

THE NEW BLACK STUDENT

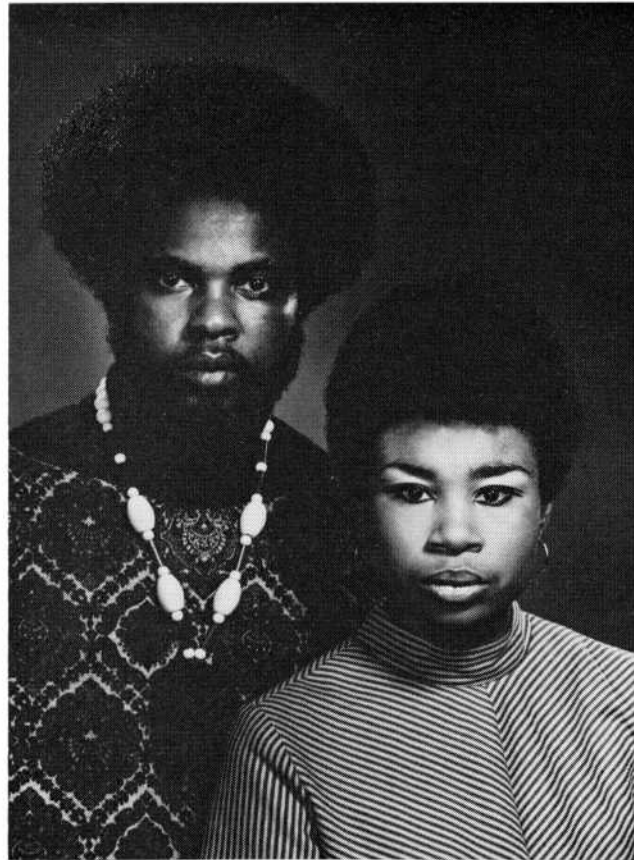
Visible, vocal, angry, determined, unsettling

Photograph by Robert E. Fields Jr.

LEADERS OF THE Afro-American Student Union of OU announced March 5 that their organization was breaking away from the newly formed student government (see Campus Notes) and that they intended to meet with President Hollomon to present him with a "Black Declaration of Independence," which would discuss race relations at the University and list fourteen "demands," eight of which would be "nonnegotiable (see opposite page).

"This break," said Sterlin Adams, president of the ASU, "is not only the result of the adoption of the student constitution. It is twenty years of oppression, neglect of the rights of black students, and the failure of the University to include black people in its community. The declaration says that the ASU has used every approach possible to awaken the administration, faculty, and student body to the injustices in the operation of the University. The ASU since its creation has been the chief organ for the expression of the black community at OU. There have always been some among us committed to trying to get things done from within the establishment. After repeated failures, we are no longer concerned with establishment or administrative reaction."

On the afternoon of March 7 four members of the ASU met with Hollomon in his Evans Hall office. Hollomon began by asking time to read the 12-page document, signed by four members of the ASU, identified over their signatures as "representatives for 175 black students." (This figure presumably is the ASU estimate of



Sterlin Adams (left) is president of the Afro-American Student Union. On his left is Alvarene Owens, assistant secretary of ASU.

the number of black students enrolled in OU. No one is certain since records do not categorize race. Total enrollment on the Norman campus is 15,500.) He then responded to each of the fourteen points (see opposite page).

With each demand there was "a statement of clarification, a statement of rationale and justification, a statement concerning the dates upon which we [the black students] expect implementation, and the black students' position." The document concluded: "If these demands are not met, we will have to take the only action deemed justifiable."

After the hour-long session Hollomon said: "The students were courteous, thoughtful, and friendly in presenting their requests. I told them I realize there is a very real problem

with communication between black students and the rest of the University community. I suggested that an appropriate number of people—perhaps ten or fifteen—be selected by the black students to meet me and other members of the administration under conditions of good faith, so that we could discuss with them not the demands but the problems which underlie these demands.

"I told them we could not make progress in helping minority students if their requests are presented in the form of nonnegotiable demands. This technique only leads to confrontation and polarization of the attitudes of even the most well meaning people. The technique is clearly not even in the best interest of the black students. I have no intention of discussing these demands except to indicate what steps are under way or could be undertaken to solve the underlying substantive problems which the demands represent."

Commenting on the conclusion he said: "I am rather disturbed that the students would not specify what action they consider justifiable. Our position is clear. The University administration intends to take whatever steps are necessary to insure fairness, freedom, and order on the University campus."

Hollomon's resentment of the language and the substance of the ASU document is probably shared by most whites, even those, like Hollomon, who consider themselves to be sympathetic to the black American's "cause," so long as its strategy and tactics are "proper," as defined by the whites, naturally. Black students

The Black Student Demands and President Hollomon's Responses

1. *A black vice president of black students affairs.* This department shall handle all areas of university life affecting black students; his rank will be the equivalent to that of the other OU vice presidents.

2. *A black dean of admissions.* He shall evaluate, interview, accept, or reject black applicants. Admission shall be based on standards determined by black students; he shall have the equivalent in rank of the other OU deans.

3. *Change in entrance requirements for blacks.* Any black students with a high-school diploma shall be eligible for admission.

4. *A black studies program with MA and PhD degrees.* There will be a comprehensive program with curriculum relevant to black people, encompassing black literature, history, art, music, economics, sociology, and political science. It shall include a black chairman with an ample staffing of black professors.

5. *A black head coach in a major sport.*

6. *A separate dormitory for blacks with black counselors.*

7. *A constitution for the student body acceptable to black*

1. We have a vice president for the University community to handle housing, counseling, and similar matters. I have no intention of dividing student groups. . . . I realize there may be certain problems among black students which need attention, and I will discuss these problems. . . .

2. . . . In addition to black students we have students of other minority groups and international students. I will not consider the recommendation. . . .

3. I grant we may need to work together with black students and other minority groups to determine if we should look at admission requirements differently. The policies are set by the State Regents for Higher Education, and I couldn't change them if I wanted to.

4. We are looking at the possibility of further offerings having to do with black studies. We have courses now that deal with black history and literature. . . . We are not considering establishing a department of black studies. Degree requirements must be determined by our faculty and ultimately the state regents.

5. We try to hire coaches on capability and merit. . . . We cannot guarantee that a black head coach of a major sport will be hired. The athletic department is attempting to hire members of minority groups when possible.

6. A committee under the chairmanship of Dr. J. R. Morris is responsible for looking into residential matters. I will make sure it considers the desirability of a unit for black students.

7. . . . The University constitution will guarantee rights of minorities. We could not tolerate two constitutions.

may have derived some wry satisfaction from the discomfort of their "friends," the white liberals, who were upset about the rigidity of the black rhetoric and dismayed about the extremity of the fourteen points. After all, for many, words like "demands" and "nonnegotiable" are ungentlemanly and unreasonable, the demands are unrealistic, and the ominous conclusion is in poor taste.

The white bigots of all degrees, on the other hand, were quietly (and sometimes openly) jubilant. They will, of course, always find *some* reason to unleash their dreary prejudices, and the ASU declaration was welcome ammunition. The Oklahoma

Daily printed a number of sarcastic letters mocking the black demands with similar ones for other "minority groups" like fat students and language majors; these revealed more crude insensitivity and absence of discernment than humor.

The present logjam, with both sides sounding like the opposing parties in the Paris talks, must be broken if any agreements and adjustments are to be reached. The words themselves can become the issues, however. One of the University's three black professors, Dr. George Henderson, associate professor of sociology and a member of the College of Education faculty, wrote about the possibility of the

students or the right for black students to function independently under their own constitution.

8. (A) The right for black students to have the determining voice in the hiring of personnel indicated. (B) The right of black students to review the records and attitudes of current personnel, both black and white, with regard to their relationships with black students and their problems.

9. Full five-year scholarships for black athletes.

10. Scheduled competition with black schools in all major sports.

11. A faculty exchange program with black schools.

12. A student year-abroad program for black students at universities in black countries.

13. The attainment by 1973 of a student body which is 20 percent black.

14. A review of the records with intent to reinstate black students who have failed under the stress of academic racism.

8A. The authority to hire people rests with the Board of Regents.

8B. The personnel records of employees as well as students should not be reviewed by other students. . . .

9. I am informed that this is not possible under NCCA rules. . . . There may be cases in which a student, no matter what his race, may need a fifth year to complete his education and may not have money to do so. I will ask appropriate people to determine the seriousness of this problem and if necessary . . . take action within our means. . . .

10. The athletic department is already investigating the possibility of competition with black schools of comparable athletic ability. . . .

11. . . . We will continue to make every effort to recruit black faculty members.

12. A student-abroad program is recommended in the Plan for the Future . . . but it should not be just for black students. White students should be able to go to Africa and black students . . . to Europe.

13. I could not accept any such specific goal. Black students who are here are poorly prepared and it is the responsibility of the University to help correct this condition in any way it can. . . .

14. The academic performance of students is determined by individual decisions of the faculty, and if there is any discrimination, can be brought to the appropriate body. It would not be proper for students, black or white, to investigate the records of other students.

semantical bog, in the following letter to the editor of the Oklahoma Daily:

I would imagine that both Dr. Hollomon and members of the Afro-American Student Union have received many letters and other communications supporting "get tough" and "no negotiation" positions. It is time that both parties receive communications from those of us who want them to meet and seek solutions to the problems which gave rise to the "demands."

The advantage of being able to use words are not without negative repercussions. In many crises, we become similar to Alice in Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking Glass*.

"When I choose a word," Humpty Dumpty said, in a rather scornful tone, "it means what I choose it to mean—neither more nor less."

"The question is," said Alice, "whether

you *can* make words mean many different things."

"The question is," said Humpty Dumpty, "which is to be master—that is all."

Now that vital social issues have been raised by members of the ASU, I hope that neither they nor Dr. Hollomon will get bogged down in semantical differences. In short, which is to be master—the words or the humans who create and respond to the words? This is not the kind of contest which if one party wins, the other loses. Either both win or both lose.

Cutting below the surface emotionalism and disentangling from the myths and clichés which have been inherited from older generations are not easy. To reach an understanding of what today's black students are saying, one first must look at the predominantly white American college and university.

The university is a creation of the white middle class. Black writer Louis Lomax describes it as "a cultural power tool used not only to enforce society's will but to reproduce itself. The main role of the University of Oklahoma, like all white universities, is to turn out white middle-class Anglo-Saxon Protestant males. Examine what's taught, the hoops students are required to jump through to get the degree to start in the company. You'll find the whole thing is designed to reproduce daddy. The university is a middle-class WASP cookie cutter, and black students are sick and tired of the image white America is trying to project on them."

"The American university's curriculum," says Henderson, "relates simply to white suburbia; we must get it to relate to the world that some of the disadvantaged students are coming from. They must see some relationship between learning and their life experience. We have a poor curriculum for the low-income, disadvantaged black, brown, red, or what-have-you to use in his community if we expect him to provide the kind of leadership and the kind of empathy that community will need. We don't need black Anglo-Saxons, what Jesse Jackson calls Oreo cookies—black on the outside but white in the center."

The orientation of the university is totally white. The curriculum is

from a white perspective, taught by white professors. The social life is white, with the Greek *apartheid* the most conspicuous and grating symbol. Henderson says the weekend is the most segregated time of the week; white students and black students simply don't interact socially. There is only one black man in the administration. Except for a student assistant, there are no black men on the athletic coaching staffs. The high-school recruiters are white, and the admission requirements are geared to the white middle-class culture.

Says Vincent Harding, chairman of the history department of Spelman College, "Universities seem to be saying, we've got a microcosm of American society here on the campus and since America is a society with Negroes, let's get some of them here on our campuses and let's show them how wonderful it is to be in America; and then we shall go on, with our Negroes and our society, with business as usual. Well, some black students have come in, but as their numbers have increased, they have said you can't go on with business as usual.

"Black insistence on change is an intimation to America as a whole of what it can expect. If this country is to begin to talk seriously about bringing black people into the mainstream, it will blow the mind of the whole thing. America can't continue with business as usual. It's obvious that students are now testing the mind of the university. They are saying, 'Much that you have here and that you consider good and valuable, we are not interested in.' . . . The challenge of the Negro to higher education has implications for the society at large, if America is truly serious about wanting an integrated society—whatever that is."

The black student has heard promises and good intentions pour from the lips of whites like lather from aerosol shaving cans. He has heard administrators say, yes, we recognize that we have failed to recruit more students from the lower socio-economic scale, from the racial minority groups, and

we must renew our efforts. We are aware that the education that black students receive in their primary and secondary schools puts them at an overwhelming disadvantage in competing with white students from their high schools of which college is merely an extension. Yes, we ought to look at the way we discriminate against those from the disadvantaged black culture. They hear the faculty and administrators say, yes, we agree that there should be more black teachers, black administrators, black coaches, black students. We're working on this all the time. Also we believe that the curriculum should be wider, more flexible. We *have* ignored the history of the black man in America and in the world. We *have* distorted history, and we believe you are right in wanting to have the American university's orientation more honest and accurate. We agree that you have a right to ask for a proportionate share in higher education.

The black student hears all these things. He sees few, if any, results. He asks what will make the man move.

It can be argued that whoever holds the power determines the rules, what is "reasonable" and "justifiable," what is "right" and "wrong." Some black students see the situation in these terms, discounting the "good faith" and admirable goals and principles the whites continually expound while maintaining the status quo. They are more interested in finding the means to move him off dead center. White power structures—and the university is one—respond only to other power structures, some believe, and the threat of violence—and violence itself—is what finally makes white America move, not "dialogue," not "communication," not any of the other niceties which the white man prefers. People often, if not always, do the right things for the wrong reasons; the right reasons are usually lost in inactivity. Many black students have tired of the fine phrases from white leaders with no resultant action. This is one of

A BASIC MISCONCEPTION about the United States goes something like this: ours is a peculiarly nonviolent nation, with a special dispensation for achieving social change through peaceful democratic reforms. This misconception has created a fantastic capacity to live with a double standard. We have a national tendency (reflected in local policies) to absolutize the value of social change at the expense of human life and use violence necessary for change against other nations or races other than the white race. On the other hand, we tend to absolutize the value of peace (law and order) at the expense of social change within the national framework.

An impressionistic survey of American history tells us what we don't want to hear. The expulsion of the British and the establishment of an independent nation was markedly violent. The pacification of the continent and the creation of the industrial giant required expulsion and extermination of Indians and the slave labor of black people and children. Slavery was abolished with violence. The "Progressive Era" came after a period of violent labor struggles. This era led us into what we call the "welfare state." The welfare state is a way of describing a society in which two-thirds of its people have acceptable living standards, limiting poverty and continued exploitation to those parts of the population which cannot easily unite (farm and service workers) or which lack a territorial base (migrant workers) or which are set off racially from the rest of the population. If those caught in the welfare trap wish to change their condition, they must remember they have every right except the right to use the primary means by which this country was developed: violence.

The summary of our history is clear: More and more elements of American life have been invited into the "mainstream"

after the use of overt violence. Each addition solidifies the "in-group" which can then continue, or even increase, the violence directed toward those outside the consensus. The pattern is too clear. More and more respectable black leaders will be welcome at the White House, while police will more and more be used to break up black rebellions in the cities or on college campuses.

So we are back to the thesis: We place a supreme value on peace within the society that has already incorporated us, and a supreme value on violence directed at those outside the corporation.

What does all this suggest? That the millions of poor urban blacks are unlikely to break into the inner ring of American consensus without violent disorders if the historical pattern holds. I happen to believe that Oklahoma and the University of Oklahoma are not free of this historical pattern. —DON GIBSON, CAMPUS MINISTER

the reasons for the ASU declaration and the way it is worded. The new black student doesn't necessarily believe the white man any more.

The black student of today is impatient as well as incredulous. He is living at a time when black Americans are aggressively seeking identity in a white society and demanding some control over what the white majority offers them educationally, socially, culturally. It is a time for natural hair styles and an interest in an African heritage. It is a reawakening to the black man's role in this nation's history and the right to determine his own destiny. The new black student is making his presence felt on a number of white campuses throughout the nation, and it was predictable that the University of Oklahoma would be among them.

That the black student has been manipulated by the white power structure is not debatable. Through unconscious indifference and calculated enmity, the black students have been deprived, ignored, patronized, and exploited. Now some whites are aghast at a turn the black student movement is making toward separatism.

Many point to the black student demands for separate housing, a different set of admission standards, academic repatriations, their own constitution, vice president, and admissions dean as a return to the "separate but equal" doctrine of the days of legal segregation. It may be true that contradictions and paradoxes exist in the ASU declaration, though none surpass the fundamental contradiction that this nation was founded under: the declaration of man's inherent right to freedom and institutionalized slavery.

To say that a separate dorm for blacks is contrary to the concepts of equality may be correct, but the black students can point to the fraternities and sororities and say, "Double standard."

There is no solid agreement about tactics in the black student community. The debate over the techniques to employ in bargaining with the administration has been a continuing one at ASU meetings. One reason for a hard line is to radicalize the black students, some of whom are as apathetic and reluctant to be involved as any white.

Negotiating the ASU demands will require patient diplomacy if the white leaders choose to try. "We are living in a day when manners have changed, when vocabulary has changed, and it behooves us to make distinctions of a kind we have never made before," says David D. Henry, president of the University of Illinois, in a recent article on campus disorders in Newsweek magazine. "Militant student words such as 'demands,' 'nonnegotiable,' and 'racist,'" News-

week quotes Henry as saying, "often do not carry the harshness of their surface meaning. While the word 'demand' normally offends me, I translate it to mean 'proposal.' I think too many times the public reacts without understanding what the student is saying. But by the same token I hope the students will come to understand something of the psychology of adult reaction to this jargon. Everyone must learn to use words understandable to both sides."

A cartoon in a recent issue of Saturday Review magazine describes the feelings of many. A white, middle-class dowager looks plaintively toward her stout, balding husband, and says, "I remember when life was one big joke. What happened?"

What's happened is that the University isn't like it was ten years ago or twenty or more, and among those who are the most uptight are those who want the campus to be just the way it was when they were in school. It can't be. It won't be.

It is not an easy time to be a university president or a regent. Some persons predict violence. "It's not inevitable by any means," says a University official, who admits that he fears the repressive public atmosphere.

It is a frustrating period when solutions are few, a time of often painful and complex change. Alumni and the

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The New Black Student

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public are naturally disturbed and frustrated by the racial conflicts on the campuses, and it is easier to revert to simplistic reflexes than to use calm objectivity.

But it should also be remembered that it has never been easy to be black in this country, and today the

new black student, who sees the university from a perspective markedly different from the white view, finds that he is largely on his own against the white inertia and resistance to change. He still intends to test the white man's "good faith."

—PAUL GALLOWAY

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