



More Scared than Radical?

The Story Behind the Hartwell Hall Takeover May 6-7, 1970

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It is the nature of man to be involved in the action and passion of his time or run the peril of not having lived.-Lewis Walter Stewart Junior¹

Wednesday May 6, 1970, a group of three to five hundred SUNY Brockport students have just left the College's main student union to take over Hartwell Hall, the location of the College's administrative offices. The students have just come from a rally where they demanded that the college shut down to observe a moratorium on Vietnam and the death of four students at Kent State who were shot by National Guardsmen during an anti-war protest. There are no police or National Guard troops to stand in their way; order on campus is kept by student marshals.² The uncharacteristically cold Brockport night is filled with the sound of fire engines and smoke that appears to be emanating from a building just up the road from Hartwell Hall; will Brockport become the next Kent State or will cooler heads prevail?

Data from the late sixties shows that college enrollment by young men increased dramatically as a result of male students seeking deferments. Although colleges and universities like SUNY Brockport benefited from higher enrollment numbers, the situation created an ideal environment for protest against the war. Richard Nixon's 1968 presidential campaign had focused on Law and Order, a theme directed at the college campuses that were experiencing large degrees of unrest. At that time only the elite colleges, not state schools like SUNY Brockport, were experiencing major problems.³

¹ *The Brockport Stylus*, "New Student Movement." 11 March 1970, p. 16.

² I was unable to confirm whose idea it was to appoint student marshals to keep order on campus but interviewees told me that they wore white armbands and had the task of keeping order not only during the sit-in but also during the protest marches into the town. One faculty member, Dr. John Kutolowski of the History Department, donned an armband and became a "Marshall" for a short period of time.

³ Dr. Owen S. Ireland, interview with author, October 20, 2005 in Brockport NY.

A traditional aged SUNY Brockport student in 1970 lived through an era that witnessed the assassination of a President while they were in middle school, the civil rights movement and the Vietnam conflict gain momentum while they were in high school, and by the time they reached Brockport to attend college in the late sixties Robert Kennedy and Martin Luther King Jr. had been recently assassinated. The decade ended with two dramatically contrasting events, Woodstock and the moon landing, one representing nationalistic pride and achievement and the other representative of the growing counterculture and generation gap, a fitting way to end a turbulent decade in the United States.

By the spring of 1970 college campuses like Brockport had been the center of protest and activism for many years tackling issues like civil rights, ecology, and the Vietnam War. The issue of the war and the draft hit close to home for many college students because the draft directly impacted many of them. Charges of the draft being unfair and racist resulted in the development of a draft lottery system that took effect in the beginning of 1970. The lottery changed the status of thousands of college students who had been able to avoid the draft by getting a student deferment for the period they were in school. The lottery system, in theory, was supposed to close the loopholes and make things more even. Now, if a college student was deemed 1-A (or eligible for the draft), and drew a low lottery number, the longest deferment he could get would be to finish senior year, or if an underclassman, to finish the semester.

Although SUNY Brockport could hardly be called a hotbed of activism in the late sixties it did have its fair share of student activists with varying agendas. As some of the nation's colleges struggled to deal with increased violence related to student activism on

their campuses, SUNY Brockport embarked on an ambitious growth plan which saw huge increases in students and faculty and an effort to recruit more racial minorities. The presence of so many new students and younger faculty, many of whom were not much older than the students they taught, created a potentially volatile mix in a politically conservative small town that was not equipped to handle the strain on its resources much less an influx of activist ideology.⁴

The increased enrollment by students hoping to avoid the draft combined with a concerted effort by the SUNY Brockport administration to dramatically expand the number of students on the campus in the late sixties, including recruitment fairs in Long Island N.Y and heavy recruitment of transfer students from New York State's community colleges, created a different campus for students who arrived in the late sixties.

The student population had grown explosively from 1967 to 1970. there were something like 9,000 kids there in 1970, maybe even more, and when I had gotten there in '66 there were like 2300 kids there, so the growth was explosive. There was also heavy recruitment of black inner city kids from Rochester, including a lot of kids who were completely unprepared for college. - James Howard Kunstler⁵

In Brockport, N.Y in the spring of 1970 an African-American, Lewis Walter Stewart Junior, known at the time on campus as Walt Stewart, ran for student government President along with Caucasian Larry Gostin as his running mate.⁶ The legitimate candidacy of an African American at SUNY Brockport was indicative of the massive

⁴ Dr. Owen S. Ireland, interview with author, October 20, 2005 at SUNY Brockport. Ireland came to SUNY Brockport from Wilkes College in Pennsylvania in 1968 and was hired as one of a hundred new faculty members. Ireland's anti-war stance in the hawkish community caused him to look elsewhere for employment.

⁵ James Howard Kunstler , interview with author November, 9, 2005 via phone. Kunstler is a well respected author and was a member of the class of '71

⁶ *The Brockport Stylus*, "New Student Movement." 11 March 1970, p. 16.

changes the school had undergone in the latter part of the sixties.⁷ Stewart's candidacy was the culmination of an effort to increase both the college's overall population and the number of minorities on campus.

He (Stewart) was not what you think of as a bomb throwing crazy of the late sixties but a natural leader. Dr. Owen S. Ireland⁸

Stewart held a commanding presence on campus and his political speeches read like sermons.⁹ Stewart had been a champion for the cause of civil rights at Orange County Community College in Newburgh, NY. At OCCC Stewart was the major reason African American history courses were added to the curriculum.¹⁰ Soon after Stewart transferred to Brockport he became associated with a group on the Brockport campus that became known as the Black Student Liberation Front (BSLF). Some interviewees compared Stewart to the late Martin Luther King Jr. in style and substance, especially his advocacy of non violence.¹¹ Stewart rose to prominence on campus by coming to the defense of an embattled professor in the Art department, Patricia Hosman.

Patricia Hosman was a 25 year-old art instructor and a *Cum Laude* graduate of Cornell University; she also studied at the University of London. Hosman's job classification in the fall of 1969 was temporary, which meant that she could be

⁷ According to noted SUNY Brockport historian and professor of history W. Bruce Leslie there was an African-American student government president in the 1950's which means that Stewart was not the first African-American to hold such a position but it's important to note that in the 1950's the student body was significantly smaller and presumably more close nit. Stewart's election as BSG president in theory should have quieted some of the perception that SUNY Brockport was a racist institution and yet after Stewart's election the radical group, the BSLF became more active in protests.

⁸ Ireland.

⁹ Stewart and his brother became ministers.

¹⁰ Lewis Walter Stewart Junior, interview with author, December 19, 2005

¹¹ Stewart's friend Ivan Ramos, who had worked with Stewart on an unsuccessful local election campaign in the late 1990's, said being with Stewart was like "being in the very presence of Dr. King."

terminated without a hearing.¹² Initially Hosman's job was terminated upon the recommendation of Art Department chair Ambrose Corcoran without an official explanation. Five students who were employed in the Art Department resigned immediately to protest the firing which they claimed was racially motivated.¹³ In response to the firing, Walt Stewart formed a group known as the Coalition of Concerned Students and Faculty, (CCSF) which was formed specifically to get Hosman's position reinstated. A sit-in at Hartwell Hall was organized to support Hosman.

The group was successful in getting Hosman reinstated with the help of Rochester Attorney Thomas Fink, who had negotiated with the institution to have her position reclassified to "term" which meant that formal charges and a hearing were required before she could be terminated.¹⁴ Hosman's reinstatement as a faculty member would be short-lived; she offered her resignation the following February. Hosman completed her employment at Brockport in May of 1970 but her presence on campus would cause problems for the administration long afterward.¹⁵

The incident became known as the "Hosman-Corcoran Affair," and it even received attention in the Rochester newspapers. It was at that point Corcoran offered an explanation for his attempt to terminate her position. Corcoran said it was related to her grading system, which was a pass fail and not on a five point system. Hosman claimed that her pass fail method was too progressive for Corcoran and that the presence of a highly educated intimidated him.¹⁶

¹² The Brockport Stylus, "Art Instructor Fired: Students Charge Racism" 10 December 1969

¹³ Ibid

¹⁴ The Brockport Stylus, "Students Sit-in Hosman "Unfired." 12 January 1970 p1

¹⁵ The Brockport Stylus, "Hosman Resigns," 28 January 1970 p1

¹⁶ The Brockport Stylus, "Corcoran Gives Reasons For Request to Fire Hosman," 18 February 1970 p1

Pat Hosman's official photograph taken in the late sixties showed a young smiling professor with long straight hair, certainly not a stereotypical radical hippie type and yet that is how she was described by interviewees, two of whom compared her to the late Janis Joplin.¹⁷ Hosman was obviously very outspoken and she may have unwittingly inspired the BSLF to engage in radical activities some have suggested that she may have overtly done so.

Hosman joined the staff at SUNY Brockport at a time when the tremendous growth of the university created a huge need for more college professors. In the hiring frenzy there were professors like Hosman who were just out of college and not much older than many of their students. It was a changing of the guard as new professors brought with them a fresh perspective on world events and many of whom supported the growing movement for racial and social equality.

It is important to note that in spite of the perception that racial inequality was exclusively a southern problem in the late 1960's and early 1970's, that as late as 1966 there may have been as few as seven African Americans living on campus at SUNY Brockport.¹⁸ Unfortunately specific numbers of African American students were not recorded until years later. As far as whether SUNY Brockport was a "racist" school by 1970 depends on your perspective. There is no doubt that the BSLF felt that it was and even Walt Stewart remembers seeing graffiti on campus during his campaign for B.S.G President that likened him with an "ape" and calling him a "nigger."¹⁹

¹⁷ Hosman was the only individual I contacted who refused to be interviewed for this project stating simply that she "respected" what I was trying to do but that she "had no interest in revisiting that period of (her) life."

¹⁸ Since there were no specific numbers available one researcher relied on pictures from the yearbook to ascertain an approximate number of African- Americans on campus.

¹⁹ Stewart

We ran against jocks who were really big on campus at the time and nobody expected us to win and we had a landslide. We called it the New Student Movement, the NSM, and it was on all of our lapels. - Larry Gostin²⁰

The NSM put together a well organized campaign and the group was covered favorably by John J. McGuire the editor in chief of the student newspaper, *The Stylus*. The group was highly visible and utilized the student press to get their message across. The focus of the NSM was to promote change on campus and to make student government more meaningful. Gostin and Stewart were the perfect combination of intellect and eloquence and they were both activists who did not limit their focus to the war in Vietnam, they were also cognizant of the racial and social inequities of their time.

In spite of the fact that an African American had gained the student presidency, there were still racial tensions on the campus that needed to be resolved. Although Stewart and Gostin preached non-violent solutions the BSLF was perceived as a group that advocated violence. Gostin and Stewart maintained a loose association with the BSLF after the election.

The BSLF used a state owned house located on the north side of the campus on 268 Holley Street known as the Wari Katarra Cultural Center.²¹ In spite of ground breaking national legislation that was meant to desegregate black and white students, black students had chosen to demand their own student union, because they felt that the main union served only white students, and it was granted to them. The center opened in the second week of October in 1969 at 266 Holley Street and within four weeks it moved

²⁰ Larry Gostin, interview with author, November 9, 2005 via phone.

²¹ Tom O'Neill, "Black Cultural Center." *The Brockport Stylus*, 22 October 1969, p. 1.

next door to its final location. The center was dedicated to a young African American woman, Karen Lee, who had been killed in a hit and run accident in front of the house.²²

The BSLF was Brockport's answer to prominent national organizations like the Black Panthers. The title Black Student Liberation Front was coined by Lewis Stewart in 1969 when he was approached by a group known as the Black Student Union, or the BSU, that had formed on the Brockport Campus in 1966 in order to promote integration of Black students.²³ The BSU asked Stewart to write a Constitution for them, a request that he obliged.²⁴ The new name reflected the times, it was chosen in the wake of the assassinations of Martin Luther King Jr. and when race issues on college campuses were fodder for protest along with environmental issues and concern over the war in Vietnam.

The BSLF was a small group that received a lot of student press during the years John J. McGuire was editor of *The Stylus*. They had staged a late night sit in at one of the residence halls, Gordon Hall, on Monday October 25, 1969 in response to the eviction of four female African-American students for violation of the rules; the BSLF claimed the evictions were racially motivated.²⁵ Exactly a week later white students staged a counter sit-in at the exact same location.²⁶

Although there was a racial element to the Gordon protest it is important to note that one of, if not the biggest problems in Brockport during the years of high growth was

²² During my interview with Walt Stewart he told me that the name Wari Katarra was Swahili. In researching the name, which is spelled many different ways in various publications, I determined that the word "Wari" is similar to the Swahili term Mwari which is a young child before puberty and Katara is an automobile. Since the young girl, Karen Lee, was killed by a car this seems to make sense. Although I am not certain that this is the origin of the name it is as close as I have come to determining any other possible meaning.

²³ Lewis Walter Stewart, interview with author, December 19, 2005 at his home in the Rochester area.

²⁴ Ibid

²⁵ *The Brockport Stylus*, "Blacks Stage Peaceful Sit-In." 29 October 1969, p. 1.

²⁶ *The Brockport Stylus*, "Counter Sit-In Staged at Gordon." 5 November 1969, p. 1.

student housing. It was an issue that dominated the pages of *The Stylus* for years to come as the demand increased for housing. The student housing problem may be another reason that local Brockport residents and students began to have strained relations.

John J. McGuire, known on campus simply as “J.J.”, a former marine who had seen combat in Vietnam, was the editor of SUNY Brockport’s newspaper *The Stylus* during the time when racial issues seemed to be at the forefront on the SUNY Brockport campus. McGuire was well liked and although he was not known as being particularly charismatic or dominating presence, he commanded a great deal of respect and could more than hold his own in a public speaking situation. It was during McGuire’s tenure as editor of *The Stylus* that the newspaper tackled national issues such as civil rights and Vietnam. Before McGuire became editor of the newspaper he was a regular contributor to the editorial page.

Those who knew J.J. described him as a pacifist and an easy person to get along with.²⁷ McGuire was forceful with the pen but a reluctant leader of student protest, possibly because in the back of his mind he feared that it would become violent as it had in other parts of the country and on other college campuses. McGuire was described as being “older” than the other students and a big brother type of figure. Guesses at his age put him in his late twenties when he attended Brockport.²⁸

²⁷ In a paper written by former student John Butz, “A Polite Rebellion” McGuire is said to have related to the author that he received considerable criticism from his former Marine colleagues because of his anti-war stance. Unfortunately McGuire passed away in 2000 of Cancer so I was unable to interview him. The Butz paper is available for review in the SUNY Brockport Archives located in the basement of the school’s library.

²⁸ I was surprised at how many people said “he was older than the rest of us” and so I figured he may have been in his thirties because at the time of this writing I am thirty nine years old and attending college. Dr. Consentino was the first person I asked specifically how old McGuire was and he placed him in his late twenties as did another former classmate in a subsequent interview.

A week before the Hartwell takeover on Wednesday April 29, 1970, the sirens sounded and students soon filled the mall, a large open spaced area located in the center of the SUNY Brockport campus. A Genesee Beer truck found a convenient location as a day of drinking and listening to live music began. In an era when the drinking age was eighteen, the Spring-In was a day designed for students to let loose and have a day off from classes. No one knew exactly what day the event would occur on and students looked closely at the weather reports in hopes of determining what beautiful day the Spring-In would occur on.²⁹ The Spring-In was complete with as much beer as a student could consume and the festivities continued on into the weekend.

On the day following SUNY Brockport's annual drunken festival, those who were not too hung-over looked at a calendar that showed that "the Sixties" had been over for four months and yet the remnants of a turbulent decade lingered on without a firm resolution. There were still environmental problems, racism, and most importantly a war that was taking the lives of young people by the thousands. That evening Thursday April 30, 1970, Richard Nixon went on television to address the nation and unwittingly set into motion a chain of events that would eventually be the beginning of the end of a war and of the Nixon Presidency although neither end would occur for years to come.

I would rather be a one-term President and do what I believe is right than to be a two-term President at the cost of seeing America become a second-rate power and to see this nation accept the first defeat in its proud 190-year history.- Richard Nixon, April 30 1970

²⁹ Michael Perez, interview by the author, November 5, 2005 via phone

The series of events directly leading to the Hartwell Hall occupation began with President Richard Nixon's announcement of the U.S led invasion of Cambodia during the Vietnam Conflict on Thursday April 30 1970. The nation was divided into Hawks and Doves, with both sides holding emotional views. Colleges reacted almost immediately with varying degrees of protest. Even colleges like Kent State in Ohio that were not known for political protests became heavily involved. It was war protest activities at Kent State that began a series of events that would change the United States forever.

It would be a hard sell to the nation, but Richard Nixon attempted to explain to Americans his decision to begin bombing operations in Cambodia.³⁰ Nixon tried to promote the plan as a way to safely bring Americans home from Vietnam but some colleges saw it as a deception since Nixon had run on a platform that included a "secret plan" to end the war in Vietnam and an escalation of a war that was appearing unwinnable, especially from a President who promised to end America's involvement in it, set off a series of protests on college campuses across the nation.

Two hundred and eighty three miles west of SUNY Brockport at another college not known at the time as a hotbed of anti-war activism, Kent State University in Ohio, students began to organize a series of protests against Nixon and his decision to escalate the war. Three days after Nixon's announcement, Monday May 4 1970, after a tumultuous weekend filled with protests at Kent State, National Guardsmen shot and killed four college students on a campus that was far more similar to Brockport than fervent anti-war colleges like Berkley or the University of Chicago.³¹

³⁰ The only thing Nixon really did was "announce" the bombings since the United States had been secretly bombing Cambodia for over a year.

³¹ Ireland

In spite of the fact that killings were an everyday part of life by 1970, with body counts broadcast on the nightly news, the killing of student protestors by government soldiers appeared to be the spark that lit a fire on college campuses nationwide, especially those like SUNY Brockport that were not known as overtly radical. As far as blame for the shootings, opinions ran along conservative and liberal lines with the former placing blame on the students and the latter on the government.

Freshman Rhonda Butterfield was in *The Stylus*' office when word came that four students at Kent State University had been killed by National Guardsmen.³² Butterfield had come from a small town in Upstate New York and had been raised a political conservative.³³ It was J.J McGuire who decided that someone from the student body needed to go to the regularly scheduled Faculty Senate meeting that evening and request a moratorium or at least some kind of official acknowledgement of the events at Kent State. When Butterfield arrived at the meeting she felt intimidated and overly emotional. As she waited to speak all she could think about was the fact that she, a female college student, could have been shot and killed.

When Butterfield finally spoke to the Faculty Senate and requested the moratorium she had to choke back tears. The request for a one day moratorium was not without precedent; the school had observed a moratorium on October 15, 1969 and instead of writing a new resolution Dr. John Kutolowski simply substituted Vietnam and October 15, 1969 with Cambodia and May 8, 1970.³⁴ The motion passed 18-0-2 in spite of some heated exchanges between two faculty senate members. The other issue that

³² Rhonda Butterfield, interview with author, January 22, 2005 via phone. Butterfield said that her life changed after the meeting and she devoted the rest of her life to public service.

³³ Ibid

³⁴ See attached journal entries from Dr. John Kutolowski

needed to be addressed was how to handle the issue of students who in good conscience would not take final exams as a means of protest. The issue was argued but no resolution was offered with regard to grades of students strikers who boycotted exams or classes.

The approval of a moratorium was not enough to satisfy the activists on campus, especially because the grading issue was not addressed satisfactorily in the minds of many of the students, and on Tuesday May, 5, 1970 students began to gather on the mall where just six days earlier they had been drinking beer and having a good time. The crowd grew slowly but eventually an impromptu march was organized by David Comes who was better known on campus as “The Spaceman.”³⁵ At the front of the procession marchers carried a handmade sign simply stating “Give Peace a Chance” a song by former Beatle John Lennon. The march went as far as the local high school where, according to the *Brockport Republican-Democrat* marchers attempted to get local high school students to join them.³⁶

The march was part of a called student strike and although Comes organized the march, BSG President-elect Walt Stewart took over leadership once it had reached Main Street Brockport where it momentarily transformed into a sit-in where Stewart and other student leaders spoke to the crowd. The *Brockport Republican-Democrat* later noted that there were “raised fists” and “black power” signs present at the march and during the speeches on Main Street. By all accounts the march and gathering were peaceful but the presence of ten African American students at the head of the procession may have upset

³⁵ Stewart

³⁶ Brockport Republican Democrat 05/07/1970 p.1 Walt Stewart insisted the story was fabricated and that no one attempted to coerce high school students into joining the march. This was contradicted by two other people I interviewed who said that there were marchers who attempted to convince the high school students to join the march. Since Stewart was at the front of the march it may be that he was unaware of what was going on behind him. However, if some of the marchers were attempting to coerce college students to join in on the protest they may have been doing so in a playful manner with shouts and screams and with no real intent to cause a mass uprising at the high school.

the conservative element in the town of Brockport and those students who saw issues regarding race being totally separate from issues concerning the war in Southeast Asia and the Kent State shootings.³⁷ Later that evening students gathered on the school's mall, sang protest songs and burned effigies of Richard Nixon.

*I personally abhor and regret the escalation in the Cambodian situation. The college campus ought to be a place where questions of the day can be objectively discussed. I am happy the students are taking an objective look at the issues of the day. The school supports this as long as the rights and freedoms of individuals are upheld. – SUNY President Albert Brown*³⁸

By the morning of Wednesday, May 6 1970 SUNY President Albert Brown distributed a memo that congratulated his staff members for the handling of the student uprising. The Brown memo went on to say that Brown was “extremely impressed by the work done” by department heads with regard to the prevention of violence on the Brockport Campus.³⁹ In spite of Brown's memo, Student leaders and some faculty members still were not happy that Brockport had not shut down to observe a lengthy moratorium as other schools across the nation had agreed to do. The reaction was the formation of another committee made up of the newly elected Brockport Student Government; the group that had formed in reaction to the termination of a staff member, Pat Hosman, which then evolved into the NSM, was now simply called the “Steering Committee.” Their leader was Walt Stewart, the President elect of the Brockport Student

³⁷ Mary. Condit, "SUCB Student Says College March and Strike Were Failures." *Brockport Republic Democrat*, 14 May 1970, p.2 Condit wrote a rather scathing assessment of the march and noted that the “black leader” mentioned Bobby Seale and she found this to be offensive since the march was supposed to be about the war.

³⁸ Jack Williams. "College Presidents: They Share Concern." *Rochester Times Union*, 6 May 1970, sec. A, p. 1.

³⁹ See Attached memo dated May 6, 1970

Government. The other members included John J. McGuire, the editor in chief of the *Stylus*, BSG Vice president Elect Larry Gostin, and Jerry Cosentino the Vice Treasurer of the B.S.G.⁴⁰

The Steering Committee organized a rally, held in the student union on Wednesday May 6, 1970 at approximately 9 p.m. It was attended by anywhere from six hundred to two thousand students.⁴¹ There were at least six speakers including three members of the Steering Committee, a student from the University of Rochester, and one of the founders of the National Petition Committee, a committee set up to collect money to “unelect(sic)” Richard Nixon.⁴²

The first speaker, Sherman Hawkins from the University of Rochester, received a favorable response and his theme was unity amongst the college community and he was soliciting funds for the National Petition Committee whose goal was to buy airtime on a major television network to address their grievances.⁴³ The second speaker, Art Walker, a hardliner and a Vietnam Vet, was introduced as the new president of the BSLF. Walker did not receive a favorable a response. Walker, an African-American, used his time on

⁴⁰ Brian Knapp, "Students Take Over Administration Building: Leaders Plead for Non-Violence and Reason." *The Brockport Stylus*, 7 May 1970.

⁴¹ That number depended on your source of information, The Stylus had “about 2,000” the Rochester Democrat and Chronicle and the Times-Union, (Rochester’s evening paper at that time), had 1,500 and official Brockport press release had “600 to 700” students WROC-TV reported 1,000 and the fire capacity in the room is listed at 800. In October of that same year when Dick Gregory spoke in the ballroom the number in attendance was listed as 1700 so anyone’s guess as to the number of students at the rally is as good as the next. It is interesting to note that The Stylus reported the largest number and the college’s public relations office reported the lowest number and both numbers were rejected by the press.

⁴² The National Petition Drive was organized in part by Gordon S. Black who, at the time, was a professor at The University of Rochester. Black would go on to achieve fame as the head of a polling company, Harris Interactive. I attempted to contact Black to find out whether the group succeeded in buying air time on a national television network and I was advised he is no longer a part of Harris Interactive. One interviewee that I spoke with remembered the group buying the commercial air time but I was unable to find a second source for confirmation. In the summer following the Hartwell takeover Larry Gostin headed a committee name the “National Petition Amendment Committee,” whose purpose was to have social issues such as racial equality added on to the main petition.

⁴³ Brian Knapp, "Students Take Over Administration Building: Leaders Plead for Non-Violence and Reason." *The Brockport Stylus*, 7 May 1970

the podium to draw attention to issues that the BSLF was concerned with including the list of demands published in the November 19, 1969 issue of the *Stylus* and presented to Dr. Brown. Walker ended his talk with the statement “you are afraid to close the school but want some brothers and sisters to stick their necks out.”⁴⁴

The next speaker was John J. McGuire. McGuire’s speech focused on the fact that any demonstration needed to be non-violent and he requested unity amongst the students, a thinly veiled appeal to the renegade BSLF that had not yet agreed to take part in the Hartwell takeover. McGuire ended his speech echoing the theme of the NSM, simply stating “We have to speak up in the passion of our times.”

The stage was set for Gostin and Stewart to make their sales pitch to students. Gostin’s speech centered on the impending strike, since he is credited as having conceived the idea of a takeover of Hartwell; Gostin made the comment during his speech that at least five people will not leave unless “the man comes and takes us out.”⁴⁵

According to *The Stylus*, Walt Stewart was the final speaker; *The Stylus* reported that his comments were “short and to the point,” which was uncharacteristic of the eloquent leader. The Steering Committee had made their plea to a large group of students on a campus of approximately five thousand students, it remained to be seen how many would actually participate in the sit-in especially if there was fear of violence.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Ibid

⁴⁵ Ibid I presume Gostin was referring to the “five” members of the Steering Committee and yet I have never figured out who that fifth member was.

⁴⁶ According to a press release from the community relations office there were two other speakers that were not listed in *The Stylus*’ account of the evening. The two speakers were faculty members, one from nearby University of Rochester and another from Brockport. These faculty members reportedly urged students not to attempt an occupation of any buildings or to commit any vandalism. Why these speakers are missing from the account listed in *The Stylus* is a mystery. The other question that remains is why the faculty members were not listed by name in the press release or in any other documents. The final mystery surrounding the speakers is why a faculty member from University of Rochester would be at Brockport when U of R was experiencing its own problems.

Once the rally had finished, a group of students ranging from 350 to 500, marched to the steps of Hartwell Hall to stage a sit in. Initially the BSLF had decided not to join the Hartwell protest and instead decided to retreat to the Wari-Katarra Cultural Center.⁴⁷

The number of students who participated in the sit in caused some to suggest that the vast majority of students at SUNY Brockport were not “radical” or particularly socially aware or active although that claim is almost impossible to substantiate. Either way, even though the number of students participating in the strike was relatively small in proportion to the overall college population the number was significant enough to be noticed and gain remarkable concessions from the administration without having to resort to violence. It is doubtful that student strikers would have gained any concessions if they had resorted to violence. There is little doubt given the events of Kent State and later Jackson State that students who chose to participate in the strike, sit in, marches and rallies did so at the risk of being arrested or beaten or possibly failing to graduate because of missed finals or by being blacklisted by conservative faculty members or the administration. Even though the risk of injury or death was not comparable to what a typical soldier faced in the line of fire in Southeast Asia, but by no means should the bravery of the leaders of the SUNY Brockport, or another college’s, strike and their participants be questioned.

At approximately 10:00 PM on May 6, 1970 students gathered on the front steps of Hartwell Hall in preparation for the occupation. A few words were spoken while some students hung protest signs from the second floor window just above the larger group. Within moments they would enter the facility with the intent of shutting down the college for the rest of the week and having a moratorium on the Vietnam War.

⁴⁷ Ibid

Considering the amount of violence that had occurred on other college campuses across the nation, there is no doubt that Brockport administration officials and faculty members had cause for alarm. The students followed their leader's advice and entered Hartwell Hall peacefully; many of them sitting in the hallways probably were more scared than radical. It was described as a confusing time for everyone.

Hartwell Hall is noted for its scenic tower which is the center of the college's official logo. It is the oldest school building on the campus and the most identifiable.⁴⁸ In addition to its symbolic value, Hartwell was chosen as the place of occupation because it housed the President's office as well as most of the staff members' offices. In 1970 the building housed a swimming pool and a gymnasium and reportedly a few ghosts. The large granite steps leading into the building were laid by stonemasons in the late 1930's. The design is Georgian Colonial and the building is named after Ernest Hartwell who was head of the school from 1936 to 1944. Hartwell was known as a strict disciplinarian and he would have been shocked by the presence of radicals in a building named in his honor.⁴⁹

May 6, 1970 at approximately 10:00 PM, a short time after members of the BSLF left the main rally in the student union and arrived at the Wari Katarra Cultural Center on 268 Holley Street, a few hundred yards up the road from Hartwell Hall and the main protest, smoke appeared from inside the house. A fire had been set in four places and Brockport firemen rushed to the scene.⁵⁰ There was little doubt at the time that it was

⁴⁸ The alumni building is older but Hartwell is the oldest building used exclusively for instruction.

⁴⁹ All of this information can be found in the SUNY Brockport Archives and online at <http://www.brockport.edu/~library1/archives.htm>

⁵⁰ *The Brockport Stylus*, "Fire Damages Black Cultural Center." 7 May 1970, and *Rochester Democrat and Chronicle*, "Fire Hits Center at Brockport." 7 May 1970, sec. B, p. 1. and attached news scripts from WROC-TV 8 courtesy of David McKinley

arson mainly because of the timing of the fire; the only real question was who set it and the fear was that white racists had done so, at least that was what the first reports indicated. The damage to the facility was far less than the damage to the reputation of the BSLF. Those who thought the group was prone to violence were convinced that BSLF members had set the fire; others were just scared.

As the fire burned the student marshals wearing white armbands, who had been hastily commissioned the day of the march, reportedly helped keep order.⁵¹ The smoke from the fire and the sound of fire alarms only added to the confusion of the evening. As the fire burned there were rumors concerning fires in other areas of the campus and even an attempted firebombing of an electrical power facility that was located up the road from Wari Katarra.⁵²

The BSLF members who arrived at the scene of the fire became enraged and were reportedly shouting at fire fighters as they fought the blaze. According to BSLF chairman Laverne Spain, the BSLF had left the house in order to attend the general meeting.⁵³ Shortly before the fire started students were reportedly seen leaving the area with briefcases. In spite of the outrage shown by the group at what they attempted to portray as a racially motivated arson set by an anti-black group, law enforcement officials had little difficulty finding evidence as to who had actually started the fire. Sheriff Deputy Burt Verhay reported to the local media that the fire had been set in four places and

⁵¹ Ibid

⁵² See attached news scripts. The firebombing was also mentioned by at least three people who were interviewed for this project. They reported that some BSLF members had thrown Molotov cocktails at a large power grid in hopes of cutting power off to the campus. One can only wonder if it was a legitimate attempt or just another way to stir up confusion on campus.

⁵³ *The Brockport Stylus*, "Fire Damages Black Cultural Center." 7 May 1970, .

started with kerosene.⁵⁴ There was also a report of a smaller fire set at the main college union at the same time which caused the main union to be evacuated.

The fire at Wari Katarra may have drawn some attention away from the group that went to Hartwell Hall to stage their sit in, but a student with a bullhorn begged students to join in a peaceful protest.⁵⁵ Many of the students who went to Hartwell Hall gathered at the front of the building before they began the occupation. A few students took up posts in the windows and begun to hang protest signs for all to see. Anti-war and anti-Nixon graffiti was chalked on the face of the majestic buildings columns.

Outdoors at the mall, located at the center of the campus, resident students were running rampant and spreading rumors of impending violence including a possible police raid.⁵⁶ The smoke from the Wari Katarra house suggested that students had begun an all out riot and the students who had not attended the rally or participated in the sit in or the strike were confused and easily convinced that the college itself was about to be burned down.

Approximately thirty members of the BSLF added to the confusion by running around campus yelling “They’re burning our building down.” The group continued to cause confusion on campus. At Harmon Hall, a multi story residence hall located in close proximity to the Wari Katarra house, the Resident Director advised all students to stay in the building and not allow any entry⁵⁷ in response to the discovery of kerosene can and kerosene soaked clothes in the room of one of the members of the BSLF. The discovery was reported to the authorities; there was also a rumor circulating around campus that the

⁵⁴ *Rochester Democrat and Chronicle*, "Fire Hits Center at Brockport." 7 May 1970, sec. B, p. 1

⁵⁵ See attached journal entries by John Kutolowski

⁵⁶ Perez

⁵⁷ Regan Beers, Sidney Wesseldine interview with author January 18, 2006 via phone

Wari Katarra house had been stripped of valuable items before the fire. The prospect of some BSLF members setting fire to their own building was becoming more evident, at least to those in Harmon Hall.⁵⁸

Later that evening approximately thirty BSLF members attempted to enter Harmon Hall, possibly in an attempt to destroy evidence related to the fire. When the BSLF arrived at the entrance to Harmon Hall they were met by a large contingent of white students who had gathered in the hallway and on the steps, many of whom were holding hockey sticks baseball bats and other “weapons.”

The female members of the BSLF were pushed into the white students and male BSLF members began shouting “They are hurting our women.” In short order the BSLF males began a scuffle with the white students including Sidney Wesseldine and Regan Beers. Beers had won the nationals in wrestling that year and he states that he took care of the attackers quickly .⁵⁹

I knew some of the black kids that I played football with... and all of a sudden I am just one of the enemy now. The fact that I treated them like fellow athletes all year long did not mean a thing. That was very upsetting.-Regan Beers⁶⁰

Wesseldine did not fare as well; he sustained a laceration in his side from a knife and was taken to a nearby hospital where he was treated with stitches and released. Wesseldine was the only casualty of the evening.⁶¹ The next day Wesseldine, then a freshman, left Brockport and never returned; his bad luck would continue when he drew

⁵⁸ Wesseldine, Stewart

⁵⁹ Wesseldine, .

⁶⁰ Beers

⁶¹ Wesseldine, and attached press release. The incident was also reported in the Rochester Times Union. No one was ever charged with the crime

twenty one in the next draft lottery. Fortunately Wesseldine survived his stint in the military as he was never deployed to Vietnam.⁶²

An isolated report suggests that police may have broken up the fight at Harmon Hall and Wesseldine remembers police coming to the dorm that evening and arresting two students for starting the fire. He claims that the students had a strong smell of kerosene on them that evening.⁶³ Wesseldine's recollection seems mildly plausible because Stewart remembers the police being able to find the arsonists easily because they smelled of kerosene and other interviewees remembers arrests that evening and bail money being collected. Nonetheless there is no evidence in any of the local newspapers or available scripts from local television that suggest students were arrested that evening; if they were the incident was successfully covered up.

In response to their failure to gain entry into Harmon Hall the BSLF members began to smash windows on the lower floors of the building in frustration. Afterward they went to the main student union and smashed display cases, overturned tables and began taking food and supplies from the snack area.⁶⁴

After the BSLF members ransacked the main union they staged their own occupation while they were in the union and subsequently the group demanded that police were allowed on campus to protect the group from the white racists who had set the fire. Their request was granted in spite of the increasing evidence that showed the possibility that the fire was set by BSLF members and not a hostile hate group. Two sheriff deputies were posted outside the student union; theirs was the only protracted

⁶² Wesseldine

⁶³ See attached news scripts for the isolated report. Thomas Fink also firmly contends that there were arrests the evening of the fire

⁶⁴ *Rochester Times Union*, "Brockport Stays Open As Police Stand By." 7 May 1970, sec. A, p. 1.

police presence on campus of the entire evening. While the BSLF occupied the same union they had protested served only the needs of white students, firefighters attempted to douse the fire that was engulfing the building that was given to them in response to that very protest. The fire, unlike the rumors regarding who had set it, were under control in about an hour.

I'm not sure if anyone told me why the house was burned down. If they did tell me I don't remember. It wasn't connected in any way with the sit in, it was certainly not productive. I think it really related more to those students and their concerns and grievances more so than what was happening with the general population of students at that point. - Thomas Fink Attorney⁶⁵

At Hartwell Hall the message of the evening continued to be non violence. Not long after the occupation of Hartwell had begun Thomas Fink, a Rochester, NY Attorney, was contacted by Jerry Cosentino to come onto campus to help with negotiations and to ensure the students rights were not violated. Fink's role in the negotiations may be one of the main reasons that police force was not used to evict the students from Hartwell. It was Fink who during the evening advised the students that they were in violation of the Henderson Act, legislation that was designed to address campus unrest that had been signed by New York Governor Nelson Rockefeller during the height of the anti-war movement.⁶⁶

Also appearing on campus was photographer Michael Soluri, photographer for The Saga, the student yearbook, who had been busy that week taking photographs of the march and other protest activities.

⁶⁵ Thomas Fink, interview by the author October, 28, 2005 via phone

⁶⁶ Cosentino

When I came back that evening I remember the presence of the state police and I had to show my ID card and they let me through.-Michael Soluri⁶⁷

Sometime between 1:00 AM and 2:00 AM the Village of Brockport's Police Chief Donald Hare told a local news station that he planned to enter the SUNY Brockport campus and "remove violent demonstrators." Hare told the news station that he would be assisted by a dozen sheriff deputies and approximately thirty state troopers. Hare's threat to "clear the campus," would prove to be idle.⁶⁸

At Hartwell Hall the hallways were littered with students, making it nearly impossible to walk through the hallway without stepping on someone. The next day, news cameras showed students all over the front steps and some students raising their fists in unison. There was a fear at Hartwell Hall that, in retaliation for the fire at Wari Katarra, the BSLF would start fires elsewhere. One student, the child of a prominent faculty Chairman, feared that police would beat her up and her father's reputation would be tarnished. In spite of that fear students began to pass a hat around at Hartwell in order to collect money in order to repair the Wari Katarra house.

Sometime after 2 AM on May 7, 1970 some members of the BSLF arrived at Hartwell Hall yelling and screaming, frightening some of the white students who were sitting peaceably in the corridors.⁶⁹ The BSLF members had come to Hartwell with food that had been stolen from the main student union. Approximately ten of the BSLF members went to the gym located in the basement of Hartwell Hall and attempted to break into a supply closet in order to get a basketball. Professor John Kutolowski advised the students that he had a basketball in his car and that there was no need to break into the

⁶⁷ Michael Soluri, interview with author, November 06, 2005 via phone.

⁶⁸ See attached news scripts

⁶⁹ See attached journal of John Kutolowski

closet. Unfortunately when Kutolowski arrived at his car he realized that the ball was not fully inflated and so he went to his apartment to get a needle to pump it up with.

Upon his return to the occupied building Kutolowski presented the students with the basketball and the students “put on quite a show” even managing to draw some of the students out of the halls and into the gym to watch.

In another section of the building students were skinny dipping in the pool or bowling while others were beginning to sprawl out on blankets and attempting to get some sleep, and still other students on the second floor were smoking marijuana. One student who was under the influence of LSD climbed up the main bell tower. By the early morning hours the main strike had resulted in no violence and only minor vandalism at Hartwell (Some students had broken into President Albert Brown’s office but were convinced by a faculty member not to rifle through files or touch personal belongings), the students seemed to be getting their message across peacefully and fears of mass violence like the type that had occurred at Kent State University before the strike and later at Jackson State College in Mississippi were not realized.

Later in the evening a messenger from the BSLF went to Hartwell Hall to seek out members of the Steering Committee and McGuire and Consentino were chosen to meet with Art Walker and Lee Spain.

I think I was sleeping on the floor upstairs on the second floor just trying to get some rest in between our negotiations with the administration and I got word that the Black Student Liberation Front wanted to meet with us. So J.J and I went and it was kind

of an interesting little mission because we were trying to avoid the police and get across the mall area unharassed.(Sic)” Jerry Consentino⁷⁰

Walker asked the Steering Committee if the BSLF could join the general strike because the group feared that White students were plotting to retaliate against the BSLF and the group felt they would be safer if they joined the general strike. McGuire and Consentino agreed to allow the BSLF to join the general strike at Hartwell and list the group’s demands along with the Steering Committee’s on the condition that the group agreed that there would be no rabble rousing or violence. The BSLF agreed to join the general strike and left the main Union for Hartwell around 6:00 am on May 7, 1970.

The unification was not without conflict including an argument between BSLF chairman Spain, Stewart, and student Dave Copeland. Copeland was a non- violent activist like Stewart and during a verbal confrontation Spain slapped Copeland although Stewart thought that he wanted to hit him more than Copeland. The non- violent Copeland, who later went into the ministry, did not respond in kind. Another potentially violent confrontation was averted.

The two groups were officially one and could focus on a common task: to shut down the college for two days in protest of the Cambodia incursion and escalation of the war. The issues of the student deaths at Kent State and racial injustice had become intertwined. The Steering Committee also wanted to ensure that no student would be penalized academically for participating in strike related activities. The success or failure of the Steering Committee to get their demands met depended on the ability of their leaders to negotiate with SUNY Brockport President Albert Brown and Brown’s

⁷⁰ Dr. Gerald Consentino, interview with author December 20, 2005 via phone.

willingness to negotiate with them. By all accounts Brown was not going to make it easy on any of them.

Dr John Kutolowski's phone rang at 8:30 am on the morning of Thursday May 7, 1970. On the other end of the line was Faculty Senate President C. Stuart Dube's secretary informing Senator Kutolowski that an emergency Faculty Senate Meeting was going to commence at 9:30 am. He replied, "I'll be there." The previous night had been an unusual time on the Brockport Campus and Mother Nature acknowledged the uniqueness of the day by providing snowfall in late Spring, albeit a modest amount, the night before.

In order to enter occupied Hartwell Hall non- strikers were given special clearance. The meeting commenced at approximately 9:30 am in Dr. Brown's office in Hartwell Hall. The attendees included Brown, Faculty Senators, Jack Lazarus (the Monroe County District Attorney), an unnamed Monroe County Sheriff, The Steering Committee, Lee Spain of the BSLF, Thomas Fink, and members of the local media including television photographers and Michael Soluri, who was shooting photographs for *The Stylus*.

The meeting commenced with Dr. Brown introducing those who were not members of the Faculty Senate to the group. Before the larger group had gotten together there was a general agreement on the grading policy but the particulars of the resolution still had to be worked out. In spite of the fact that the day before had been unseasonably cold the room filled with people became warm enough to warrant the periodic use of air conditioners to cool it down, at least temperature wise.

The students' demands were presented for the most part by Larry Gostin. The first issue at hand dealt with grading, the second dealt with moratorium days and teach ins, and the last dealt with social and racial injustice. Brown jostled a bit with Gostin during his presentation, he became downright defensive during Lee Spain's listing of BSLF demands. The early hours of the meeting were filled with emotion and tension and verbal sparring amongst youth and the Faculty Senate, a state of affairs that seemed to confirm that there was a "communication gap," between college students and authority figures.

At one point tempers became so flared that Brown almost mockingly called for a ten minute "moratorium." It was during that break that Fink again advised the student leaders that they were in violation of the Henderson Act and could be subject to arrest. The prospect of arrest did not seem to make the students waiver.

When the session reconvened, J.J McGuire appealed to Brown to consider a reasonable settlement and reminded Brown that they were both Marines who had seen combat. Although it is difficult to say if McGuire hit a cord with Brown, the impasse over whether exams scheduled for Friday May 8, 1970 and Monday May 11, 1970 would be completely cancelled because of a moratorium was solved by moving all of those exams to Tuesday, May 12 1970. The proposal also dealt with missed work and students who did not take final exams because of their conscience. Instructors were given the leeway to give "striking" students their mid term grade or a simple pass or fail grade even if the course was required for the student's major; the wording of the final resolution effectively made final exams optional for all students, even if they did not participate in the strike. The resolution also allowed professors to assign a grade of "I" even though the Steering Committee opposed that aspect of the resolution; the "I" grade was only to be

assigned if student and instructor reached a “mutual agreement.” Disagreements with regard to grading were to be dealt with by the office of the academic dean.

It was a hectic time for some and others were happy because they got out of taking final exams.- Jim Abrams⁷¹ SUNY Brockport Class of 1970

The other aspects of the settlement by comparison had far less impact on the student body. Brown promised to hold a “series of meetings” with “designated representatives of the BSLF,” in order to make recommendations with regard to the BSLF demands that were published in *The Stylus* on October, 19, 1969. The main demand of the group was to add an African-American studies program and that was already scheduled to begin in the fall of 1970. Nonetheless for all of their efforts and posturing the BSLF only managed to get lip service from Brown. The resolution made no mention of an investigation into the cause of the fire at Wari Katarra.⁷²

There was another matter discussed at the Faculty Senate meeting that remained unresolved, Pat Hosman’s reported threat to students who did not participate in the student strike. There was talk on the campus that Hosman had told her Art students that if they participated in the student strike they would receive an “A” and if they did not she would fail them. Hosman found herself at the center of another controversy with possible legal implications.⁷³

Did anyone really believe I was going to check up on 200 students...Take a break, have some fun. A’s are free. Give them away to everyone. Albert Brown gets an A. C

⁷¹ Jim Abrams, interview with author October, 27, 2005 via phone.

⁷² See Attached copy of resolution

⁷³ See attached letter and copy of journal and minutes of meeting

Stuart Dube II gets an A. Spiro Agnew gets an A. Without them where would the revolution be ? Power to the people. Long live Jerry Rubin. - Pat Hosman⁷⁴

The strike was over by 2 PM on May 7, 1970. Students who participated in the strike took time to clean up the trash they left behind. In the middle of the gymnasium sat the basketball which students had been playing with that evening; it was retrieved by its rightful owner. Once word of the settlement reached the whole campus many students began to leave rather than wait and see if there would be more unrest on the campus.⁷⁵

When this thing was going on (the Hartwell Sit-In) a lot of parents' cars were pulling up to dormitories and getting their sons and daughters because they feared that the whole thing might explode with tear gas and throwing things at the police. So the next day there weren't that many students to begin with. So even if you wanted to give your exams, you couldn't. – Dr. John Kutolowski⁷⁶

The rumors surrounding the fire at the Wari Katarra persisted and efforts to collect money for the repair of the center were often met with scoffing and cynicism. The fire had gutted the lower portion of the building. The estimated financial damage to the campus, including the Wari Katarra house, was \$20,695.00. The house, valued at approximately twenty thousand dollars, made up half of the total dollar amount of damages.⁷⁷

The reaction to the Hartwell takeover in the town of Brockport prompted local officials to set up a meeting with representatives of the College and the town at a local

⁷⁴ Pat Hosman, "Pat Hosman Replies..." The Brockport Stylus, May 14, 1970. In this letter to the editor Hosman also made the point that her policy of giving failing grades to students who did not attend the strike was no different than failing a student who did participate in it.

⁷⁵ Ireland and *Rochester Times Union*, "After Protests Most Students Return in Area." 11 May 1970, sec. A, p. 2.

⁷⁶ Dr. John Kutolowski, interview with author, November 16, 2005 via phone.

⁷⁷ See attached news scripts and letter pertaining to damages

landmark, the Morgan Manning House, on Friday May 8, 1970, the first day of the moratorium.⁷⁸ The meeting was attended by the town of Brockport's Attorney and former local politician, Paul Hanks, Eddie Hundt (the owner of a local donut shop), Matt Penna (a concerned resident), George Boyd (a political science professor at SUNY Brockport), and student Thomas O'Neil. During the meeting Boyd addressed the concerns of the town representatives, especially that the college was becoming uncontrollable. Boyd addressed concerns surrounding the sit-in by stating he supported the student strike as a "symbolic action" but not the takeover of Hartwell Hall.⁷⁹

Monday May 11, 1970 a teach-in was held on the campus of SUNY Brockport at 3:00 pm in the science lecture hall "because the acoustics in the ballroom left something to be desired."⁸⁰ The *Rochester Times Union* noted that all of the Rochester area colleges were in session except for SUNY Brockport.⁸¹

The reactions in the local paper, *The Brockport Republican Democrat*, toward the strike related events were entirely negative. For instance, the paper published a letter penned by student Mary Condit that criticized Walt Stewart for mentioning Black Panther co-founder Bobby Seale during one of his speeches on Main Street Brockport during the march on Tuesday May 5, 1970. Condit went on to write that the strike was "an organized failure."⁸²

Tuesday May 12, 1970, exactly one week after SUNY Brockport students had marched down Main Street Brockport, town officials organized a "March for America."

⁷⁸ Brockport Republican Democrat 05/14/1970 p. 1

⁷⁹ Ibid and Chibbaro, Lou, and Brian Knapp. "March for America." *The Brockport Stylus*, 14 May 1970,

⁸⁰ Brockport Stylus May 13, 1970

⁸¹ *Rochester Times Union*, "After Protests Most Students Return in Area." 11 May 1970, sec. A, p. 2.

⁸² Mary Condit, "SUCB Student Says College March and Strike Were Failures." *Brockport Republic Democrat*, 14 May 1970, p.2

The protest signs with peace slogans and black fists from a week before were gone and replaced with signs that had pro –Nixon administration slogans like “No Substitute for Victory.” The organizers set up a podium on the steps of the local post office on Main Street and presented pro-Nixon speakers including one Brockport student, Todd Palmerton.⁸³ The town’s march was reportedly attended by SUNY students who lined the street with peace signs and who disrupted the speakers.⁸⁴

At the head of the march were two young girls holding a sign that said, “America- Love it or Leave It.”⁸⁵ One of the girls, a seventh grader named Jackie Brady, was asked to write a letter that expressed her opinion about the events of the previous week and she wrote;

*You wanted me to give my opinion about the situation. Well here’s what I want to say. If the college kids don’t want to fight and if they want to bring the other men home, how are we to protect ourselves from our enemies? Answer that college kids! If you want Peace fight for it- Jackie Brady*⁸⁶

The Brockport Stylus’ final issue with John J. McGuire as Editor-in-Chief had a dateline of May 13, 1970 and the editorial page noted that cooler heads had prevailed and no major violence had erupted on campus.⁸⁷ The paper promised a full account of events and a complete investigation that would be published the following year. Although events

⁸³ Palmerton was interviewed along with John J. McGuire for a paper written by John Butz which is available in the SUNY Brockport archives. Palmerton indicated that he received flack for his Conservative political philosophy. At the time of the interview with Butz he still considered himself a political conservative. Although Palmerton’s name shows up in a database as living in Batavia NY his number is unlisted both in the phonebook and in the alumni directory.

⁸⁴ Brockport Stylus May 13, 1970

⁸⁵ Republic-Democrat, Brockport NY, “Youths Write Opinions on March; Peace,” May 21, 1970 sec. A

⁸⁶ Ibid. The word “peace” was capitalized in the original article.

⁸⁷ The Brockport Stylus, May 13, 1970 Editorial Page

related to the student strike were written about the following semester, the college newspaper never did fulfill its promise to give a complete accounting of the events.

Thursday May 14, 1970, 1182 miles south of Brockport at Jackson State University in Mississippi, two students, one a high school senior and the other a pre-law student, are dead after policemen spray a female dormitory with over 140 rounds of ammunition. *The New York Times* carries the story in the lower left corner of the front page with the headline noting that “Two Negro Students Are Killed in Clash with Police in Jackson.”

Friday May 15, 1970 officially marked the official end of what was arguably the most tumultuous semester in the history of SUNY Brockport. By all accounts there were few students who stuck around long enough to enjoy the last day. If they were on campus, they were probably getting ready to participate in graduation ceremonies. Across the country some colleges continue to protest the killing of college students at Kent and Jackson State but Brockport has had its fill of protesting and the tension that goes along with it. The death toll at Brockport remained zero.

Cooler heads did prevail at SUNY Brockport in the wake of Kent State shootings and another tragedy was avoided. While other campuses were stormed by police and bombed with tear gas, SUNY Brockport staged a relatively peaceful protest with mixed results for the administration and the protestors. SUNY Brockport student leaders negotiated terms of their surrender in the hope that those who did not take final exams as a “matter of conscience” were not penalized. The student leaders also addressed the issue of racism on campus and off at the risk of alienating protesters who saw the Hartwell sit-in as a war protest unrelated to issues regarding racial discrimination. In spite of that

perception, the issue of race did become a central part of the SUNY Brockport protest at Hartwell Hall.

The summer brought warmer weather to the campus along with investigators who interviewed students about the events of May 6-7 1970 with special attention being paid to the fire at Wari Katarra and other vandalism that had occurred on the campus that evening. In the office of academic affairs over one hundred complaints were filed within the first week with regard to grades. In accordance with the Faculty Senate Resolution agreed on at Hartwell on May 7 the SUNY Brockport Dean of Academic Affairs, Armand Burke, had the daunting task of resolving differences when students and faculty could not come to a “mutual agreement.”⁸⁸

I believe it was that summer I stayed around, I had one course to complete, because I was around when these investigations started, I was called into a room in Hartwell and I remember a reel to reel tape going and these guys in their suits so it wasn't like guys in police uniforms or anything like that...they wanted to know what I knew. - Michael Perez⁸⁹

By the fall of 1970 Walt Stewart and the new student government took office and had to deal with more practical issues like funding of sports programs and how to collect the student activity fee. It was business as usual on campus although there were still some unresolved issues surrounding the fire at Wari Katarra. The fall of 1970 did mark the beginning of the Department of African and African-American Studies led by new professor Dr. Felix Okoye.

⁸⁹ Perez

The tumult of 1970 on campus had strained already delicate relations with the Brockport residents. It was bad enough that the town's resources were being pushed to the limit and lack of affordable student housing was enabling opportunistic landlords to take advantage of the students. Proponents of Brockport's transformation from a sleepy little teachers college to a multi-propose college noted that the town would benefit from a drastic increase in tax revenue. Opponents to the expansion wished they had their sleepy little town back.

Dr. John Kutolowski announced that a fund established to collect funds from the faculty to restore the Wari Katarra house would officially close on October, 15, 1970. In addition to receiving funds from the faculty for the "Wari Katarra fund Kutolowski had received a pack of matches with a note advising the BSLF to 'finish the job'." ⁹⁰

The events of October 1970 would prove to be so bizarre that even a movie scriptwriter couldn't have written them. During October two faculty members would be arrested (one for phoning in a bomb threat), a nationally known black activist would visit the campus, and seventeen former and current members of the BSLF would be arrested. A former student would be implicated in a series of bombings in Rochester and subsequently FBI agents began to ask questions in and around the campus.

On October 2, 1970 eighteen sealed indictments were handed down in connection with the "night of terror" as the local Brockport newspaper coined the evening of May, 6, 1970. Because of racial tensions on campus and the events at Kent State the Monroe County District Attorney's office decided to negotiate a surrender of those indicted rather than enter the campus to serve the warrants and bring the students in. Only one of the

⁹⁰ Kutolowski

students was living on campus at the time and eight of those indicted were not attending the college any longer.⁹¹

It was no longer a question of whether anyone was going to be arrested; it was simply a question of who and when. In anticipation of the arrests the BSG had retained attorney Thomas Fink to negotiate the surrender of the indicted students. The initial reports indicated that seventeen students and one faculty member were named in the indictments. All but one of the indictments was related to the fire at Wari Katarra and the subsequent vandalism on other parts of the campus. The eighteen sealed indictments inspired the name given to the group: the “Brockport 18.” Just as the BSLF was Brockport’s answer to the Black Panther party, the “Brockport 18” was the schools version of the Chicago Seven.

On Thursday October 8, 1970 student leaders staged another rally in the hopes of stirring up support for the Brockport 18 and address some of the issues that had been raised since the Hartwell Hall takeover.⁹² The speakers included McGuire, Stewart, Gostin, Dave Copeland, and Jerry Paun of the NSM, BSLF President Eddie Gilliam, who had recently replaced Art Walker, and Pat Curtis, who was introduced as the leader of the newly formed the “Peace and Freedom Party,” which was created to support Bobby Seale, the leader of the Black Panther party, who was slated to go to trial along with the rest of the Chicago 7.⁹³

The theme of the meeting was unity on campus; Gostin went as far as to suggest the abolition of organizations such as the Brockport Student Government and the Black Student Liberation Front in favor of one larger group that would wield more power to

⁹¹ The Brockport Stylus, “Confrontation, the “18” and the Law,” 20 October 1970

⁹² Michelle Atkins, “210 People hear Student Leaders,” The Brockport Stylus, October 14, 1970

⁹³ Ibid.

change things on a local and national level.⁹⁴ The low attendance for the event, around two hundred students, must have been a disappointment for the organizers.

Also at the meeting, BSLF chairman Eddie Gilliam made the suggestion that a bail fund be organized for students who were named in the indictments once they were arrested; perhaps Gilliam knew that he would be one of those students.⁹⁵

Thursday October 8, 1970 also was the day that eyewitnesses reported seeing two people steal dynamite from a construction truck that was parked at a diner in the center of the Village of Brockport. Within a week a former SUNY Brockport student would be implicated in the theft and the dynamite was used to bomb a series of buildings in Rochester, NY on October 12, 1970, four days after the report of the theft. The bombings would go down in local history as the “Columbus Day Bombings,” a day that saw the bombing of the Federal Building in downtown Rochester along with the dynamiting of several Black churches in the city.⁹⁶

As if that incident wasn’t strange enough, the head of the Speech Department at SUNY Brockport, Dr. William Owen, was charged with phoning in a bomb threat to the campus security office. Owen was the first Black department chair in the history of SUNY Brockport and his residence was only a few houses up the street from the Wari Katarra house.⁹⁷

On the night of the Columbus Day bombings in Rochester at the SUNY Brockport campus a “bail rally” was held as negotiations for the surrender of those

⁹⁴ Ibid

⁹⁵ Brian Knapp, “Stylus Analysis, Rally in the Mall: Personalities,” *The Brockport Stylus*, October 14, 1970

⁹⁶ It was learned many years later that the bombing were the work of the local mafia in an attempt to draw attention away for court cases involving suspected mafia members.

⁹⁷ Ryan, Tom. "Prof, 49, Guilty of Bomb Call." *Rochester Democrat and Chronicle*, 13 October 1970, sec. A, p. 1. The incident was also reported in the *New York Times*. Owen changed his plea later and remained at Brockport on the faculty until 1977. Why he made the bomb threat is a matter of speculation.

indicted was negotiated between Assistant District Attorney Howard Relin and Attorney Thomas Fink. The SUNY Brockport administration was no longer involved in the negotiations by this point.⁹⁸ The negotiations were complicated by the fact that not all of the members of the Brockport 18 were still associated with the College and only one of them actually lived on campus.⁹⁹

The Columbus Day bombings and the theft of the dynamite from Brockport were not enough to keep news of arrest warrants being handed out to the Brockport 18 off of the front page of the Rochester newspapers.¹⁰⁰ The names of all those indicted were released on October 14, 1970 and ten of the warrants were served to students at Thomas Fink's downtown office.¹⁰¹ The ten students who were served took buses downtown along with approximately two hundred and fifty SUNY Brockport students, mostly White, who marched to Thomas Fink's downtown office as a sign of solidarity.¹⁰² Of the eighteen indicted, all were Black students, or former students with the exception of a former faculty member, Pat Hosman who was neither black nor a former student.

And honestly that (Hosman's charge of attempted coercion) was a stretch; if you think about it you do have freedom of expression not that you want people to direct people to do criminal activity or anything of that nature but that was a pretty big stretch.-

*Howard Relin*¹⁰³

⁹⁸ Howard Relin, Thomas Fink interview with author October 28, 2005 via phone.

⁹⁹ Rochester Times Union, "Sit-In and Fire Not Linked, Brockport Grand Jury Finds," October 14, 1970 sec. B

¹⁰⁰ Both the Rochester Times Union and the Rochester Democrat and Chronicle ran headlines and reported all of the names of those indicted on the front page along with follow up stories concerning the bombings and the bomb threat by Dr. Owens.

¹⁰¹ WROC TV archives, 10/13/1970 news script courtesy of reporter Dave McKinley

¹⁰² Thomas Fink

¹⁰³ Howard Relin, interview by the author, February 26, 2006, via phone

The delay of the arrests also allowed time for the BSLF and the BSG to raise money for the bail bonds. Twenty one professors, a group known as “The Concerned Faculty” put the bulk of the money, around three thousand dollars, in spite of criticism from the media and their colleagues. The group was also pledged support from activist and comedian Dick Gregory who performed at Brockport the evening that the indictments were unsealed. Gregory also promised to contact powerful friends like Jane Fonda to solicit help, though there is no evidence that he followed through.¹⁰⁴

The fact that those indicted were mostly Black made the arrests appear political and racist. Some students questioned why the white students who were involved in the sit-in at Hartwell Hall did not get arrested. The answer was that most of the white students were not involved in major vandalism on the night of the sit- in. Most of those indicted were directly involved in setting the fire at Wari Katarra. Daniel Pratcher and Rudolph Laster Jr. were charged with arson or riot and criminal mischief. Hosman’s charge was perplexing and most people thought that it was related to the fact that she had told her students to participate in the strike or receive a failing grade. In fact Hosman’s charge may have come out of the District Attorney’s investigation into events on the campus and rumor had it that Hosman had met with members of the BSLF and advised them to set fire to the house or engage in some other violent protest activities.¹⁰⁵

Three more of those indicted surrendered to sheriffs in the lobby of the Rundel Memorial Library in downtown Rochester on Thursday October 16. The rest turned

¹⁰⁴ When I asked Walt Stewart if that help ever came he laughed and said “no.”

¹⁰⁵ Howard Relin and Jerry Consentino both hinted at this during my interviews with them.

themselves in by October, 22, 1970 with the exception of one student who had been arrested on unrelated drug charges and was arraigned at that time.¹⁰⁶

In December of 1971 *The Stylus* reported that four of the Brockport 18 had their charges dismissed, four pled guilty to disorderly conduct including Pat Hosman whose charges were reduced from attempted coercion, five students pled guilty to misdemeanor charges related to the damage in the union rather than face jail time. Daniel Pratcher, and Rudy Laster were convicted of felony arson and their case was on appeal, one student's case was still pending, and one student, former BSLF leader and Vietnam Vet Art Walker, had jumped bail.¹⁰⁷ By the time Walker, who had been greeted with jeers at the student union on May 6 for refusing to join the Hartwell sit-in, reappeared years later, the statute of limitations had expired, the war in Vietnam was over and Blacks were still fighting against racial injustice with varying degrees of success.¹⁰⁸

The ship then sailed down the canal to that place where all ex- Stylus editors go. The Brockport Student Activist Rest Home, founded, funded and kept alive by the BSG.- John J. McGuire¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁶ One of the arresting officers was then Under sheriff Andrew Meloni who would go on to serve as Monroe County Sheriff from January 1, 1980 until May 31, 2001

¹⁰⁷ Brockport Stylus, "Riot Charges Dropped," December 9, 1971, p. 24 Pratcher and Laster both served sentences in state prison after an unsuccessful appeal. I was unable to find any information regarding the final member whose case was still pending.

¹⁰⁸ Howard Relin interview with author, March 5, 2006

¹⁰⁹ John J. McGuire, "Parting words typed just before deadline by the outgoing editor-in-chief." I omitted a few words from the quote for clarity. The original piece mentioned the canal twice, which is a reference to the present day Erie Canal which runs through the center of Brockport NY and it mentioned "ex-WBSU general managers" which was a reference to the college radio station which still operates at the time of this writing.

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Epilogue, May 6, 2006

Thirty six years ago today a group of students left the main union...

Today marks another anniversary of the Hartwell sit in and the day that I put this work to rest with the possible exception of a few minor edits. When I chose this topic I had no idea where it would lead me. I never imagined that it would take me from Brockport to Florida, Virginia or even Alaska! I also never imagined that these “bums,” as Richard Nixon “affectionately” referred to them, would turn out to be teachers, lawyers, published authors, law professors, politicians and even a few preachers.

I approached this work with very little by the way of information and an uncertainty where I first heard the “year without finals” story. (One of my classmates claims that one of our professors joked about it when she cancelled our final) I had originally intended to work exclusively with old issues of *The Stylus* because of my association with the paper as a columnist. The oral history element, which gave me the greatest joy, developed because of something I read in another student’s paper housed in the SUNY Brockport archives. That student, whose name escapes me, wrote that his deepest regret was the fact he didn’t have enough time to conduct more interviews. I saw that as a challenge from a scholar, one I readily accepted.

The first interview I conducted was with Dr. Ireland and that was done in person. It didn’t take me long to realize that interviewing someone in person had a lot of drawbacks; especially the time involved commuting and the lousy sound quality of the recording. One other interesting thing to note about the Ireland interview if you are a future researcher, that tapping noise in the background is a pencil hitting the desk which during the interview was nearly inaudible and on the recorder sounds as if Dr. Ireland is building a shed while we were speaking.

I decided that the rest of my interviews would be by phone. I owe John Sapienza from the Brockport Alumni Association (I will be a member a week from today!) a huge debt of gratitude for supplying me the available phone numbers from the classes of 1970-1973. The early going was pretty slow since many former students either didn’t take part in the protest because they were commuters or their only recollection was that “final exams were cancelled that year.”

There were many phone interviews I didn’t cite simply because they drifted too far away from the subject or didn’t offer a fresh perspective. One such interview was with a superintendent of a suburban school district who remembered that he had to share a two bedroom apartment with nine other students.

Once I was deep into the project I became obsessed with finding two people I though were central to the whole story, Patricia Hosman and Walt Stewart. I found Hosman by way of an interviewee who led me to the owner of a local bookstore who knew her married name. After I obtained her married name I did a little hit and miss in the phone book. In spite of all of my detective work Hosman only offered the name of former student who lives in New York City and has an unlisted phone number. I can honestly say that I was devastated when she refused to be interviewed.

Walt Stewart turned out to be a bigger challenge. I devoted way too much time obsessing over his whereabouts. The first month was wasted looking for “Walt Stewart” instead of looking for “Lewis Walter Stewart.” It turned out that he had run for office in Rochester under the latter name so there was some information available about him in the local press. Stewart had also been featured on a local talk show hosted by Bob Lonsberry. Lonsberry didn’t even bother to return either my emails or my phone calls, possibly due to the fact he had read the scathing article I wrote about him or maybe it was just the fact that it wasn’t worth his time. Nonetheless I wound up finding an editorial written by an Ivan Ramos and I called him up and he gave me a few solid leads, all of which panned out.

The first one turned out to be a postal worker who informed me that Stewarts brother was the pastor of a local church. I found the brother’s phone number and left a message. The next lead was that Stewart was a chaplain for a state prison so I inquired by email to the state. The final lead was that Stewart knew someone who worked at the office of state senator Joe Robach. When I called Robach’s Brighton office to leave a message the secretary recognized the name and stated that she had just talked to him within the last few days. She called me back within ten minutes and gave me Stewarts home and work number. The state emailed me a week later with Stewarts location. (Just like the State Government to be a week late!)

In spite of the aforementioned problems of interviewing Stewart in person I was not going to settle for a phone interview with one of the central figures in the Hartwell story. The interview went even better than I could have imagined and I consider it the pinnacle of my research. (He also avoided tapping a pencil on the table)

One thing that I found surprising about Stewart and the others who were involved in this protest, they downplayed their role in shaping this country. I firmly believe that many young men could have been drafted into service to fight foreign wars if there hadn’t been an active protest movement on college campuses; when politicians attempt to avoid “another Vietnam” it has more to do with avoiding protest and dissention than it does becoming entangled in an unsuccessful military campaign. That may be the most important part of the protestor’s legacy.

Special Thanks....

My classmates Bruce Pritchett, Liz Sharpe, Tara Wade, and Michelle Panapento. Mary Jo Gigliotti, college archivist, John Sapienza from the alumni association, all of my interviewees, all of my Brockport History Professors (thanks for making me work harder) Dave McKinley from News 8, for an amazing day and some invaluable research materials! “Dr’s” Kutolowski, Dr Kenneth O’Brien, and most of all Dr. Bruce Leslie a great teacher, mentor, scholar editor, inspiration and friend. (not to mention the fact he bought me lunch a couple of times)

**Transcript of Speech Given April 4, 2006 at A Symposium in Honor of the
Inauguration of SUNY Brockport President John R. Halstead.**

Hartwell Hall is noted for its scenic tower which is a part of the college's official logo. It is the oldest school building on the campus and the most identifiable. In spite of its rich history Hartwell was chosen as the place of occupation because it was the location of Brockport's administrative offices including the office of then SUNY President Albert Brown. In 1970 the building housed a swimming pool a gymnasium, a bowling alley and reportedly a few ghosts. The ghosts are still there today. On the evening of Wednesday May 6, 1970 The large granite steps leading into the building, that were laid by stonemasons in the late 1930's, were littered with student protesters. The façade of the building was covered with anti-war graffiti and students hung protest signs from the windows. In the building named after Ernest Hartwell who was head of the school from 1936 to 1944, there were students littering the hallways. Hartwell, who was known as an unusually strict disciplinarian certainly would have been shocked at the sight of student protesters, sprawled throughout a building named in his honor.

But this isn't a presentation about Ernest Hartwell or the history of campus buildings. This presentation is about a time in this schools history that was, at the risk of sounding cliché, unlike any other.

1970, according to Brockport folklore, was the year final exams were canceled, but were they? It was also the year that members of a radical group, the BSLF modeled After the Black Panthers burned down "their own" building. But was it really "their own" and how many of "them" really knew who set fire to the building known as the "Wari-Katarra cultural Center." And who were these crazy hippies that hatched a plot to take over a college and attempt to shut it down and whatever happened to them?

To most of you in this room the names Stewart, Gostin, Consentino, McGuire and Kutolowski may not ring a bell, but it is through the eyes of these former student leaders and a former professor that the story of the Hartwell takeover is told.

It is fitting that during a week that we celebrate the inauguration of a new era at Brockport that we also examine a critical time in this schools history. A time when Brockport's transformation from a "sleepy little teachers college" to a State University was completed. Complete with all of the problems associated with growth and complete with all the problems associated with change both on a national and local level.

Our narrative begins with the story of a Professor in the art department, Patricia Hosman. In 1969 Hosman was hired along with hundreds of other professors as part of President Albert Brown's growth plan. 25 year old Hosman was a cum laude graduate of Cornell University who was described as a "Janis Joplin type." One person I spoke to said that there was a lot talked about in Hosmans classes, and not much of it revolved around art. But let's be fair, Hosman was not much older than many of her students and she was not what most people would consider to be the atypical college professor and so it makes sense that she would ruffle the feathers of an older more conservative dept. chair and indeed she did.

Ambrose Corcoran, the chair of the art dept, and described by those who knew him as "conservative," gave Patricia Hosman her walking papers, effective January 1970. Since Hosman was only classified as a "temp" employee he was not obligated to give an official reason for her termination and she was not entitled to a hearing. Unfortunately for Corcoran there were some students who saw the Hosman firing as "racially motivated." Not racially motivated in the sense that Hosman was fired because of the color of her skin. It was the color of the skin of the students she associated with, at least that was how the five student employees in the art dept who resigned in protest over her termination saw it, and that was how an African- American transfer student from Orange County Community College in Newburgh New York saw it as well. That student, Lewis Walter Stewart Junior did not sit by idly as Hosman was fired for her association with the group that he named the Black Student Liberation Front.

On the Brockport campus Stewart was known as “Walt.” Stewart organized a group known as the Coalition of Concerned Students and Faculty, The CCSF staged a sit in at Hartwell Hall to protest Hosmans firing.

Ultimately it was a local Rochester based Attorney, Thomas Fink, who saved Hosmans job by negotiating to have her employment status changed from “temp” to “term.” Even though she did not have the protection afforded to tenured faculty, her new status meant that she couldn’t be “terminated” without a hearing.

Stewart wasn’t Hosmans only advocate, the editor the colleges’ newspaper, The Brockport Stylus, firmly sided with Hosman and the CCSF.

John J. McGuire, known as “J.J.,” was not simply the editor of a college newspaper. He was a former Marine who had seen combat in Vietnam. Under McGuire the Stylus provided a forum for all points of view.

It was McGuire’s Stylus that in the fall of 1969 published an extensive list of BSLF demands for president Brown to consider, including the addition of a black studies department and an effort to hire more black professors . The demands were complete with a deadline for Brown to address them. To his credit, President Brown didn’t take the demands lightly and he replied to them before the deadline expired.

In the spring of 1970 with a supportive student press behind him, Walt Stewart decided to announce his candidacy for Brockport Student Government President. Stewart’s running mate was Caucasian Larry Gostin.

Gostin and Stewart called their makeshift political party the “New Student Movement, ” The NSM won handily and Stewart and Gostin were officially President and Vice President elect of the Student Government. They promised to make student government relevant to the times.

And so it was 13, 123 days ago on April 29, 1970. The drinking age was 18 and the voting age was 21 and on this campus a loud siren indicated that the Spring- In had begun. Spring-In was the annual drunken festivity complete with free beer and live music.

Spring In 1970, like its predecessors, was designed as a way to let off a little steam before finals and as many of you know finals week is often filled with tension as is the week before. Spring- In was spontaneous. The exact date was unknown and students speculated when the sirens would go off. Once they did students gathered in the mall and

drank free beer to their hearts content. At the 1970 they were likely unaware of the fact that the following night President Richard Milhous Nixon would set into motion a series of events that in a matter of a week would transform the schools mall from the center of the party to the center of the protest?

Thursday April 30, 1970, there weren't a lot of choices as to what to watch on TV in the days before cable. When the President of the United States spoke to the nation he had a captive audience. It was the day after Spring-In that Nixon announced that the war had been escalated, we had "officially" begun" operations in Cambodia. A sleeping anti-war movement on college campuses stirred at Nixon's announcement, four days later that movement would be wide awake.

Monday May 4, 1970, around noon, 283 miles west of here at Kent State University in Ohio four students died at the hands of National Guardsman during a protest against Nixon's escalation of the war in Vietnam.

¹¹⁰*It was J.J McGuire who decided that someone from the student body needed to go to the regularly scheduled Senate Faculty Meeting that evening and request a moratorium or at least some kind of official acknowledgement of the events at Kent State. He sent Freshman Rhonda Butterfield. When Butterfield arrived at the meeting she felt intimidated and overly emotional. As she waited to speak all she could think about was the fact that she, a female college student could have been shot and killed.*

When Butterfield finally spoke to the Faculty Senate and requested the moratorium she had to choke back tears. The request for a one day moratorium was not without precedent, the school had observed a moratorium on October 15, 1969 and instead of writing a new resolution Dr. John Kutolowski simply substituted Vietnam and October 15, 1969 with Cambodia and May 8, 1970. The motion passed 18-0-2 in spite of some heated exchanges between two faculty senate members. The other issue that needed to be addressed was how to handle the issue of students who in good conscience would not take final exams as a means of protest. The issue was argued but no resolution was offered or passed with regard to grades of students strikers.

On Tuesday May, 5, 1970 students began to gather on the mall where just six days earlier they had been drinking beer and having a good time. The crowd grew slowly

but eventually an impromptu march was organized by David Comes who was better known on campus as "The Spaceman."¹¹¹ At the front of the procession marchers carried a handmade sign simply stating "Give Peace a Chance" a song by former Beatle John Lennon. The march went as far as the local high school where, according to the Brockport Post, marchers attempted to get local high school students to join them.¹¹² Later that night students hung out on the mall and burned effigies of Nixon and sang protest songs.

The next morning SUNY President Brown issued a memo to all of the dept. chairs commending them for not letting the protest get out of hand.

In spite of Brown's memo, Student leaders and some faculty members still were not happy that Brockport had not shut down to observe a lengthy moratorium as other schools across the nation had agreed to do. The reaction was the formation of another committee made up of the newly elected Brockport Student Government; the group that had formed in reaction to the termination of a staff member, Pat Hosman, which then evolved into the NSM, was now simply called the "Steering Committee." Their leader was Walt Stewart. The other members included John J. McGuire, Larry Gostin, and Jerry Cosentino the Vice Treasurer of the B.S.G.

The Steering Committee organized a rally, held in the student union on Wednesday May 6, 1970 at approximately 9 p.m. Once the rally had finished, a group of students ranging from 350 to 500, marched to the steps of Hartwell Hall to stage the sit in. Initially the BSLF had decided not to join the Hartwell protest and instead retreated to the Wari-Katarra Cultural Center.

May 6, 1970 at approximately ten p.m a short time after members of the BSLF left the main rally in the student union and arrived at the Wari Katarra Cultural Center on 268 Holley Street smoke appeared from inside the house. A fire had been set in four places and Brockport firemen rushed to the scene and put it out in less than an hour. There was little doubt at the time that it was arson mainly because of the timing of the fire. The main question was who set the fire and the fear was that white racists had done it.

The smoke from the fire and the sound of fire alarms only added to the confusion of the evening. There were rumors concerning fires in other areas of the campus and even an attempted firebombing of an electrical power facility that was located up the road from Wari Katarra.

The BSLF members who arrived at the scene of the fire became enraged and were reportedly shouting at fire fighters as they fought the blaze. Shortly before the fire started students were reportedly seen leaving the area with briefcases.

The fire at Wari Katarra may have drawn some attention away from the group that went to Hartwell Hall to stage their sit in but a student with a bullhorn begged students to join in the peaceful protest.

As the fire burned at Wari Katarra, Approximately thirty members of the BSLF ran around the campus yelling “They’re burning our building down.” At Harmon Hall the Resident Director advised all students to stay in the building and not allow any entry. This was done in response to the discovery of a kerosene can and kerosene soaked clothes in the room of one of the members of the BSLF. The discovery was reported to the authorities, there was also a rumor circulating around campus that the Wari Katarra house had been stripped of valuable items before the fire.

later that evening that approximately thirty BSLF members attempted to enter Harmon Hall in a possible attempt to destroy evidence related to the fire. When the BSLF arrived at the door to Harmon Hall they were met by a large contingent of white students who had gathered in the hallway and on the steps, many of whom were holding hockey sticks baseball bats and other “weapons.”

The female members of the BSLF were pushed into the white students and male BSLF members began shouting “They are hurting our women.” In short order the BSLF males began a scuffle with the white students including Sidney Wesseldine .

Wesseldine sustained a laceration in his side from a knife and was taken to a nearby hospital where he was treated with stitches and released. Wesseldine was the only casualty of the evening. The next day Wesseldine, then a freshman, left Brockport and never returned, his bad luck would continue when he drew twenty one in the next draft

lottery. Fortunately Wesseldine survived his stint in the military as he was never deployed to Vietnam.

Sometime after 2 a.m on May 7 1970 some members of the BSLF arrived at Hartwell Hall yelling and screaming the group frightened some of the white students who were sitting peaceably in the corridors. The BSLF members had come to Hartwell with food that had been stolen from the main student union. Approximately ten of the BSLF members went to the gym located in the basement of Hartwell Hall and attempted to break into a supply closet in order to get a basketball. Professor John Kutolowski advised the students that he had a basketball in his car and that there was no need to break into the closet. Unfortunately when Kutolowski arrived at his car he realized that the ball was not fully inflated and so he went to his apartment to get a needle to pump it up with.

Upon his return to the occupied building Kutolowski presented the students with the basketball and the students “put on quite a show” even managing to draw some of the students out of the halls and into the gym to watch.

In another section of the building students were skinny dipping in the pool , some were bowling other students were beginning to sprawl out on blankets and attempting to get some sleep and still other students on the second floor were smoking marijuana. One other student who was tripping on LSD climbed up the main bell tower. The main strike had resulted in no violence and only minor vandalism at Hartwell(Some students had broken into President Albert Brown’s office but were convinced by a faculty member not to rifle through files or touch personal belongings), the students seemed to be getting their message across peacefully and fears of mass violence like the type that had occurred at Kent State University before the strike and later at Jackson State College in Mississippi.

Later in the evening a messenger from the BSLF went to Hartwell Hall to seek out members of the Steering Committee and McGuire and Consentino were chosen to meet with Art Walker and Lee Spain.

Walker asked the Steering Committee if the BSLF could join the general strike because the group feared that white students were plotting to retaliate against the BSLF and the group felt they would be safer if they joined the general strike. McGuire and

Consentino agreed to allow the BSLF to join the general strike at Hartwell and list the groups demands along with the steering committees on the condition that the group agreed that there would be no rabble rousing or violence. The BSLF agreed to join the general strike and left the main Union for Hartwell around 6:00 am on May 7, 1970.

Dr John Kutolowski's phone rang at 8:30 am on the morning of Thursday May 7, 1970. On the other end of the line was Faculty Senate President C.Stuart Dube's secretary informing Senator Kutolowski that an emergency Faculty Senate Meeting was going to commence at 9:30 am to which he replied, "I'll be there." The previous night had been an unusual time on the Brockport Campus and Mother Nature acknowledged the uniqueness of the day by providing snowfall in late Spring, albeit a modest amount, the night before.

In order to enter the occupied Hartwell Hall non strikers were given special clearance. The meeting commenced at approximately 9:30 am in Dr. Browns office in Hartwell Hall. The attendees included Brown, Faculty Senators, Jack Lazarus, the Monroe County District Attorney, an unnamed Monroe County Sheriff, The Steering Committee, Lee Spain of the BSLF, Thomas Fink , members of the local media including television photographers and Michael Soluri who was shooting photographs for the Stylus.

The students demands were presented for the most part by Larry Gostin. The first issue at hand dealt with grading, the second dealt with moratorium days and teach ins and the last dealt with social and racial injustice. Although Brown jostled a bit with Gostin during his presentation he became downright defensive during Lee Spain's listing of BSLF demands. The early hours of the meeting were filled with emotion and tension and verbal sparring amongst youth and the Faculty Senate, a state of affairs that seemed to confirm that there was a "communication gap," between college students and authority figures.

At one point tempers became so flared that Brown almost mockingly called for a ten minute "moratorium." It was during that break that Fink advised the student leaders that they were in violation of the Henderson Act and could be subject to arrest. The prospect of arrest did not seem to make the students waiver.

When the session reconvened J.J McGuire appealed to Brown to consider a reasonable settlement and McGuire reminded Brown that they were both Marines who had seen combat. Although it is difficult to say if McGuire hit a cord with Brown, the impasse over whether exams scheduled for Friday May 8, 1970 and Monday May 11, 1970 would be completely cancelled because of a moratorium was solved by moving all of the exams scheduled those two days to Tuesday May 12 1970. The proposal also dealt with missed work and students who did not take final exams because of their conscience. Instructors were given the leeway to give “striking” students their mid term grade or a simple pass or fail grade even if the course was required for the students major; the wording of the final resolution effectively made final exams optional for all students, even if they did not participate in the strike. The resolution also allowed professors to assign a grade of “I” even though the Steering Committee opposed that aspect of the resolution the “I” grade was only assigned if student and instructor reached a “mutual agreement.” Disagreements with regard to grading were to be dealt with by the office of the academic dean.

The other aspects of the settlement by comparison had far less impact on the student body. Brown promised to hold a “series of meetings” with “designated representatives of the BSLF,” in order to make recommendations with regard to the BSLF demands that were published in the Stylus on October, 19, 1969. The main demand of the group was to add an African-American studies program and that was scheduled to begin in the fall of 1970. Nonetheless for all of their efforts and posturing the BSLF only managed to get lip service from Brown. The resolution made no mention of an investigation into the cause of the fire at Wari Katarra.

On October 2, 1970 eighteen sealed indictments were handed down in connection with the “night of terror” as the local Brockport newspaper coined the evening of May, 6, 1970. Because of racial tensions on campus and the events at Kent State the Monroe County District Attorney’s office decided to negotiate a surrender of those indicted rather than enter the campus to serve the warrants and bring the students in. Only one of the students was living on campus at the time and eight of those indicted were not attending the college any longer.

The names of all those indicted were released on October 14, 1970 and ten of the warrants were served to students at Thomas Finks downtown office.¹¹³ The ten students who were served took buses downtown along with approximately two hundred and fifty SUNY Brockport students, mostly white, from Brockport and marched to Thomas Fink's downtown office as a sign of solidarity.¹¹⁴ Of the eighteen indicted all of them were black students, or former students with the exception of a former faculty member, Pat Hosman. A bail fund was organized and 21 of the colleges professors contributed to it.

Hosman's charge of attempted coercion was the only charge not related specifically to the damage done on the campus the evening of the Hartwell Sit- In.

*Eventually two members of the BSLF were convicted of felony arson and served time in state prison. Most of the other charges were reduced or dismissed. By the end of 1971 the incident had faded from the pages of the local press and received very little attention in *The Stylus*.*