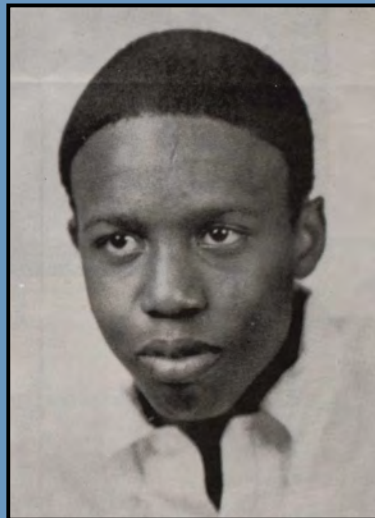




View of the alley, 900 block of New Hampshire Street.
Courtesy of the Lawrence Journal-World

Rick "Tiger" Dowdell

On July 16, 1970, Rick "Tiger" Dowdell was shot and killed by a Lawrence police officer. That evening, gunfire had erupted in East Lawrence. Tiger Dowdell, a 19-year-old Black KU student and Lawrence resident who had been a leader of the 1968 walkout at Lawrence High School, exchanged gunfire with Police Officer William Garrett as he dashed down an alley behind what is now the Lawrence Arts Center. Garrett was in hot pursuit, firing as he ran. One of his shots struck Dowdell in the back of his head. Tiger Dowdell died at the scene. The Black community and many whites as well were enraged; other whites along with the police were both fearful and angry. For the first time since 1865, Lawrence stood on the brink of a civil war.



Discover Lawrence History !

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, four days of violence erupted following the shooting death of Black KU student, Rick "Tiger" Dowdell, by officers of the Lawrence Police Department. This period concluded with another death, that of Nick Rice, a white KU student who was also shot by police. For more information on this turbulent time in Lawrence, open the link at the QR code below:

QR Code

