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Newspaper Article, Racial Tension Prompts Early Ole Miss Dismissal, April 9, 1968

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Racial Tension Prompts Early Ole Miss Dismissal

Fear of racial unrest at the University of Mississippi caused the administration to end classes yesterday at 4 p.m.

A confrontation between Negro students and white students at the University Union late Monday afternoon that resulted in the dismissal began when a group of Negroes staged a sit-in earlier in the day at the grill. Involved were approximately 30-40 students.

According to Johnny Johnson, executive editor of the DAILY MISSISSIPPIAN, the Negro students sat in the grill for five hours before tension began to build on campus. The resulting pressure from whites caused campus police to close the eating facility shortly after noon.

The Negro students then began moving across campus en masse. They were followed by about 150 whites who shouted slogans with racial overtones. As they moved near the Union, other whites joined them because rumor had spread that school would be dismissed at the first sign of trouble.

Shouts of "Who in the hell are we?" by the whites were answered by "Who in the hell cares?" by the Negro students. The shouting provoked the administration to request highway patrol help in keeping order on the campus.

Johnson further stated that he felt most of the incident was fabricated by the whites so that classes would be dismissed early for spring vacation.

At 4 p.m. classes were officially dismissed by Chancellor Fortune. When asked by a reporter if this was an action by the board of trustees, Dr. Street, who read the administration's statement, said no. When asked why the action was taken, he replied, "You may quote me as saying that the Chancellor likes long vacations."

National Guard troops had been waiting at the Oxford Armory since Friday night in case there was trouble in the area. They did not enter the campus.

Sunday Negro students and "a few whites" held a memorial service in the Oxford Square in honor of Dr. Martin Luther King. The event occurred without incident except that a group of white students gathered across the street to heckle the group.

Johnson stated also that he felt a "good deal of friction had been created between the Negro and white students at Ole Miss as a result of the past two days."

Reasons for the sit-in were not clear. After the dismissal of classes calm returned to the campus.

All Student Association Senators are reminded that they may pick up a copy of the proposed S.A. Constitution in the Student Government Office, Room 103 of the Union, anytime Tuesday. The Senate will meet tonight at 7 p.m. in Rooms 301-2 of the Union.