be sent to talk to the Black students. Even Griffith demurred. Recommending that any intermediary be someone higher than himself in the university hierarchy, Griffith said that he had “arrived at a plateau in my discussions” with the Black students. “I’ve gone as far as I can,” he confessed. “I’m talked out.” Griffith also believed that, because of his history of advocating for the students, he had lost the con-

confidence of some in the administration. "I'm not sure [hard-liners] would have even trusted me," he thought.<sup>36</sup>

Hobbs also asked who from the university should be the point of contact with the students. The suggestion that a faculty member attempt to deliver the university's message in person was rejected because of "hostage dangers."<sup>37</sup> That some university leaders seemed to think that the protesters occupying the Allen Building might take Cook, Cell, or another faculty member hostage shows that the students were perceived as completely out of control.

Even as events accelerated, however, Hobbs decided to propose a face-to-face meeting with Black student representatives. He wanted to do so before the university's one-hour ultimatum was delivered. Hobbs proposed suggesting that the Black students send five representatives to the board room to speak to "five of us." The purpose of the meeting would be to "discuss the situation for 30 minutes or so." No substantive discussion of the Black student demands was contemplated. At approximately 12:15 p.m., Hobbs, professor and chair of the electrical engineering department Thomas G. Wilson, and professor and chair of the physics department Henry A. Fairbank left the second floor of the Allen Building to deliver the proposal for a meeting to the students.<sup>38</sup>

Speaking to McLeod and Hopkins through a window, Hobbs introduced himself and said that he would like to talk. According to an account of the meeting prepared by Fairbank and Wilson, the students did not recognize Hobbs—the university provost—by "face, name, or office." Tuthill recounted hearing a student shout, "Go get somebody important," not aware that Hobbs was, in Knight's absence, the acting senior administrator of the university. Hobbs proposed a five-on-five meeting between university representatives and Black student protesters. "We've chatted for two or three years already, man," one of the student leaders responded to Hobbs. When Fairbank stated that the university believed that there was "a great deal of interest in your problems," the student responded sharply, "We want something concrete. Do you have the power to deal with this matter? We want to speak to those who have the power." The students also conveyed to Hobbs that two new demands had been added to the original list of eleven—"amnesty" for the protesters and an end to grading for all Black students. Hobbs assured his counterpart that the student representatives would have "free access" to return to the Allen Building and urged that representatives for the two sides meet for "30 or 40 minutes to see if we can reach agreement." While the students were open to a discussion, the format proposed by Hobbs was unacceptable. "We'll deal with you as a group, not as individuals," the student responded. When Hobbs answered that

a group meeting was “not a very reasonable alternative,” the Black student asked the provost to call back in a half hour.<sup>39</sup> The student protesters had bought time to consult with each other.

In retrospect, it is not at all surprising that the initial window conversation was so unproductive. The brief interaction with Hobbs, Wilson, and Fairbank was the first communication the students in the Allen Building had received from any official university representative. The students did not know, as Cahow later said, “who the provost was or what a provost was.” A former chemistry professor, Hobbs had assumed the provost position only in January, one month prior to the takeover. During his brief tenure, Hobbs had participated only “indirectly” in discussions with the Black students. Thus, the brief conversation among Hobbs, McLeod, and Hopkins was a first meeting for the three of them. Tuthill almost certainly spoke for other administrators. “They didn’t know anybody,” he commented. “I didn’t know any of them.” This was hardly a good foundation for further discussions.<sup>40</sup>

The morning and early afternoon were a heady time for the occupying students. Community leaders who had been role models for the students came by and spoke to them through a window. Media inquiries, including from the national press, started to arrive. Others in the community reached out by phone, including a call from the Ku Klux Klan (KKK). A Black student interviewed by WDBS from inside the Allen Building sounded a positive note. “We felt that it was a good strategic move today, that the timing was right, right after Black Week,” he said. “Everything’s coming off smoothly now. . . . We plan to stay until the university concedes to our demands. . . . We have nothing offered to us but a white man’s education, which has no relevance to us.”<sup>41</sup>

When the Black students met to discuss Hobbs’s proposal for a meeting, the group was unimpressed. “We decided it was a diversionary move,” Armstrong explained. “If they got five people out, all five people would not be able to talk for all the people who were in there. . . . It seemed to us to be a compromise of sorts. It wasn’t what we were after.”<sup>42</sup>

Significantly, although the Black students considered Hobbs’s proposal unappealing, they were not unwilling to negotiate with the administration under *any* circumstances. “We didn’t go in there with the stance of not negotiating,” Hopkins recounted. “That’s why we went in there—to force a negotiation.” What the students were demanding, however, was the chance to negotiate with someone in the university hierarchy who had the power to act definitively on their demands. “We looked at it as an operation,” Hopkins explained.

“No more of these long meetings, no more of these long periods between meetings. We want[ed] to get people’s attention and get them to address these issues.”<sup>43</sup> Without knowing that Hobbs was second-in-command, they viewed him as yet another functionary without authority to commit the university to specific actions. Hence, the students found the prospect of meeting with him unacceptable.

Around this time, Cell had a call with Hopkins, urging the Black students to vacate the Allen Building. Hopkins refused, telling Cell, “We’re staying until our demands are met.” “They wanted to negotiate with Knight,” Cell recounted. He considered this a miscalculation resulting from a misunderstanding of how the Duke bureaucracy operated. “Hobbs sent word to them that he was the provost,” Cell explained. “They don’t even know who the goddamn provost is. They don’t understand that the provost is more important than the president—especially then. Hobbs is a strong and effective administrator who had the confidence of the university, the faculty—which Knight certainly did not. And they don’t even know that.” Cell was exasperated that Hopkins and his fellow protesters did not “know a damn thing about how a university worked.”<sup>44</sup> Left unsaid, of course, was that neither Hobbs nor Knight had the authority to respond unilaterally to Black student demands.

Hobbs called the registrar’s office at 12:50 p.m. as instructed by the Black students. McLeod and Hopkins told Hobbs that “they had been talking for two and one-half years without action.” When Hobbs asked specifically if they were refusing his proposal for direct talks, “the response was clearly negative.” When Hobbs asked a second time “if they were in fact refusing to send out representatives who would be guaranteed re-access,” Hopkins and McLeod “seemed to have hung up.” The entire interaction had lasted less than ten minutes.<sup>45</sup>

Hobbs returned to the board room at 1:13 p.m. to report on the call. “The university has heard the demands,” he quoted the students as saying, “and these are the things that determine whether the Afro-Americans will start talking or not.” Hobbs also told the group that the students had hung up when he specifically asked if they absolutely refused the proposal for a meeting.<sup>46</sup>

The conversation from the Allen Building window and the subsequent brief follow-up call with Hopkins and McLeod were the *only* attempts by university decision makers to interact with the students during the takeover. Despite the high stakes involved, Hobbs believed that he had discharged any responsibility the university had to reach out to the protesters. “I think I’ve made a reasonable, honest try,” he told the group. Based on this interaction,

Hobbs and the other administrators concluded that the students were unwilling to engage in discussions of any sort. “They were not in much of a mood to talk,” Hobbs commented later.<sup>47</sup>

Not long after this, at approximately 1:45 p.m., Hobbs reported to his colleagues on a telephone conversation with Knight. The Duke president was back in Durham and Hobbs had raised the possibility of a call by Knight to the students in the Allen Building. “He had considered every alternative . . . without any conviction it would do any good,” Hobbs quoted Knight as saying. Hence, no call would be made.<sup>48</sup> In spite of the dire situation, Knight did not even attempt to speak directly to the students inside the Allen Building.

The statement and ultimatum drafted by Griffith, Lewis, and Price was nearing completion. Since the document called on the students to arrive at a decision to leave the Allen Building within one hour, the administrative group decided that delivery would be delayed until word was received that the “police are ready for action.” At 1:50 p.m., Huestis called to say that the police had been summoned to campus and were mobilizing.<sup>49</sup>

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Events now moved forward rapidly. The group of about two hundred students and faculty participating in the Student Liberation Front’s “freedom school” in the Allen Building moved their discussions to Duke Chapel. By midafternoon, the group had increased to five hundred. Student Mark Pinsky reported that a student renewing his driver’s license at the highway patrol station “had seen patrolmen with gas masks loading into cars at the station.” Word reached the Allen Building board room that the students in the freedom school were discussing “what other buildings they might take over.”<sup>50</sup>

Members of the Durham Black community also started to mobilize. “Howard [Fuller] and Ben [Ruffin] and Reverend Cousin had gotten to the community,” Armstrong recounted. “They said, ‘You must come [to campus]. You must come and protect these children. . . . We should be afraid for them but we should all be proud of them.’” Students at NCC heard about the takeover on the radio, and many came to the Duke campus. Asked by a WDBS reporter if the NCC students supported the Black students’ demands “completely, or half, or what?” the NCC representative was direct. “There is no half-Blackness. . . . We support all of the demands they have submitted.” Fuller was back in Durham and climbed through a window into the registrar’s office in the Allen Building. He found the students “calm, pretty well organized, and determined.”<sup>51</sup>

Not everyone on campus supported the takeover. “Right wing students,” the *Duke Chronicle* reported, “including members of the Young Americans for Freedom, were said to be considering ‘direct action’ against the blacks, possibly including an invasion of the occupied building.” Other students who opposed the takeover, including members of the Kappa Alpha fraternity, were beginning to congregate on the quad.<sup>52</sup>

Around 2:00 p.m., Knight’s fifteen-year-old son told his father that he would “go out and just look around” campus. “He came back,” Knight recalled, and said “things were relatively quiet [on campus], but [that] he did notice a certain amount of activity around the edge of the campus.” “By midafternoon,” the Duke president wrote later, “I was getting reports of men in pickup trucks, shotguns in the window racks, driving slowly around the outer perimeter of West Campus, watching, waiting for dark.” For Knight, this information was pivotal. “I had an acute distrust of anybody with a gun rack in his truck,” Knight said. “The threat to our black students during their day of occupation was only too clear,” he wrote later. “If there had been any easy way to get at them, several would have been injured or killed.” The report from his son “was about all I needed,” he commented. “It was evident we couldn’t temporize.”<sup>53</sup>

For many, Knight’s fear of men with gun racks in their trucks was exaggerated. “I don’t believe that [a] thought [of vigilantes] ever crossed my mind,” Hobbs said. “It really wasn’t a consideration.” “My feeling in Allen Building,” Howard commented, was that members of the Kappa Alpha fraternity “were a bigger threat than the κκκ. . . . Those were some crazy people.” Armstrong called the notion that Knight summoned the police to protect the protesters from attacks by whites “a bunch of crap.” “The people we were most afraid of,” she said, “were the Durham police.”<sup>54</sup>

Police cars were now gathered at a staging area in Duke Gardens, just off the quad on West Campus. Seventy-four armed police officers had arrived with tear gas at the ready. Lookouts carrying walkie-talkies relayed this ominous news to the protesters in the Allen Building. Around 3:00 p.m., Griffith reported to the administrative group that students were aware that police had gathered in Duke Gardens.<sup>55</sup>

Inside the Allen Building, the mood was changing. The excitement of earlier in the day had given way to what Armstrong described as a “sense of tenseness [and] frustration.” “I thought about my folks a whole lot,” she recalled, “because my father was very against me being involved.” This time was “very tense—very, very tense,” Josie Knowlin recalled, “because we didn’t know what to expect.”<sup>56</sup>



Not optimistic that the students would comply with the university's ultimatum, Hobbs drafted a brief second notice that would be delivered if they refused to vacate the building. Around 3:20 p.m., Huestis called to report that the police had completed all final preparations. With this news, Hobbs, Fairbank, and Wilson approached a window outside the registrar's area of the Allen Building. Hobbs requested permission to pass copies of the statement and ultimatum to the students, and a window was opened to receive the documents. Hobbs read the statement through the window as the students followed along. "President Knight has acknowledged our genuine concern that your legitimate needs in the University be met," he said. "At his request numerous meetings have been held since early October with the Afro-American Society. At that time your major concerns were identified, and an honest effort was made to understand them." After reviewing the university's commitments on issues such as a Black dorm, summer program, recruitment, and a Black adviser, Hobbs reported the formation of the Kerckhoff Committee. The new committee, he said, would meet with "you and with other groups of students who feel the University is not adequately meeting their needs." Pursuit of the issues raised by the Black students, the provost told the students, "can and will take place when you depart voluntarily from this building."<sup>57</sup>

The ultimatum Hobbs then issued was cryptic. "We realize that you must discuss this among yourselves and arrive at your own decision," he said. "In order to permit you the opportunity to do this you are advised that you may take the next hour to arrive at your decision. It is imperative, however, that your decision be reached within one hour." As Hobbs completed reading the statement, a student demanded to know the significance of the one-hour time limit. Without being specific, Hobbs responded only that the orderly process in the university had been disrupted. "You've given us one hour and we've given you two-and-one-half years to solve the problems of this racist institution," Hopkins shouted back. Despite student requests for further explanation, the provost and his colleagues concluded that "further discussion at this point would be useless." "One was attempting to communicate through a slit window . . . across a concrete moat," Hobbs wrote later. "The occupants in the Registrar's area had full telephone service, directories, etc. and could pursue the matter by telephone if there was real interest in discourse." With the sixty-minute clock now ticking, Hobbs and other senior administrative colleagues left the Allen Building. All "adjourned to the advancement office on Campus Drive," out of harm's way. Griffith was one of the very few administrators who remained on the quad. "I didn't want

force to come to campus,” Griffith explained, “so I wanted to mobilize all the resources against force that I could.”<sup>58</sup>

When word of the ultimatum reached the five hundred students meeting in the chapel, leaders reached out to the Black students to find out what course they wanted the group of sympathizers to follow. The Black students asked for wet towels “because the man is coming with gas” and requested that a human shield be formed outside the Allen Building by supporters. A little later, Ashmore reported that meetings of ASDU legislators and dorm house counselors resulted in requests to the administration that no police action occur.<sup>59</sup>

At 3:45 p.m., Griffith called the advancement office to report that there were now one thousand students outside the Allen Building, many encouraging the Black students to hold out. Hearing this, Bryson said it would be “foolish” to send seventy-four police officers into a crowd of this size without backup. It was decided that delivery of the second notice that would trigger police action would be deferred until the National Guard could be mobilized.<sup>60</sup>

A general faculty meeting in Baldwin Auditorium convened just after 4:00 p.m. Knight attended. At the request of a faculty member, Cartwright read the statement that had just been delivered to the Black students by the provost. A member of the faculty commented that he was “disturbed by the use of force implied in the statement.” He asked the president to suspend the use of force “until the deliberations of this Faculty meeting have been completed.” “At certain times it [is] impossible to suspend an action,” Knight replied cryptically. “The context is not one of our devising,” he continued. “A threat of force has been brought to bear on us. The students have refused to proceed with discussion and conference.”<sup>61</sup>

“At this moment,” the minutes of the meeting record, Professor Blackburn reported on a telephone conversation he just had in which an ASDU representative said that the students in the Allen Building were “very eager to discuss matters with the Provost.” Knight was encouraged. “If indeed this report is accurate,” he said, “we may have a real chance for renewal of conference.”<sup>62</sup>

Knight was now pressed again to answer directly whether the police had, in fact, been called. He finally confirmed that police had been summoned to campus. “You cannot exist without recognizing the pressure of force,” the president commented. “We would have been irresponsible had we not called the police.” About thirty faculty members sympathetic to the students bolted from the meeting, many heading to West Campus. As they left, one faculty member recounted to WDBS, they heard “jeering, hisses, and derisory applause [from] a large number of our colleagues.”<sup>63</sup>

Even those faculty members who remained at the meeting were concerned. Knight “was very vague . . . in defense of what was taking place,” Richard Watson recalled. “He found it very difficult to admit that the step [to call in force] had been taken. . . . It didn’t appear to us at that point,” Watson described, “that the president was giving the kind of leadership that . . . really had been thought through.”<sup>64</sup>

Around 4:30 p.m., Knight left the meeting to join the administrative group in the advancement office. Before the faculty meeting adjourned about an hour later, they voted overwhelmingly to support the actions of the president and administration.<sup>65</sup>

Griffith called the advancement office at approximately 4:30 p.m. to report that the crowd in front of the Allen Building now numbered about 1,500. The situation was dynamic and increasingly unpredictable. Since he had no walkie-talkie or other means of direct communication, Griffith had to leave the quad to find a phone to report updated information to decision makers. “By the time you would get to the phone and back to the crowd,” Griffith said, “the scene would have changed.”<sup>66</sup>

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With pressure building rapidly, the Black students in the Allen Building were outraged that police action was looming. They had no guns, knives, axes, or weapons of any kind. They had no kerosene. Their threat to burn the university’s records had been withdrawn, even if the administration seemed unaware of that fact. No one had been hurt or manhandled as the building was vacated. Rumors to the contrary, they said, were “lies.” From their perspective, the protest was nonviolent. They blamed the administration for risking a physical confrontation. “You can’t kick people around and treat ‘em like dogs and expect them to say, ‘Thank you, white man,’” one student told WDBS from inside the Allen Building. “We’re saying, ‘white man, give us what is ours!’ He brought us here. He said he would give us what we needed. He ain’t given us a goddamn thing! He put us here like a bunch of dogs. He called the pigs in,” the student said. “He called the pigs in because he thinks that’s the thing to do.”<sup>67</sup>

Many of the Black students were surprised at the university’s readiness to use force. “I didn’t think any of us thought it would be violent,” Armstrong recounted. “The last thing that ever came to our mind was that they would . . . call the state [police] or National Guard,” Williams recounted. “We thought

they would give a lot of threats. We didn't really feel that they would actually endanger our lives."<sup>68</sup>

Cook sensed a potential disaster looming. He had talked to Hopkins several times during the takeover. "I said, 'If the police should come, don't let [them] catch you and the other Blacks in this building behind closed doors. They will bludgeon you. They will crack your head.' I'd seen it in Georgia and Alabama. . . . I knew from experience."<sup>69</sup> Cook joined the human shield that had formed around the Allen Building.

Hobbs did not share Cook's concern about law enforcement. "Nobody anticipated violence," Hobbs said later. Told of Cook's comment that the students would be "bludgeoned" if caught by police in the Allen Building, Hobbs called it "a misdirected statement" and "unnecessary." "There was no reason to feel that the police would do more than say, 'You're going to be arrested if you don't get out,'" Hobbs recounted. "That's [what we] thought would be done." Belying this confidence, however, Hobbs was in touch with Duke hospital personnel to ask that they prepare to treat anyone injured in the approaching police action.<sup>70</sup>

Meanwhile, efforts by AS DU leaders, dean of freshmen Hugh M. Hall, and others to head off conflict intensified. In the late afternoon, Ben Ruffin approached Joe Martin, head of student activities at Duke, asking if Martin "could possibly get Dr. Knight to talk with the students who were now willing to come out and talk." The proposal was that three students would meet three university representatives in the Social Sciences Building right next to the Allen Building. The other protesters would remain in the Allen Building. Martin called Ashmore and communicated the proposal. Ashmore relayed the offer to the administrative group at 4:55 p.m. He also reiterated Wade's view that "vacating is a *sine qua non*."<sup>71</sup>

At 5:05 p.m., Bryson reported a call from the mayor, who advised him that 240 guardsmen were mobilized. The mayor was clear, however, that he would not "hold the men for action at night." He was distressed, Bryson said, over the delay that had already occurred.<sup>72</sup>

Knight entered the advancement office at this highly charged moment. Hobbs relayed the students' proposal for negotiations. Bryson told him the National Guard was mobilized. The classics-professor-turned-university-president, exhausted from months of illness and conflict, now faced the fateful choice he had hoped "moderation" would allow him to avoid.

"We have no option to negotiate," Knight told his colleagues. Later, the Duke president justified this decision as based on principle. He had no

choice, he advised the *Duke Chronicle* the next day, but to put “the freedom of the University above the force used by the black students.” “If this group can win by this means,” he asked, “what about the far right? Look at the Nazis in Germany.” “You can’t use the wrong means to accomplish the right ends,” he argued. “If we do, then evil men are going to use the same means for wrong ends.” Knight was also concerned about precedent. He mentioned a call he received during the takeover from Ben Roney, an assistant to Governor Robert W. Scott. “If one University gives in to a set of demands,” Roney warned the Duke president, “within 24 hours demands [will] appear on other campuses.”<sup>73</sup>

Knight was also influenced by internal political considerations. “There was no way to consider the demands until they were out of there,” he explained. “That would have been the immediate kiss of death. . . . If I had sat down with five of them during the day and said, ‘OK, we’ll negotiate these [demands] and then you will come out if we agree,’ . . . I’m certain the board of trustees would have repudiated me. We would have had a real donnybrook on our hands,” Knight thought. “It wasn’t an available option.”<sup>74</sup>

Knight’s decision-making latitude was limited from the start by his waning power among his colleagues and the board of trustees. In effect, his impotence simply exacerbated the likelihood of a confrontation.

Whatever the mix of reasons, the decision triggered complex emotions for Knight, including what he described later as “a terrible, terrible pleasure. . . . You say, ‘now something is going to be settled,’” he explained. “Compared to all the attempts to hold force back and to protect people from the results of their actions, . . . it was an unambiguous act. . . . It was psychological relief. . . . I’m not happy with that [emotion] looking back on it,” Knight reflected, “but that’s how it was.”<sup>75</sup> Knight’s capacity to seek the “middle ground” had clearly disappeared.

Only when he learned of the administration’s late afternoon refusal to negotiate did Hopkins realize how unbridgeable the gap had become between the Black students and the university. “We want to get people’s attention, to get them to address these issues,” he explained. “The administration [view] was, ‘What have these crazies done?’ So they brought the police down on us. We still saw ourselves as Duke students trying to get the attention of the administration. They saw us as subversives who were going to tear down their campus. Allen [Building] was a confirmation of something they had in the back of their heads already,” Hopkins now understood. “That we were destructive-oriented, that we weren’t talking about anything serious.”<sup>76</sup>

By now, the scene on the quad had become surreal. “I remember standing there thinking this really isn’t happening,” student eyewitness Harry DeMik described. He explained,

If you walked between the Allen Building and Social Sciences Building, you could see the police assembling down in the gardens. You could see the Black students inside [the Allen Building]. It was starting to get a little dark. . . . You could see the real radical white kids up against the doors of Allen Building with Vaseline and towels. . . . There was a Black student with a megaphone . . . reading off the demands. . . . The KAs were on the other side of the quadrangle . . . waving the Confederate flag and singing “Dixie.” A lot of white students were just milling around . . . just to see what was going to happen.<sup>77</sup>

Around this time, Cell spoke to Knight. “I knew the cops were coming,” he described, “and I’m afraid somebody is going to get killed.” “It’s out of my hands,” Knight responded. Cell warned the Duke president that police action on campus was going to “blow the university up.” According to Cell, Knight responded, “Yes, I know.”<sup>78</sup>

At approximately 5:15 p.m., Fairbank and Wilson left to deliver the second message to the students. Knight called the mayor, H. Franklin Bowers, Duke’s manager of operations and point of contact with police during the takeover, left to talk to T. B. Seagroves, captain in charge of the Durham police detail now on the Duke campus. The administrators acknowledged that from this point forward, they would have little say about how events unfolded. They agreed that “the question of action at this hour [was] up to the Durham Police,” meeting minutes record. “We knew in advance that once the police came on campus,” Griffith recounted, “they were in control and we had no control.”<sup>79</sup>

Fairbank and Wilson handed copies of the second statement to the students through the same Allen Building window they had used before. “We request that you leave this building peacefully,” the brief statement said, “and to do so immediately. . . . You are now suspended pending due process, and if you do not vacate the building immediately, all who are present will be deemed to be trespassers and will be subject to criminal charges for trespassing and other violations of law which may occur.” After reading the statement, a student inside the Allen Building said in a loud voice, “Let it be known for the record that we have offered to meet and talk with the Administration, and now they refuse to do this.” Without any further discussion, Fairbank and Wilson left, entering a nearby building to phone the group in the development office to

“let them know that the documents had been received by the students and read by them.”<sup>80</sup>

At 5:40 p.m. Hobbs told his colleagues, “It is on.” The police were on the move. A WDBS reporter described a “mass [of] troopers starting to march through the gardens. They are all armed with clubs, three tear gas guns. A couple of riot guns. Each man of course has his pistol, and they’re all equipped with a gas mask.” The Black students learned of the police activity from spotters on the outside of the building and a police scanner they had brought with them. Ashmore reported that Chief William Pleasants had offered assurances “that there were enough men to handle the task.”<sup>81</sup>

Inside the Allen Building, an intense debate was taking place over whether to stay or leave. Some were daring and unafraid. “Come on baby,” one student commented to WDBS at this dangerous moment, “because we’re ready for you.” Asked if he thought the student demands would be met, another student said, “We can’t say we are going to get ’em. But I can say this much—we’re going to fight it all the way to the end.” When the reporter wanted to know what the students would use to fight the police, he responded: “Whatever we can get our hands on. . . . There’s plenty in the records office that you can use to beat people with when you’re being struck.” Aware that the university’s one-hour ultimatum had passed, the student had a message for police. “Do me a favor,” he told the reporter. “Tell the pigs if they’re gonna attack, we’d appreciate if they’d be on time. Because they’re already fifteen or twenty minutes overdue.”<sup>82</sup>

William Turner explained the genesis of provocative statements such as these years later. “You are part of the vanguard of a revolution,” he recalled. “Fear and risk take on different proportions. . . . It’s a whole different mental state. Your cause is noble. . . . You don’t have a choice. . . . People were aware of the fact that they could have been hurt, or injured, or killed. But it wasn’t something that stood out in your mind.” That students were being killed on other campuses, Turner explained, “served to *intensify* your zeal.” Michael McBride had a simpler explanation. “We were young and so naive,” he said. “We were too young to be afraid.”<sup>83</sup>

Not everyone, however, was feeling defiant. “The resolve of some of the students appeared to be weakening,” Fuller wrote. “A few of them grew quiet and somber. . . . ‘My parents did not send me to Duke to go to jail,’” one student told the Black Power leader.<sup>84</sup>

At this point, Fuller assumed a critical role. “He’s the one who said we need to take a vote about whether or not we were going to go or stay,” Becton

recalled. “He put the options on the table of what could happen,” Hopkins remembered. The “stay” option, as Fuller described it, was grim. According to Williams, Fuller said, “Look—these walls—nobody can see through them. The guard’s going to come in here, they’ve got weapons. . . . You are going to be a bunch of dead people. Because their adrenaline is pumping and they are armed for combat. They are going to come in here to fight. They don’t care what you do. It’s going to be your word against theirs as to what happened inside this building.”<sup>85</sup>

“We gathered together in one of the rooms in Allen Building and took a vote,” Hopkins remembered. “The first vote was whether to send the female students out so they wouldn’t get hurt.” “The men took over,” Williams remembered. The men said, “The women have to leave. Get out.” “If we’re gonna die, or we’re gonna be hurt, or we gotta fight,” Williams recalled the men saying, “Y’all gotta go.” This sparked what Howard described as “a really big battle.” “I was a stay person,” she remembered. Howard told the men, “I can probably do more than half of you-all.” Despite this intense disagreement, all but three of the women left the Allen Building through a window. “We were real chauvinists at that time,” Hopkins acknowledged years later. “We were being Duke gentlemen in spite of ourselves.”<sup>86</sup>

“When I went out the window” of the Allen Building, Williams remembered, “you are going across a moat. . . . The men helped us . . . out from the inside [of the building], and the community . . . grabbed [us] and helped [us] come . . . out. I was terrified.” All of us “are kind of frightened, kind of scared, kind of upset,” Armstrong told a reporter from outside the Allen Building. “We’ve been going through all kinds of mental pressure all day long.”<sup>87</sup>

The group remaining in the Allen Building now voted on what they should do. “Everybody voted to stay,” Hopkins related. “People started bracing themselves to fight the cops.” To help deal with tear gas, “we started to put [cigarette filters] in our noses,” Catherine LeBlanc recalled. “We had been told that if we put lemon juice in our eyes it would [also] help us . . . with the tear gas.” Some students also placed ashtray lids on their heads for protection. “We had filters coming out of our noses, lemon in our eyes, crying, and a silver ash tray on top,” Michael LeBlanc described. “We were ready to fight the man . . . and thinking that that was going to work.”<sup>88</sup>

The women who had left the building were frantic. “We were all outside crying,” Williams recounted, “saying, ‘You all have to come out.’” Asked by a reporter if they were going to “stick around,” several of the women responded



with disbelief. “I wanna see those men come out of there,” Armstrong said. “They’re our brothers. . . . Whatever happens to them happens to us.”<sup>89</sup>

With the police drawing closer, Fuller again intervened. “I wanted to help them leave the building with a feeling of triumph,” he wrote later, “even though their demands had not been met.” The group was unanimous that exiting the Allen Building through a window would send the wrong message. Instead, the students discussed leaving the building through the front door with “our fists raised high.” “If you leave as a group protected by the community,” Armstrong recounted Fuller arguing, “it will [show] that the community has a vested interest in you and that you left with your heads up. You will have accomplished what you came here to do,” he said, and that was to “bring the university to its knees.”<sup>90</sup>

“Shortly before the cops got there,” Hopkins recalled, “somebody shouted, ‘Let’s take another vote.’” Becton counted the tally. This time the vote was close and difficult to count. “People would raise their hands, take them down, raise them back up,” he recalled. Although the group had decided—by a single vote—to remain in the Allen Building, Becton was determined to avoid a bloodbath. The group turned to him for the final count. “I said ‘thirteen to twelve to go,’” Becton recounted. “Becton lied to save us from dying,” Michael LeBlanc said five decades later. “I am so glad he lied.”<sup>91</sup>

“We had just decided we had done all we could,” Turner recalled. “I don’t think we really expected to accomplish that much by staying and getting our heads whipped.” “We were not interested in any violent confrontation,” Brown explained. “We saw that we weren’t going to get what we wanted right then, and if we wanted to avoid people getting physically hurt and beat up, . . . it would be better to leave.” “None of us wanted to be martyrs,” Howard commented. Fuller was central to the group’s decision to avoid a battle with police. He said, according to Armstrong, “there is just no reason to [stay], it will turn into a melee and people will get hurt.” People who favored staying “decided to leave” after Fuller spoke. “Howard Fuller came in and actually saved our lives,” Williams recounted later.<sup>92</sup>

Even with their decision to leave, however, the students were not out of danger. Griffith heard from the Black students that they had decided to exit the Allen Building. He also learned, likely from the students, that the police were moving toward the Allen Building. “I didn’t know the police had been called initially,” he recalled. “I ran to the telephone [and] called Knight and said, ‘Stop the police because they are coming out! They are coming out, stop the police!’” Griffith learned that his call had come too late. “Once [the police]

had been put in motion,” Griffith was told, “our people had no control over them. They were subject to the control of their officers.”<sup>93</sup>

The students now moved to the front door of the Allen Building. “They had chained us in the building for some reason,” Hopkins recalled. “They had this chain around the front door of Allen Building and this lock on it. We told the campus cop [standing just outside] that we were coming out,” Hopkins remembered. “The campus cop said, ‘I don’t have a key.’”<sup>94</sup>

A good-sized crowd had assembled in a tightly packed group at the two basement entrances of the Allen Building. Campus police “quietly moved into position near the crowd,” and people “pressed more closely together and locked arms singing ‘We Shall Overcome.’”<sup>95</sup>

Meanwhile, the police had reached the back door of the Allen Building. “It was real tense because we were all crowded at the front door,” Hopkins described. “We had voted to come out. And the cops were coming in the back way.” At the very last moment, a key was found. “He finally got the door open,” Hopkins recalled with relief. “We almost got caught in there in spite of ourselves.” Although reports on the precise timing of the arrival of the police differ slightly, Becton also recalled that “we went out the front door [as] police were . . . breaking down the back door.” As they left, some students held coats over their heads to prevent being photographed. They raised clenched fists. They walked out between groups of white students and faculty who had assembled to protect them. This was critical. “If they had not linked arms to protect us,” Michael LeBlanc described later, “we might be here, but I don’t know if all of our limbs would be working the same way.”<sup>96</sup>

Turner had what he described as “an interesting conversation” years later with a member of the Durham police force who had been called to campus during the takeover. The officer described to Turner “how pumped up and primed the police were” when they reached the Allen Building. “They had been waiting down [in Duke Gardens] all day. They were going to whip some heads and get this thing in order. They were pounding their billy clubs in their hands. . . . By the time they came to flush us out, we were gone. But they were ready to crack some heads.”<sup>97</sup>

At this point, the occupation was over. The Black students had departed and were marching down Chapel Drive, away from the Allen Building, joined by about 250 supporters. They carried the Malcolm X Liberation School banner that had hung from the Allen Building throughout the day. The group shouted, “Hell no, it ain’t over.” Campus security entered the Allen Building offices just vacated by the students. Without further intervention, students

and other onlookers on campus, including those surrounding the Allen Building, planned to disperse. But then, tragically, police action began. Once underway, the police would not turn back without a confrontation.<sup>98</sup>

On Chapel Drive, “police cars . . . started driving through the crowd” of marchers, Williams recounted. “They were not stopping for anybody. White students as well as Black students were having to be pulled out from in front of the cars. . . . You could see even the white students getting mad, saying, ‘What have we done to make you treat us like that?’” she recalled, saying, “‘We are just out here looking.’”<sup>99</sup>

A similar scene played out on the quad. Students and other onlookers were milling around the Allen Building when “approximately five or six patrol cars” arrived, joining those police who had come on foot from Duke Gardens. “There’s a bunch of cops all over the place,” a WDBS reporter commented. The arrival of the police cars drew more students toward the Allen Building, including some who had left with the Black students. “With helmets, tear gas, and what some people refer to as cattle prods,” WDBS reported, police “are now standing at the doorway of Allen Building, completely surrounding it.” Police had also encircled students at the two back doors, Griffith told administrators, holding them in place with billy clubs. Students started shouting “Sieg Heil,” “fascist,” and “Nazi” at the police, some throwing their arms upward in the Nazi salute. Observing the scene, Martin called the advancement of police around 6:00 p.m., suggesting to Ashmore that “if we could get the police moved, we could avert a confrontation.” Ashmore responded, “All right, I have Frank Bowers right here.” But although Bowers had been designated university liaison with the police, no effective line of communication had been established. The senior administrators in the advancement office were unable to control the police who were now on campus.<sup>100</sup>

The exact precipitating event for what came next is still in dispute. Many reports cite rocks or other projectiles thrown by students at the police. What is clear, however, is that the police now determined it was necessary to disperse the crowd. “Oh boy,” a WDBS reporter said, gasping for breath, “cops started throwing tear gas grenades into the students.” Students were “running away, . . . throwing anything they can get their hands on” at the police. Police were “running around tear gassing everything in sight,” one student was overheard commenting on WDBS. “One demonstrator picked up a [tear gas] grenade,” another reporter described, and “threw it at the police still smoking. That evoked a great cheer from the crowd and the spectators surrounding them.”<sup>101</sup>

"It was like a war broke out on the quad," DeMik recounted. "Tear gas was flying everywhere. . . . The police ran out of tear gas and they were beaten back towards [the Allen] Building. . . . When the police came out, . . . they started hitting people with billy clubs and tear gas started going through the air. [It] lit a fuse among [the] students . . . and a lot of them fought back." A number were catching tear gas canisters in towels and throwing them back at police. Football players, who had been on the quad to taunt white supporters of the Black students, got caught up in events. They "ended up involved in the riot," Campbell recalled. "All of a sudden [they] were getting tear gassed and clubbed." Each time the police ran out of tear gas, DeMik reported, "they started to retreat back towards Allen Building." As "the police retreated toward Allen Building," the *Duke Chronicle* reported, "the crowds of students followed at a distance. The police charged again, and the crowd retreated again. The police retreated again and the crowd moved in again." This continued for more than an hour. Many students sought refuge in the chapel. Police chased them into the chapel, spraying tear gas in the building. "Go Home, Go Home," students were shouting at the police. "It was all pretty ludicrous," Griffith commented later.<sup>102</sup>

Soon, police brought out a pepper gas machine, which Martin described as looking like "a combination-vacuum-cleaner-ray-gun." "Clouds of . . . pepper gas would just billow out," DeMik recounted. Martin at one point saw "two policemen, one carrying the smoke-spewing machine, chasing one lone person across the lawn." Another student reported seeing police "striking anything in their path, including a dog that later died and several students and at least one adult." "One policeman tripped a student with his club," he wrote, "and then struck him after he had fallen." Students started "taking out their frustrations," DeMik commented. "They were breaking the windows [of a police car]; they were breaking the headlights."<sup>103</sup> Soon the police car went up in flames.

During the chaos, Fairbank and Wilson saw fires erupting in the woods between the chapel and the physics building. Soon, "ten or more fires [were burning], each of which were confined to an area of about 100 square feet or less."<sup>104</sup>

Cook witnessed the scene on the quad from the front of the Allen Building. The police "were just brutal," he described, "knocking folks down and . . . screaming . . . 'Move, move, move, move! Get out of here!' . . . Those policemen were rough. . . . One guy, they hit him on the head and [he] had to go to the hospital. . . . Someone said to me, 'This is like Nazi Germany.' Well, you know, the harsh brutality." Marjorie Becker, a student, was standing near Cook

watching the melee. She grabbed him and said, “Oh, Dr. Cook!” the professor recalled. “I was her protector.” Trying to break the tension with humor, Cook told the student he was “protecting,” “You’re going to have me lynched out here!”<sup>105</sup>

Cell recalled feeling “absolutely helpless” watching events unfold. Campbell was “very frightened. . . . Here were a hundred or so police in full riot gear,” he recounted, “with tear gas cannons and all that.” “I remember thinking at the time that I wouldn’t be surprised if the police actually started shooting people. They were so angry.” “A Durham police officer drew his gun and pointed it at me and some of the [other] students,” Wib Gulley recalled, “and I was very concerned about what was going to happen.” “Kent State could very well have happened at Duke,” Howard thought later. “I think the potential was there.”<sup>106</sup>

Throughout much of this time, Cahow reported, Duke administrators in the development office “didn’t know what was going on. . . . They were isolated down there. It was amazing,” the assistant registrar thought. “Absolutely amazing.” “We should have had complete control and communication between the police and the persons who were serving as communication links,” Hobbs acknowledged. “That was the crazy part of it,” he explained. “The Black students got out of the building before all of this other mess developed. . . . Had there been proper communication between the people who were serving as a communication link and the police, the police [could] have stopped at a totally different location.”<sup>107</sup> In effect, the melee on the quad would have been avoided altogether.

One administrator who was not isolated from the crisis was Griffith. He remained in the middle of events, urgently attempting to get the police off campus. The officers had retreated into the Allen Building. “It seemed to me,” Griffith reasoned, “that if we got rid of the police, there would be no problem.” At 6:45 p.m., Powell’s minutes indicate, Griffith called the advancement office “suggesting police be called off campus without attracting attention.” The feeling of senior administrators, Griffith recalled, “was that if the police left the building, it would be re-occupied by Blacks.” After he was able to show senior administrators and the police that no reoccupation would occur, the order came for the police to leave. They withdrew in stages, the first group departing campus at around 7:45. “Within twenty minutes,” Griffith remembered, “the campus was quiet.” “A great deal of credit . . . needs to go to Bill Griffith,” Cahow thought. “He stayed in the middle, and he’s the only one that did.”<sup>108</sup>

An initial sweep through the registrar’s office showed that no records had been destroyed and little damage had occurred. “There was no real damage

to the office,” Cahow commented. “They didn’t disturb anything from what I could tell that belonged to the university.” “We were relieved that nobody had been killed in the building,” Cell recounted. He also recalled feeling “very very depressed, very numb, defeated. . . . It felt like hell,” he said. “It was a bad day.”<sup>109</sup>

Nineteen people were admitted to the Duke hospital emergency room on the evening of February 13 with injuries “related to the disturbance on campus.” Injuries included hematoma to the temporal scalp, a mild concussion, laceration to the scalp, a sprained ankle, and third-degree burns on a hand. Two police were treated, including one listed as a “25 year old male struck on [the] back of [a] helmet with [an] unknown object” with “brief loss of consciousness.” Five students were arrested.<sup>110</sup>

The Black students who participated in the takeover went in various directions. Some walked to a Black church to discuss what to do next. Another group went to the AAS office to confirm that they could account for every Black student who had participated. McBride called his parents: “I knew they would see this on the news,” he recalled, “and I wanted them to know I was OK.” Others returned to their dorms. “I remember it was 6:30 and Walter Cronkite was on,” Armstrong recounted, “and all of a sudden we hear all this noise and people were screaming. Chuck said, ‘What is going on?’ And that is when the tear gas got started. . . . It was so ironic because all of us were inside and safe.”<sup>111</sup>

Howard thought the fact that few, if any, Blacks remained on the quad when the confrontation between the police and students erupted was illustrative of different attitudes toward law enforcement. White students, she believed, “had this feeling ‘the police would not do this to us,’” and thought, “‘They’re bluffing.’” Black students “had just the opposite” reaction, she explained. Many in the Allen Building believed the police would “shoot us down, [and] burn the building down with us in it.” “I voted that we should stay” in the Allen Building, Hopkins acknowledged. “But after I got out there and saw what the police had done, I was glad we voted again.”<sup>112</sup>

A forum attended by more than one thousand students, faculty, and members of the administration was held at Page Auditorium that evening. Hopkins described the takeover as “one battle . . . in [our] struggle to gain our humanity at this university. . . . Our main aim,” he told the cheering crowd, “is to intensify the struggle we have begun.” “So I say that this university should be stopped and the *people* should decide how it’s going to be run,” Hopkins implored. “We’ve got to get them pigs out of Allen Building . . . ’cause . . . they’ve lost their place in humanity.”<sup>113</sup>

Hobbs and Cartwright also appeared at the forum. They announced the formation of the Kerckhoff Committee and said the president would address the university community on Saturday at 1:00 p.m. in the indoor stadium. To angry shouts, Cartwright insisted, “We cannot operate a university unless we can operate it with rational discourse.”<sup>114</sup>

At the end of the forum, the group voted overwhelmingly to declare a three-day boycott of classes and to establish a “free university” to operate during the boycott. It also called for amnesty for the Black student protesters and reinstatement for Blacks forced to leave the university in the fall because of their academic standing.<sup>115</sup>

Students returned to their dorms. Hobbs made it home around 10:30 p.m. The events of February 13, 1969, at Duke were now over. But the university’s efforts to grapple with the fallout from the Allen Building takeover were only just beginning.

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The events of February 13, 1969, at Duke University represented the culmination of racial and interpersonal dynamics that had existed from the moment of desegregation. The university failed completely to anticipate the needs of Black undergraduates or to plan for their adjustment to a previously all-white campus. No effort was made to get to know the students or to learn about the communities and families from which they had come.

As a result, it was left to the students to “assimilate.” Most officials at Duke believed that the new students were fortunate simply to have the chance to attend the school. They felt that no changes were necessary to create an academic environment where Black students could learn and grow. In the absence of any initiative by the university, relationships between Black and white students—and with faculty and administrators—were left to chance. In almost all instances, Duke’s response to its Black students was shaped by Jim Crow racial views still held by many trustees and alumni. Put simply, Black students were not viewed as part of the Duke University “family.” Rather, as President Knight explained later, they were regarded as “intruders.”<sup>116</sup>

Black students thus encountered a hostile environment when they arrived at Duke. Their feelings of isolation and alienation grew. As they became more organized, the Black students demanded changes. They sought a university able to provide a meaningful academic, social, and cultural experience for both white *and* Black students. Change came very slowly, and only in response

to government directives or escalating pressure from the students. Frustration and anger increased. Notwithstanding enormous risks, members of the AAS finally decided to occupy the Allen Building. Their goal was to force change at the university.

This was the context for Duke's response to the Allen Building takeover. When University House was occupied on April 5, 1968, by a group consisting primarily of white students, the protesters were called "guests" and allowed to remain for more than thirty-six hours. Women were given permission by the president himself to stay overnight and thus escape punishment for violating dorm rules. Griffith explained that administrators believed that the university should refrain from using force to clear University House. Despite repeated shouts of "hell no, we won't go," protesters, according to Griffith, were "our students, they weren't our enemies. They were part of our university family." Asked afterward by a faculty member why the Silent Vigil protesters who occupied the quad for four days were not arrested, Huestis was direct. "Well, you know, I don't think I could quite bring myself to do that," he told his faculty colleague. "I had too many friends out there."<sup>117</sup>

Black student protesters enjoyed no such deference. The university's response to them was dismissive, condescending, and arbitrary. While the takeover differed from the occupation of University House and the Silent Vigil in important respects, all three protests resulted in only minimal destruction of property and no injury to persons. Both the Allen Building takeover and the Silent Vigil disrupted university operations. Unlike the takeover, however, the Silent Vigil—with its concurrent boycott and strike—effectively shut down the university. Because university decision makers had few, if any, personal relationships with the Allen Building protesters, they could only view them as outsiders. Race made it almost impossible for those in power at Duke to establish close connections with these students. In stark contrast to the occupation and Silent Vigil, just over one hour from the time they learned of the takeover, university officials drew a "line in the sand." Black students would receive an ultimatum from the university, then face whatever force was necessary to eject them.<sup>118</sup>

The university could envision only two possible responses to the Allen Building takeover. The first was conducting substantive negotiations on Black student demands while protesters occupied the building. This was politically untenable. The second was the deployment of overwhelming force to clear the building by nightfall. No serious consideration was ever given to maintaining the status quo long enough for a peaceful way out of the standoff to emerge.



Knight would explain later that speed in deploying force was necessary to protect the Black students from white vigilantes who were waiting for nightfall to attack. Few, including the Black students, shared this concern. Silent Vigil participants on the quad received bomb and other threats of physical violence from those who opposed their protest. In that instance, Durham police were also summoned to campus. Their job, however, was to protect the protesters from threats, not clear the quadrangle. There is no indication that Knight or his colleagues ever considered using the police to protect the Allen Building protesters from threats they might face.

Unlike the ongoing contacts between administrators, faculty, and protest leaders that occurred throughout the University House occupation and the Silent Vigil, no such interactions occurred during the Allen Building takeover. Hobbs, who had never previously met with the Black students, tried only once to engage directly with the protesters. When he issued the university's ultimatum to the Black students, he refused to answer questions. Once back in Durham, Knight was offered the chance to call the protesters. Only ten months earlier, the Duke president had invited a group of predominantly white students into his home for what became a thirty-six-hour occupation because, he explained, "he wanted as little distance as possible between [students and himself] when the important questions turned up." Given the chance to call the Black students in the Allen Building, however, he declined, concluding that such a call would be pointless. No one ever asked Cook or Cell—the professors closest to the Black students—to reach out to them on behalf of the university. That Hobbs considered one effort at communication a sufficient precursor to invoking force is telling. He did not know these students, and they did not know him. How could Hobbs even imagine that further outreach might defuse an escalating situation? In the end, Hobbs seemed more interested in creating a record that he had made an attempt to contact the protesters than in actually engaging with them. Even after the Black students expressed a willingness to negotiate a resolution, confrontation by force remained the university's preferred option. Duke "was willing to go to the brink of disaster by bringing police on the campus," Becton summarized correctly, "but unwilling, after Blacks had occupied Allen Building for six hours, to talk to those students who occupied the building."<sup>19</sup>

Because university officials focused almost entirely on regaining control, they failed to fully consider the risks associated with bringing police onto campus. Hobbs, among others, appears to have been unconcerned about the possibility that police might use excessive force against the Black student

protesters. Even with 1,500 students, faculty, and members of the community gathered on the quad, university leaders hesitated in using force only long enough to mobilize the National Guard. Without effective communication among administrators, or the ability of university officials to direct police activity, it is not surprising that the introduction of police to an already volatile campus situation led to chaos and violence. Black protesters were lucky enough to escape physical harm because trusted advisers and historical experience made them aware of the peril they faced. Many others at Duke that day were not so fortunate.

If the Black students had vacated the Allen Building when first asked to do so, the day of the takeover would have ended differently. Yet the more challenging question is whether the use of force by the university against its students had to happen once the takeover occurred. Knight, for one, saw race playing a role in the crucial decisions made that day. Asked if it was “easier” for the university to use force against Black students than white students, the Duke president was candid. “Of course. . . . That isn’t a difficult question to answer, that’s just how it is,” Knight said. “That’s just the nature of things.”<sup>120</sup>