

free to travel the streets at night. Habitual criminals are repeatedly set free to go out and commit yet another crime."²⁹

Hoffman's profane rhetoric, theatrics, and colorful stunts, such as blowing his nose in a handkerchief that resembled the American flag, angered both students and townsfolk. His performance also left the crowd of students, including many left-radicals, unimpressed. One KU student, calling his appearance "theatrical," expressed "disappointment" with his speech. Chalmers agreed, saying that Hoffman had "nothing to offer" Lawrence or the university. Left-wing radicals criticized him because he was not a "serious revolutionary" and had "no plan [for] after the revolution." When he finished, Hoffman received no applause from the audience and headed out of town, calling KU "a drag."³⁰

By mid-April, however, Lawrence appeared headed for the revolution that Hoffman had advocated, and an armed confrontation seemed inevitable. Guns, explosives, and other weapons flowed freely, though surreptitiously, into the community. The street people and black radicals were stockpiling weapons. One local freak claimed that George Kimball, a radical and prominent member of the street community, was running guns into east Lawrence and selling them to African Americans. On April 12, John Spearman, Jr., the BSU's president, urged African Americans to arm themselves and declared that his group was "taking responsibility for insuring the safety of all blacks on the KU campus" because "numerous threats" had been made against him and members of the organization. Moreover, the BSU declared that it had "little confidence" in the Lawrence police force. *Harambée* said that Lawrence "pigs" were embarking on a witch-hunt, "using every tactic from A to Z to commit legal genocide on BSU members." The BSU, however, was not merely encouraging blacks to arm. In March, according to Kansas Bureau of Investigation (KBI) surveillance, Monty Beckwith, the editor of *Harambée*, purchased a .30 caliber pistol and placed a .30 caliber rifle on layaway, while Melvin Jackson, rumored to be a Chicago Black Panther, ordered two 30 caliber rifles.³¹

Although the thought of armed white radicals and hippies unsettled many in the community, nothing frightened white Lawrencians more than the specter of black men with guns. It is probable that threats made against the BSU and other campus groups came from local members of the Minutemen (founded by the virulent anticommunist Robert DePugh), the Ku Klux Klan, or armed militia from Lawrence's extreme Right. The radical Right was less public than the radical Left, and identifying members and activities is difficult. There is little doubt that vigilantes existed in Lawrence, both as groups and as individuals. Richard Beatty, a worker at Acme Dry Cleaning, once was a member of the Minutemen and friend to the Ku Klux Klan, although he later claimed to have renounced his racist views. In 1970,

however, Beatty was carrying a gun, as were his friends and acquaintances.³² Mostly, however, Beatty and the Minutemen "sat around and talked about what we would do 'if' [blacks or hippies got out of line] and stockpiled weapons." According to Beatty, the Minutemen numbered around 100 and bought their own weapons, but they also pooled their money to buy illegal automatic rifles, grenades, and explosives. Unlike the purchases made by the BSU and blacks, the Minutemen's weapons buildup was not accompanied by a public denouncement, nor does it appear that the police monitored their activities closely; some evidence suggests that several police officers were involved with the Minutemen. The Minutemen stored their weapons in a barn in an area south of Lawrence, where, Beatty claimed, they also took target practice. The Minutemen had no organizational structure. When "something would happen," he recalled, several "self-appointed" leaders called for a meeting, word of which was relayed to others and which twenty-five to fifty people attended. Meetings became more frequent during April and July 1970, when the town experienced acute racial problems. Beatty and his colleagues were aware that blacks and white radicals were also armed.³³

With Lawrencians armed and tensions high, it seemed likely that violence would follow. The threat was never more likely than during a racial confrontation at Lawrence High School. On April 13, several black students at Lawrence High forced their way into Principal William Medley's office, demanding to speak with him. They gave him a list of demands, similar to those which black students had made during the 1968 walkout and almost verbatim to demands made by the KU-BSU to Chalmers in October and February. They included the addition of black history and literature courses, a black homecoming queen and black cheerleaders, and the hiring of ten new black teachers, not, as one student remarked, "those colored teachers we have now."³⁴

Mike Spearman, one of the protesting students and the brother of the KU-BSU president, allegedly shoved Medley and told him they were taking over his office, while another student kicked in the outer door to the office. Medley claimed the demands were made in a "loud and boisterous manner" and that many "rude and sarcastic remarks" were made about him and his staff. He rejected the demands outright and ordered the students back to class. They ignored him. Some milled around his office while others pounded on classroom doors with bricks, rocks, and clubs. Teachers locked their doors to keep the black students out; several claimed that the black students threatened white students. The black students told Medley that he had better come up with "some answers" to their demands before John Spearman, Jr., Leonard Harrison, and others arrived. John Spearman, Jr., did arrive, as did his father, school board member John Spearman, Sr. Someone called the police, who arrested, among others, John Spearman, Jr., Rick

Dowdell, and Danny Mumford, all KU-BSU members. John Spearman, Sr., convinced the students to meet in the cafeteria, where he talked with them until 3:00 P.M. Medley immediately suspended the black students.³⁵

Two days later, the racial situation at Lawrence High remained tense, and Medley feared further confrontations. Police patrols allowed only students not under suspension into the school building. On April 15, black students gathered across the street from the school in Veteran's Park while, at the same time, white students amassed in the cafeteria parking lot. Small groups of blacks broke out classroom windows and fights erupted between blacks and whites that resulted in several minor injuries and one serious injury. Medley blamed the disturbance on "outsiders," by which he meant the KU-BSU and Harrison.³⁶

During the week-long high school crisis, Richard Beatty recalled that the Minutemen, including several police officers, learned through the "underground" that blacks were planning to "take" the high school. In response, Beatty, allegedly armed with a submachine gun, and some fifty other "well-armed" colleagues presented a public "show of force" at the school, although it is not clear when this might have happened. Beatty and his comrades felt that "there comes a time when the only way to stop violence is with violence."³⁷ Whether Beatty's claims were true is not clear, but they seem probable.

The high school was closed the following day, and, on April 20, an estimated 1,500 people attended a special school board meeting to consider the students' demands and the school's race relations. Black students and their parents, many who were members of the Lawrence Concerned Black Parents, walked out of the meeting when the board did not reinstate the students or take any action on their demands. After the meeting, the administration building adjacent to the high school was firebombed. Lawrence police warned Medley and Superintendent Carl Knox that their homes also were likely targets of firebombs. Medley asked the board of education to provide protection for his family and property at night, and both Knox and Medley took their families to motels.³⁸

Although many Lawrencians, including twenty-three Lawrence clergy, urged amnesty for the suspended black students, the school board rejected the plea. Its position had broad support throughout the community. A Lawrence teacher claimed he had never seen "such near-complete support" for the administration as he saw among the local business owners. One resident called the pleas for amnesty "pure nonsense" and called the board's decision "the only one which makes sense in a society which says it wants law and order." She added, "[m]ind you, this isn't a black vs. white issue with me." Robert D. Ramsey, a former administrator in the Lawrence schools, was "concern[ed]" about the racial violence and asked Knox if "our old nemesis, Leonard Harrison, [was] behind the current unrest[.]" A survey of white high

school students suggested that they did not think the school system was racist, and if it was, one student commented, "the niggers made it that way."³⁹

To make matters worse, late on April 20 a multimillion dollar arson gutted the Student Memorial Union at the University of Kansas. The FBI and the KBI believed the arsonists were a group of young black men, seen leaving the Union shortly before the fire was discovered, but they were never identified. Minuteman Richard Beatty did not rule out the possibility that a right-wing white radical, intent on stirring up more trouble, had started the fire. Some Lawrencians believed that white radicals or some hippies set the fire, a direct consequence of Abbie Hoffman's appearance earlier in the month. The arson, however, was never solved. On April 21, Governor Robert B. Docking, at the request of city officials, placed the city under a dusk-to-dawn curfew that was extended for two additional nights. No one was allowed on the streets without a pass between 7:00 P.M. to 6:00 A.M., alcohol sales were limited, and the sale and transportation of flammable liquids, firearms, and explosives were prohibited. Arson, firebombings, and sniper fire continued during the curfew period, however, including another fire at Lawrence High School.⁴⁰

On the morning of April 21, racial violence again erupted at Lawrence High. About 150 black high school and junior high students, parents, and other supporters, many carrying clubs and baseball bats, again assembled in Veteran's Park. They crossed the street, passed by police officers, and broke school windows. Helmeted Lawrence police formed a line in front of the administration building (adjacent to the high school), used teargas to disperse the demonstrators, and made several arrests. Black students who did not participate in the walkout were caught in the middle of the fray, threatened by both white students and the protesting black students. *Harambee* proclaimed the high school disturbance as "THE WEEK THAT WAS."⁴¹

A resolution of sorts was reached in late April when black and white student representatives, after earlier rejecting a plan that would allow the high school's BSU to choose two of the five varsity cheerleaders, accepted an alternative plan that increased the number of cheerleaders to eight instead of the traditional five, with two members selected from minority groups. But a week later, a cross section of black leaders, including Leonard Harrison, John Spearman, Sr., and Vernell Sturns, all agreed that little progress had been made on the students' demands, despite Knox's and other administrators belief that things were getting better. Harrison commented, "I'd say at this point that the issues are not resolved. I don't know, in fact, what the consequences might be." He added a prescient warning: "[W]hen you create a situation like this and don't resolve it immediately, you may not get more disruptions today or tomorrow or next week. But the next time there is a confrontation, it'll probably be worse."⁴²



above 12. Racial tensions were acute after a walkout by black students at Lawrence High School in April 1970. Further contributing to the tense situation were strained relations between African Americans and the Lawrence Police Department. With good reason, blacks in Lawrence had long complained about police surveillance and brutality. (Courtesy University of Kansas Archives)

right 13. On April 20, 1970, arson engulfed the University of Kansas Memorial Union, doing an estimated \$3,000,000 damage. For three nights after the fire, Lawrence was under a dusk-to-dawn curfew, and the Kansas National Guard patrolled city streets. Critics of student activism blamed the fire on student revolutionaries who thrived under lax campus administration. KU administrators blamed the fire on "outsiders." The arson was never solved. (Courtesy Lawrence Journal-World Collection, Kansas Collection, Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas)