

## Chapter 5

**CORNELL'S FIRST CRISIS: THE CROSS-BURNING AND THE GUNS**

Yonder stands your orphan with his gun,  
Crying like a fire in the sun.  
Look out now, the Saints are coming through,  
And it's all over now, baby blue.

— Bob Dylan, “It’s All Over Now, Baby Blue”

On Saturday morning, April 19, 1969, my father roused himself from bed, and prepared to walk across the suspension bridge over Fall Creek gorge to get his hair cut at Willard Straight Hall, Cornell’s student union. He always enjoyed his visits to the barbershop, perhaps because they linked him with a stable and comforting past. He could smell the same piney aromas and hear the same murmuring of voices he had in that barbershop as a new professor 25 years before and a student 10 years before that, and as his father had when he was adopting the prevailing demeanor of an even earlier generation of Cornellians.

For all my childhood, my father’s barber had been Clyde, a friendly man from a nearby country town who was respectful but self-assured with his better-schooled clientele. My father and Clyde often discussed their children as a common denominator in their very different lives. Clyde usually had good news about his devoted daughter, who was living the American dream by going to college on his earnings. My brothers and I, in contrast, were angry and alienated from family and society, carelessly casting away our opportunities. We must have looked to Clyde, as we did to my father, like some incomprehensible American nightmare.

David, nearly 20, was becoming disaffected with Yale, where the little genius (with the highest SAT math score possible) had been majoring in math and minoring in radical protests with the Students for a Democratic Society. His picture had recently appeared in the Yale magazine, standing on a desk during an occupation, and he was talking about dropping out and cutting sugar-cane in Cuba as part of the *Venceremos* (“we will conquer”)

brigade. I, the middle son at 17, was completing my senior year at prep school only by the grace of my father's friendship with the headmaster, and my fluctuating academic record and quasi-political behavior had led to rejection by all my colleges.

I didn't help my mother as she contacted second-tier colleges and the University of Chicago, where I was on the waiting list, preferring to fantasize about a life on the road traveling to demonstrations on my dream motorcycle, the Triumph 500, perhaps ending up at Fresno State, which appealed to me solely because it was in California. Winty, the youngest at 14, was, as was often the case in important matters like girlfriends and rock n' roll bands, first emulating and then outdoing his older brothers. He was the most radical of all, quoting Ghandi and Mao, publishing the revolutionary Little Red Rag, alternately displaying a shaved head and flowing locks, and preparing for the day he would utter the most profound political judgment of his life through a bullhorn while exhorting students to leave their classes: "Ithaca High is a mini-state of fascism!"

Our politics and wanton attitude towards achievement probably didn't pain our parents as much as our surly behavior towards them and our palpable contempt for the home they had created. We contrasted the physical poverty of black America with what we thought (to their amusement) was the sumptuousness of our parents' house. We contrasted the spiritual poverty of white America with what we thought (to their irritation, given their donations to numerous social causes) was the complacency of our parents' lives. We contrasted the violence being done by America in Vietnam with the peacefulness of our house on a spring day, when the breeze would glide softly through the screen doors, and the pine trees would filter the intermittent noise of the street down to a murmur. We saw only hypocrisy in our parents' attempt to make their life sound, as if in their house and values they had erected a monument to the state of the world rather than a refuge from it. Still children, we saw our omnipotent parents as responsible for the world rather than just part of it.

Hair, as part of the body, makes even more personal a statement to the world than the clothes we wear. This makes the barbershop where my father was heading that morning a good vantage point from which to observe the social changes in Cornell during his lifetime. When he was a student, his peers were likely to encounter their professors there, and would be eager to talk

with the great men. By 1969, the campus had grown so much that students wouldn't recognize most of the professors in the barbershop, and awe for their elders had changed to mild contempt and even anger, so they wouldn't want to talk with them anyway.

A good share of students wouldn't go to the barbershop in the first place. The handful of women who had been "co-eds" in the 1930s had grown steadily to half the campus, and of course they didn't use a barbershop. The number of blacks on campus had increased from a few dozen to a few hundred during the 1960s, and the barbershop was slow to realize that blacks' hair required different techniques and tools; black men trekked downtown to get their trims and gels in the Negro Southside, or simply waited until vacation and home. And hirsute white men, whether counterculturalists or political leftists, needed no haircuts.

There weren't all that many of the former, for whom long hair was a "freak flag" of new consciousness. This was before campus strikes after the invasion of Cambodia in 1970 made spring shutdowns and the "pass-fail" grading system the norm, so you could still flunk out if you sat in a geodesic dome smoking dope all day and forgot to go to class. There were many more of the latter, though, for whom long hair was a banner of political defiance, like a Viet Cong button. They were not a majority on campus, but they had reached a critical mass, so that wearing long hair was almost an act of conformity in Cornell's college of Arts and Sciences, although not in Engineering, Hotel, or Agriculture.

The barbershop reflected the changes in our family as well. As boys, we loved to go with my father to Clyde's; as angry teenagers, we undertook those visits as acts of submission, after lengthy delay and resistance. To my father, Clyde's place was Nôtre Dame, a sanctuary; to us, it was the Tower of London, where physical mutilation was to render us compliant. David penned a lengthy treatise of opposition to haircuts, including the ominous declaration that if forced to get one, he would do things he didn't dare to commit to paper. All in all, it was fitting that my father was going to the Straight that morning to fulfill a tradition that was conservative, conformist, and exclusive, because that building was to serve as the focal point of a revolt in which the radical, the different, and the excluded finally flexed their muscles against the complacent campus.

There was to be no haircut that day for anyone, no calm half-hour of relief from the demands of life, because in the early morning hours, the Straight had been seized by 100 black students, members of the Afro-American Society (AAS), reacting to a cross-burning at a black women's cooperative. Carrying tire-irons and baseball bats, they evicted the weekend guests. The Crisis, as it is still called at Cornell more than 20 years later, had begun. When the AAS, watched by hesitant campus police, brought in guns that evening to deter attacks by fraternity boys and police from nearby jurisdictions, the nature of the takeover changed. It was no longer one of the Vietnam era's thousands of dramas of reason and revolt, of power and challenge, but one of one, the one place where students and not the authorities took up the instruments of death.

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There was little reason to suspect that it would be a Saturday unlike any other in Ithaca's history, if the Ithaca Journal that morning was any indicator. The Journal carried news about takeovers and street protests at other campuses, from conservative, quiet Colgate to wild and woolly Berkeley, but as President Jim Perkins noted in an interview earlier in the year, Cornell's administration prided itself on working closely with disaffected students. The current controversies at Cornell — President Nixon's refusal to ratify as head of the National Science Foundation a Cornell professor who opposed the Anti-Ballistic Missile program, and the denial of tenure to a professor who was active in liberal causes — seemed to be fading, with the faculty grudgingly accepting their inability to influence Nixon and students angrily accepting their inability to influence the university.

There was even hopeful news about the future of campus protests in general, in a long article called "New Voice on Campus" by a writer for the Chicago Tribune, the "American Newspaper for Americans" that always displayed on its front page a "flag of the day" from some business or home. Exulting that "the silent majority isn't being silent anymore," he cheered on the Committee Against Student Terrorism at Columbia and the Committee to Defend Individual Rights at Wisconsin, which were offshoots of the Young Americans for Freedom, a nationwide group funded by conservative commentator William F. Buckley. "When things looked bad" during student strikes, they had demanded that

classes be offered, militants be expelled and prosecuted, and police be called "without hesitation."

The rest of the Journal reinforced the idea that life would go on without too much turmoil in Ithaca. The top-selling record that week was "Aquarius," a soft plea from the play "Hair" to "let the sunshine in your heart," sung by a brightly smiling black group with processed hair, the Fifth Dimension, a perfect antidote for stone-faced students whose Afros called out a challenge. The Dryden Drive-In was showing a double feature from the most successful series of anti-Communist, pro-American propaganda films until "Rambo" came along, the James Bond thrillers "From Russia with Love" and "Thunderball." The Youth Council's year would include a trash clean-up, a kite-flying contest, and a teen night-club, according to leader Mary Ann Culligan, who like her parents was already a pillar of the community. (Her mother was the most reactionary vote on the school board in the 1970s, and her father topped off decades on the county board by casting the deciding vote against a gay rights bill in 1991.) The closest thing to politics in her plans was a "conference on involvement." And the only conflicts that local college students were taking part in that weekend were in polo, tennis, crew, track, and baseball.

Perhaps there was a premonition of trouble, though, because the Journal carried a photo feature on the Tompkins County jail, to show potential law-breakers the cold courtesy that awaited them there. The intended audience for the warning was probably the teenagers who were sure to pack the Strand theater that night for Monster Movie Madness, an annual event in which "Hideous Apparitions Roam the House," meaning that the manager and the popcorn vender ran up and down the aisles in mummy suits while bouncers tried to identify the miscreants who were hurling eggs at them and the screen. The threat was clearly lost on the AAS.

Despite this apparent local calm, Cornell might have guessed that its number would have to come up. During that academic year, serious disruptions had swept through the nation's campuses, inspiring emulation. In some of the most likely and unlikely campuses white students had occupied buildings to demand an end to support for the Vietnam War through the Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) and research for the Defense Department. In even more cases black and Hispanic students, whose numbers had increased rapidly as embarrassed universi-

ties responded to the glare of the civil rights movement, had occupied buildings to demand separate programs for studying, living, and socializing.

Just during the previous week, the Journal had reported students occupying offices at Colgate over black studies, at Harvard over ROTC, and at Stanford over a laboratory performing military research. Columbia students were holding a building to demand that any graduate of a New York City public high school be admitted to Columbia. They had armed themselves with broken chair legs as clubs to defend themselves from the violent police eviction that, given their experience a year earlier, they fully expected. Tear gas had been used to break up an illegal street demonstration at Berkeley; it being Berkeley, there was apparently no need to cite the cause of this protest.

Although "black" issues were at the core of many of the protests, the primary engine behind all this turmoil, black, brown, or white, the one thing that made it all conceivable, was the Vietnam War. Richard Nixon, far from ending the war as he had promised in his presidential campaign the previous fall, was cranking it up again in an effort to break the enemy's will. My father, reflecting the consensus of Americans who might once have supported the war, recorded this weary complaint in his diary later that year: "Oh, Dick Nixon, get with it on VN!!" The most recent weekly figure for Americans killed in action was the highest since Nixon's inauguration three months before: 266 young men dead in a war that was supposed to be ending. For young people to be reasonable and respectful of the rules as the rule-makers perpetrated such madness was laughable.

Cornell had seen a few significant protests by the AAS that academic year, but they were brief and passed quickly from the campus's consciousness, leaving whites with a sour, somewhat fearful taste, which was exactly their purpose. In December members of the AAS roamed the campus, performing obnoxious guerrilla theater to demand a separate college. They marched through the administration building brandishing toy guns, knocking over soda machines and waste baskets, and in a poignant juxtaposition of the new rage with the old gentility, dumped on the floor the refreshments President Perkins had so thoughtfully told his secretary to prepare for them. They walked onto the basketball court during a varsity game, pounded on cars and forced drivers to detour around the campus, harassed white students with mock

attacks, and carried piles of library books to the front desk and left them there, intoning, "These books have no relevance to me as a black person." Finally, they stormed into the Straight cafeteria and danced on the tables to African music, knocking white students' trays to the ground.

The five students who were identified as participants were called before the student-faculty judicial board, just as whites disrupting ROTC parades, advocating draft-card burning, and blocking Marine recruiters had been in previous years. Those anti-war students had taken part in their judicial proceedings with gusto and accepted their penalties — probation, warning, or reprimand — with pride. In contrast, the black students refused to attend their hearings, arguing that an all-white university board couldn't judge black students for a political protest to which the university itself was a party. The AAS and the faculty committee that oversaw the judicial board engaged in desultory negotiations and recriminations, with the AAS refusing to discuss changes in the system until charges were dropped against the five black students who had been identified, and the committee refusing to drop the charges until the AAS sat down to discuss its proposals. The AAS insisted that blacks be negotiated with as a group, not tried as individuals in the colonial method of divide and conquer. The faculty committee balked at any relaxation of individual responsibility for one's actions.

Snubbed by the AAS, the faculty committee reviewed the judicial procedures by itself, and decided not to change them for political acts. The committee was spurred to hang tough by the administration's failure to press charges in two other black protests: in the spring of 1968, 60 students occupied the economics department to demand the firing of a visiting professor for his remarks that blamed poverty on a "perverted" ghetto culture; and a few months after the guerrilla theater in the spring of 1969, Perkins was jostled and then denied the microphone at an AAS meeting when he announced that the Board of Trustees was not going to divest its stock in companies operating in South Africa. On Thursday, April 17, the nine-member judicial board tried the five students *in absentia*, and at 2 a.m. the next morning, it struggled to its conclusion, placing a reprimand in the official records of three of them. The student newspaper, the Cornell Daily Sun, acknowledged both sides' positions, printing commentaries by the sole dissenter on the board, who argued that the existing

system was hampering the university's ability to move forward, and by a student who said that bending the rules would severely damage the university. The Sun's editorial that day favored bending.

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With the judicial board's ruling, Cornell was on a collision course with most of its black students. As their numbers had increased rapidly from 20 in 1963 to 250 five years later, they had finally been able to band together in a group large enough to support each other. Being black was of central, personal importance to them in a way that the whites who ran and largely populated the university could not grasp. The university nobly said that it wanted to treat the black students as color-less beings and provide what Martin Luther King Jr. had asked for in his famous dream, a place where they could be judged on the content of their character, not the color of their skin. Given the racism of American society, of course, this was impossible. Even in the best of times it would have taken intense workshops in the dorm, the classroom, the fraternities and sororities, and the faculty lounges to soften the self-fulfilling perceptions each group held of the other and the woundings that resulted. But no serious efforts were made to educate whites about racism, and because of the war and the seething black nationalism in America's cities, it was the worst of times.

White students were guilty at heart, knowing that their parents, neighbors, and society were racist, but they were also resentful toward the whining blacks who wanted to visit all the sins of the parents on the children. They were tired of sitting under a microscope of black analysis and attack of their every word and look, disgusted with blacks being pleasantly reserved as individuals, choosing not to talk about race, and then in a group talking about nothing but race, backing up their yelling with violence or threats and refusing to listen to whites' response. And if whites were resentful, blacks were moreso, believing that whites had no right to talk about "the rules" and the "community of reason." There was nothing reasonable about what white America had done and was doing to black America, and the only progress that blacks had ever seen had come when the southern civil rights movement broke every rule, legal and social, in the book.

The white faculty were proud of themselves for trying to integrate, and confused that black students didn't seem to like



being integrated. Those children at Little Rock had been so grateful! James Meredith had fought his way onto campus at Old Miss, and had wanted to live in an integrated dormitory like the other students, only to be denied that right! Why weren't these black students grateful, and why did they want separation on campus? I remember from my freshman year at the University of Chicago the wistful mixture of anger and sympathy in the voice of my math professor when he asked the black students who sprawled together over the back rows of the classroom: "Why do you do this? You can't hear as well back there. If you're not in your regular seats I won't even be able to learn your names. Why do you have to be together?" As a Jew who fled Hitler's Europe, he knew something about struggling against discrimination and seemingly hopeless odds, and he thought this behavior was self-destructive. The faculty at Cornell would have agreed with his assessment.

The laws of physics say that every action has an equal and opposite reaction, but the laws of psychology and sociology say that the reaction doesn't have to be an immediate one. In the late 1960s, in the safety of college campuses, black Americans were able to, and so had to, vent the anger that they, their parents, and the many generations enslaved or endangered that preceded them had, on pain of death, been barred from showing. Men in particular provided rage to this revolt, spurred by the memory of being unable for centuries to provide even a modicum of protection for the women and children in their families. Whether or not men ought to feel special responsibility for protecting "their" families is a question I will gladly leave to scientists of both sexes. When my family is threatened, my little chest puffs up like a buck's whose brood has just stumbled upon a bear, and I lash out accordingly. Whether I'm hot-wired to feel this way or I was taught to is irrelevant to me and the buck. We just do. More than anything else, Cornell's Crisis was a drama of liberation in which black men dared to acknowledge that feeling.

On a trip to Poland in 1989 I found a remarkable share of the men I met in the intelligentsia to be hamstrung by blandness and indecision. This made a sharp contrast between them and the remarkable share of the women who exhibited the legendary *polot*, or flair, which has been ascribed to them for centuries. For 200 years of foreign rule, Polish men had to pull in their horns or risk injury to themselves and their families, and so women, who

were less threatening to the occupiers, had to fend more than usual for the family, financially and socially. Multiply the men's feelings of shame at their symbolic castration a hundred-fold and one might begin to get a feel for the undeserved frustrations and conflicting pressures of the black men who were at Cornell in 1969. Success in school and courtesy in public was starting to be perceived as kowtowing to white power rather than doing your community proud.

I remember the way the other sixth-grade boys taunted my daughter's friend Aaron as "faggot, oreo, Tom" for being one of the best students at her all-black, low-income school in Washington, DC, in the early 1980s. While unequal opportunity and continuing disinterest and racism on the part of white society are still barriers, a lot of the handicap of being black and male comes from this crippling vestige of slavery, this understandable but lamentable result of a people's need to venerate resisters and denigrate collaborators. Most of the black students at Cornell were from the middle class, and not the ghetto of tough neighborhoods and fractured families. In their racially-oppressed but economically-advancing families, finishing high school was a given and going to college a strong possibility, and this added yet another bit of confusion about being oppressed yet fluent in the language and styles of the oppressor.

From guilt to anger, from frustration to shame, from pride to betrayal, the black students felt things that white students and faculty couldn't even begin to understand. Every class, every step, every look, every word brought them the chance not, as the white world expected, to make the most of this wonderful opportunity, but rather to stand up and make a statement on behalf of those left behind. Arthur Mizener recalled to me with great clarity 20 years after the Crisis how black men in his English classes had doubted that any white person writing about a wealthy white society had anything to say to them. They finally found a resonance in the passage in *The Great Gatsby* where the parvenu tosses a score of beautiful shirts onto his bed, hoping to impress Daisy with his wealth but finding that she cries instead at their beauty. And Gatsby's pathos at his exclusion was just the tip of the black students' iceberg.

After the judicial committee voted to reprimand the three black students, eleven false fire alarms were registered in Cornell's dorms. Then, at three a.m., the Ithaca police received a report of a

rock thrown through a window and a burning cross on the porch of a student cooperative where black women lived. A detective who was up on campus checking out the false alarms kicked the four by two foot cross off the porch and stamped out the burning cloth that was wrapped around the slats. The perpetrators were never found. Given the incidents of proven harassment of the cooperative in the past, and of black living units by white students over the next few years, it is reasonable to assume that whites did it, and that is precisely what black students assumed. Many whites, though, thought the timing just too fishy, and suspected that the cross-burning was a plot by a small group of black students to justify an uprising. In retrospect, that appears highly unlikely, because such an act would not only have a devastating psychological impact on the women, but would also have placed them in real danger.

After all, even when the most perfidious of political groups, the Nazis, burned the Reichstag in 1933, they made sure there were no Nazis inside. Although rumors persist about a plot, perhaps involving radical white students who had access to construction materials in the College of Architecture, there has never been a hint of proof. If there was a nefarious plot, it would seem almost impossible for the secret to survive all these years in which people often renounce previous decisions, unless the number of conspirators was tiny. If that was the case, then almost all black students would have been unaware of the fraud, so their reactions have to be understood as if the cross had been placed there by racist whites, even if it wasn't.

Black women were under the most brutal, the most unacceptable attack imaginable, and so what happened next was almost unavoidable. Dramatic action had to be taken, as a man in the AAS later explained to a crowd of white students trying to understand the events that were swirling around them, to challenge "a historic concept that black people are supposed to be impotent, that black men are not supposed to take care of black women." An additional factor driving the urgency of defending black women may have been the reputation some of the leading black activists had as ladies' men — white ladies' men.

Some people complained that the campus police didn't provide protection to the cooperative quickly enough after the cross-burning, that President Perkins allegedly had called it a "prank," and that the whites on campus didn't evince enough

concern the next day at the deed, but it is hard to imagine any response from the rest of the campus that could have obviated the need for action by black students. Only an immediate show of force the next day by the entire Cornell community, perhaps a march through the town and a vigil at the cooperative to show how seriously the campus took the threat and how firmly it intended to stand by black students, matched with a visible deployment of the State Police to protect the house and the FBI to help the Ithaca police find the perpetrator, might have taken the steam out of the blacks' anger. Even this unlikely response, though, might only have served to increase their need to stand up and show that they could protect themselves.

Still, if thousands of whites had stood guard for one or two sleepless nights outside the cooperative, they probably could have avoided the many more sleepless nights to come. What was it that caused whites on campus not to rush to stand by the blacks? To say racism would be accurate, but too simple to mean much. There must have been a combination of suspicion of being manipulated by a phony incident, shock, disgust, inertia, a feeling that your support wasn't going to be welcome and would look condescending, and a feeling that blacks would let the campus know what needed to be done. There must also have been a belief among whites — racial ignorance as much as racism — that this just wasn't so serious. The cross-burning was noted in the afternoon Ithaca Journal on the inside pages as an item from the police blotter, along with the eleven false alarms. The incident occurred too late to make the Friday morning edition of the Cornell Daily Sun, its last edition of the week, but why didn't the Sun run a special edition, as it did on Sunday to report on the takeover?

Similarly, why did the nation's newspapers put a picture of armed students emerging from the Straight on their front pages, and not the picture of the charred cross on the lawn at the cooperative? Why did enraged alumni take Cornell to task for not sending the police in to evict the protesters rather than for not sending the police over in force to the cooperative immediately to demonstrate support and resolve? Why did some faculty consider resigning over the university's eventual settlement with the AAS rather than over the failure of the university to rally to the black students after the cross-burning? Why did some faculty threaten to stop teaching until all guns were off campus rather than until the FBI was called in and the police made an arrest for

the cross-burning? Which was the greater breach of law and order, the greater threat to society, the cross-burning or the occupation that followed it? Obviously, white America thought the latter, and black America thought the former. Whites who still refer to the Crisis simply as the "guns" incident are ignoring the point of view of the principle actors, the black students, to whom it was the "cross-burning" incident.

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The first representatives of the university the black students met face-to-face that morning were not the negotiators they expected, but a band of fraternity boys, led by the athletes' favorite house, Delta Upsilon. They had heard about the hubbub up at the Straight, and had decided just to put an end to all this nonsense. The jocks broke a window on a secluded side of the building and a few clambered in, only to be met by superior force and be clambered right back out ignominiously a few minutes later, bloodied and bowed. Next, the few score members of Cornell's Students for a Democratic Society (a tame cousin of the national SDS, which was already splintered into extremist factions) rushed to support the occupation.

To its chagrin, SDS did not have close relations with the AAS and had not been let in on its plans. Black and white radical politics were just not melding in America: joint meetings often dissolved over the demand by blacks that the whites acknowledge their racism and pay, on the spot, their share of the "reparations" owed to black America from slavery and segregation. During one anti-war demonstration in Washington, future mayor Marion Barry and future delegate to Congress Walter Fauntroy attacked the anti-war movement as racist and tried to cow the demonstration's organizers into funding their causes. Old-line Washington activist Julius Hobson denounced this as "blackmail" and turned it off even as a number of white activists were preparing to accede to the Barry group's political and financial demands. There was nobody Hobson's stature and confidence among blacks on the Cornell campus, and SDS and the AAS remained at a distance.

Still, for SDS, this was a cause it supported and an opportunity it couldn't pass up. The bad penny of Cornell campus politics, graduate student and SDS leader Dave Burak, came to the Straight and started speaking through a bull-horn to the growing crowd of supporters and onlookers. The tenor of his remarks can

be gleaned from a reporter's account of his response to a questioner who pointed out that some black students opposed the takeover: They are the "black bourgeois (sic)" who "don't realize what's best for them." The SDS contingent promised to block further attempts to enter the building, but the damage had been done. The students inside were convinced that the university had instructed the campus safety division to allow the whites in, when nothing was farther from the minds of the primary negotiators, Vice President Steven Muller and Dean of the Faculty Robert Miller, whose priority in the occupation was to avoid anything that could spark violence, and whose hesitancy had simply rubbed off on the campus police as well.

It was these men's fear of creating a confrontation that kept them from calling onto the campus the police from surrounding areas who were gathering in Ithaca, and who would have been needed to help the Cornell police cordon off the area, let alone retake the building. They decided to defuse the feeling of siege by letting blacks come and go from the building at will. On Saturday evening, the AAS, having heard of the buildup of police downtown, brought in up to 20 guns as the campus police watched. For Steve Muller and the rest of the administration, the guns were completely unexpected; for the black men leading the occupation, they were almost inevitable. They had read Eldridge Cleaver's glowing accounts of Huey Newton and his early Oakland cohort of Black Panthers stunning white authority and sparking black women as they moved with the sure dignity of African kings through the streets of San Francisco and the state assembly in Sacramento, openly displaying their legal weapons. Muller's mission, already focused on deterring violence, became simple and urgent: get the students out before the city authorities felt compelled by public opinion to evict them, and somebody got killed.

Muller had good reason to move quickly. In an interview some 20 years later, Congressman Matt McHugh recalled the mood in Ithaca Mayor Jack Kiely's office, where he had been called as district attorney of Tompkins County along with representatives of the state and city police: "There was enormous pressure to do something. People were calling, telegrams were coming in from all over. It took restraint not to use the police, and let Cornell work it out." McHugh noted that Kiely, a former Marine who still wore his regulation buzz-cut with pride, had the respect of the police, so it was hard for them or conservative Ithacans to accuse him of being soft. In holding off on the use of force he was, McHugh

said, "like Nixon going to China," able to do what a liberal could not have done. Still, the knowledge early Sunday morning that guns were in the building, McHugh said, "changed the equation." On Saturday, Kiely had already approved the calling of other counties' sheriffs to Ithaca as a reserve force, and roughly 300 had responded. Their eagerness to act was, according to McHugh, "very worrisome...Some were champing at the bit for the opportunity to put down the so-called long-haired students and the blacks. You had not-very-well trained police in a frame of mind to go in and kick some ass."

To McHugh, the situation was ripe for a tragedy: "You have to look at this in the context of the times, locally and nationally. It did not occur in a vacuum. Tensions had already been high at Cornell over previous incidents that year....There was a mood of division in the country, a feeling that you had to be tough." McHugh recalls that there were rumors of "rednecks in from the country areas with guns in their pick-up trucks," and that even before the guns went in, there was a feeling that "somebody could always get killed." The guns raised the level of tension dramatically, and "had an extra effect on the police."

Both Muller and AAS leader Eric Whitfield knew that with the guns Kiely would soon be forced to take over, which would escalate the chances of police action, so on Sunday morning they quickly came to terms. The occupation had really been a response to the cross-burning, so the demands were only a subtext to the real plot, and most had actually been met months before with Cornell's agreement to start a department of black studies directed by a young academic from Northwestern, James Turner. There was one final point of contention, though: the long dispute over the campus judicial system and the December protests. Muller was sympathetic to the demand that the reprimands be dropped, because they had become so deeply symbolic to black students as an example of the university's breaking its bond of reasonableness and trust with them. Surprisingly, though, he seized on one rule just as he dismissed another, telling Whitfield that only the faculty, and not the administration of the university, could nullify the reprimands.

Muller's position may have been politically right, but it was factually wrong. President Perkins had the power to waive a minor penalty in the interests of the institution; in fact, the faculty of the college of Arts and Sciences later that week voted to ask him to do that very thing. Muller must have been gauging how

far he could go without damaging the administration's relations with the faculty, and decided it was important not to obviate their role. Dean Miller solved the impasse by offering his honor as hostage: if the AAS would leave, he would do his best to encourage the faculty to nullify the reprimands and, although this would be kept secret, he would resign as dean if the faculty rejected his advice. With this final pledge, the AAS, which was so opposed to being reprimanded by the rules, agreed to let the rules govern the nullification of the reprimands.

In interviews shortly afterwards, Muller recalled that he had asked Whitfield if the AAS would leave in buses guarded by the safety patrol, or at least relinquish their guns. Whitfield reported back to Muller that the young men, having armed themselves and having heard rumors of other armed groups coming to get them, absolutely refused to give the guns up until they had walked back to the women's cooperative, and had symbolically and physically defended the women before the world. Muller and Whitfield had built up much trust in each other's representations of their constituencies, so Muller accepted Whitfield's assessment. He believed that he could not win on the guns without a lot more time, and time was precisely the thing he lacked the most, with the mounting public demand for decisive action by the police. Muller agreed that the AAS could walk out with unloaded guns, and that the university would not pursue judicial or legal action for the takeover. Both he and Whitfield knew, however, that the civil authorities would bring charges against AAS leaders, and within a few weeks McHugh did win indictments for coercion.

And so, 34 hours after coming in, the black students walked out, holding their unloaded - but easily loaded - weapons up for all the world to see as they marched across campus to the cooperative. With the printing of the picture of armed students emerging from the Straight on the front page of nearly every newspaper in the country, Cornell began its week in the national spotlight. Muller had done what he felt he had to in order to save the students' lives: "It was surrender or extinction. We didn't have time...only minutes. Would you prefer 30 killed and 100 injured?...Yes, we've lost something, but think of what we might have lost." As the danger of armed confrontation receded, it appeared that the Crisis was behind Cornell, but in his many level-headed decisions Muller had made one tremendous, well-intentioned blunder. By insisting on the faculty's concurrence in the settlement, he had unwittingly created a second crisis in the Crisis.