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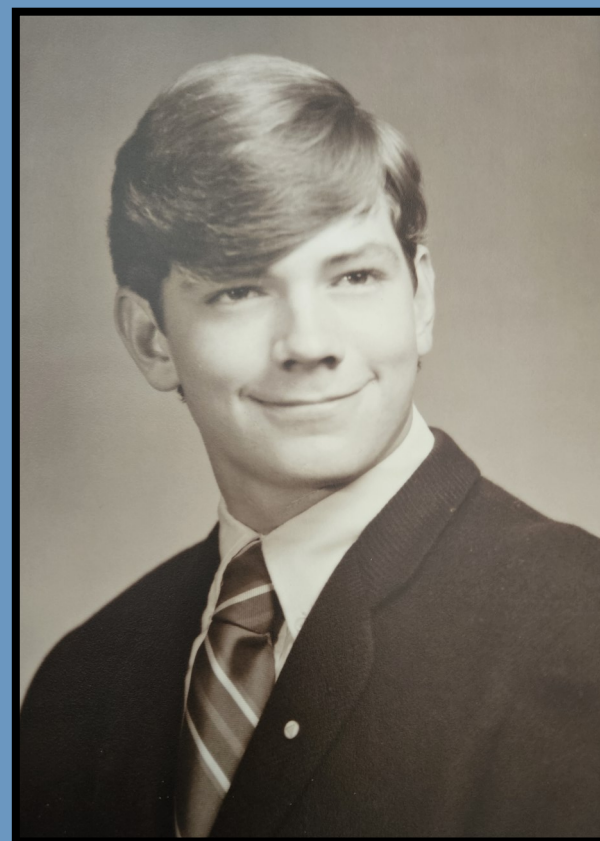


View of Oread Street. This photograph is inscribed "July 20, 1970 — where it ended— Gaslight Tavern, 1241 Oread — Harry Rice shot dead, Merton Olds shot in leg."

Courtesy of the Douglas County Historical Society/Watkins Museum of History

Harry "Nick" Rice

On July 20, 1970, Nick Rice, a white 19-year-old KU student, was shot and killed on Mount Oread by a Lawrence police officer. That evening, some sixty protesters, angered by the police killing of Rick "Tiger" Dowdell four days earlier and egged on by scores of bystanders, had rebelled, opening fire hydrants and tipping over a Volkswagen and attempting to set it on fire. The police fired tear gas and one officer shouted "shoot 'em." An officer fired through the tear gas, missing the would-be arsonist but striking Nick Rice, an innocent bystander in the crowd of spectators. When other bystanders attempted to provide aid, police fired tear gas around him. He died from a bullet wound to the base of his skull, indicating that rather than charging the police, he was fleeing from them. The next day, Kansas Governor Robert Docking ordered troops from the Kansas Highway Patrol to assist local law enforcement, effectively replacing the local police on Mount Oread where they were despised.



In the 1960s, Lawrence, Kansas, became the site of passionate protests for African American civil rights and Black Power. In 1960, Black Lawrencians protested against the Jayhawk Plunge, a privately-owned swimming pool that admitted whites but excluded Blacks. Scattered protests in the early 1960s were also launched against racist exclusion at restaurants and segregated seating at movie theaters. The first major civil rights protest erupted at the University of Kansas in 1965. Hundreds of students demanded that KU not only refuse to list whites-only rentals for off-campus dwellings, but also that it stop sending student teachers to school districts with "racially discriminatory hiring practices." 110 students were arrested and suspended from KU when they refused to leave Strong Hall. Later, however, they were reinstated, and KU conceded to their demands.

Not all future campus protests would be resolved so peacefully or so satisfactorily. Indeed, the next five years would be the bloodiest and most violent in the post-Civil War history of Lawrence. The Black Power movement, which would provoke the next protests, emerged first not at KU, but in 1968 at Lawrence High School (LHS). Unlike the multiracial and nonviolent Civil Rights Movement, Black Power espoused Black separatism and retaliatory self-defense. The Black students' initial goals were modest, including teaching Black history and hiring Black teachers. But when LHS was unresponsive, the Black students, supported by their parents, became more militant. Over the next two years, racial tensions in Lawrence rose, especially between militant Black students at LHS and KU and angry members of the Lawrence Police Department. And violence, including exchanges of gunfire and bombings, increased not only at LHS, but also at KU and throughout Lawrence.

From the mid-1960s to the early-1970s, the Vietnam War also emerged as a major issue of

concern for KU students and faculty as well as for the larger Lawrence community. Between 1965-1968, campus activists organized teach-ins on the war, and they picketed at the local draft board, the ROTC building, and the Sunflower Munitions Plant located thirteen miles east of Lawrence. KU students, especially draft-age men (18-26 years old), worried as the Selective Service System increased its monthly quotas.

On May 1st, 1970, President Nixon announced the invasion of Cambodia in an expansion of the Vietnam War. Protests erupted on college campuses across the nation. On May 4th, 4 people were killed and 9 wounded on the campus of Kent State. Two more were killed at Jackson State College on May 14th. At KU, a large antiwar protest occurred during the annual ROTC review in Memorial Stadium. Some 175 students nonviolently disrupted the review. A few lay down in front of the of the cadets to block their line of march, while others danced around the cadets, taunting them. Chancellor W. Clark Wescoe, alarmed by what he saw as anarchism," cancelled the review. The 1969 protest swelled the ranks of the antiwar movement. And the movement became more confrontational, its protests erupting several times in violent encounters between antiwar protesters and local police.

On July 16, 1970, a four-day siege of Lawrence erupted. Two KU students, one Black and one white, Rick "Tiger" Dowdell and Nick Rice, were shot to death by officers of the Lawrence Police Department.

For more information:

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