

in Birmingham. In her hand she held a shoe, one shoe, from the foot of her dead child. We hold that shoe with her. Every one of us in the white South holds that small shoe....” The column ended: “With a weeping Negro mother, we stand in the bitter smoke and hold a shoe. If our South is ever what we wish it to be, we will plant a flower of nobler resolve for the South now upon these four small graves that we dug.”

We often hear newspaper reporting described as the first draft of history.

“Covering Civil Rights” and “The Changing South of Gene Patterson” are superb examples and rich reading for anyone interested not only in history, but also in excellent journalism that helped to tell the stories of race in America in the mid-20th century. ■

Jack Nelson, a 1962 Nieman Fellow, became a reporter at the Biloxi Daily Herald in 1947 after graduating from high school, where his nickname was “Scoop.” He was a

reporter for 13 years at The Atlanta Constitution where he won a Pulitzer Prize for exposing conditions at a state mental institution. After serving as Atlanta bureau chief for the Los Angeles Times from 1965 to 1970, he joined the Times’s Washington bureau where he served 31 years, 21 years as Washington bureau chief. He retired at the end of 2001.

✉ scoopnelson@aol.com

Documenting the Orangeburg Massacre

Campus killings of black students received little news coverage in 1968, but a book about them keeps their memory alive.

By Jack Bass

At 10:33 p.m. on the night of February 8, 1968, eight to 10 seconds of police gunfire left three young black men dying and 27 wounded on the campus of South Carolina State College in Orangeburg. Exactly 33 years later, Governor Jim Hodges addressed an overflow crowd there in the Martin Luther King, Jr. Auditorium and referred directly to the “Orangeburg Massacre”—an identifying term for the event that itself had been controversial among South Carolinians. Governor Hodges called what happened “a great tragedy for our state” and expressed “deep regret.”

His audience that day included eight men in their fifties—including a clergyman, a college professor, and a retired Army lieutenant colonel—who had been shot that fateful night. Some of them still had lead in their bodies from gunshot wounds. For the first time, survivors were honored at this annual memorial service for the three students who died, Samuel Hammond, Delano Middleton, and Henry Smith. Their deaths, which happened more than two years before gunfire by national guardsmen in Ohio killed four students at Kent State University, marked the first such tragedy on any American

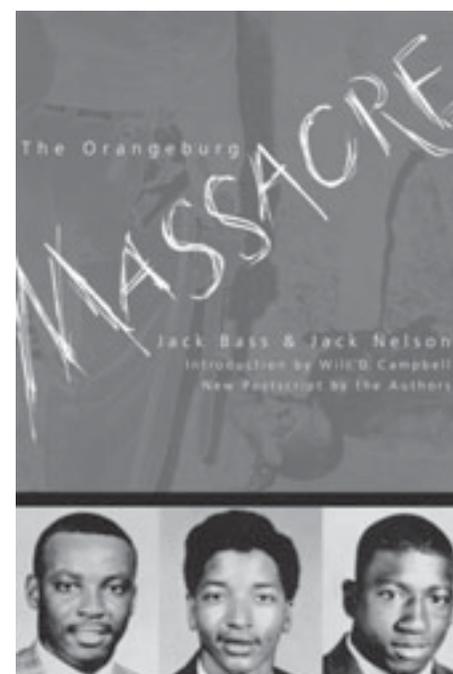
college campus.

Unlike Kent State, the students killed at Orangeburg were black, and the shooting occurred at night, leaving no compelling TV images. What happened barely penetrated the nation’s consciousness.

In an oral history project done during that 33rd anniversary, the eight attending survivors told their stories. Robert Lee Davis, a 260-pound football player when he was shot, was one of them. He drove from the small county seat town an hour away, where he worked with emotionally disturbed children. He told his interviewer, “One thing I can say is that I’m glad you all are letting us do the talking, the ones that were actually involved, instead of outsiders that weren’t there, to tell you exactly what happened.”

The Orangeburg Shootings

The shootings occurred two nights after an effort by students at the then almost all-black college to bowl at the city’s only bowling alley. The owner refused. Tensions rose and violence erupted. When it ended, nine students and one city policeman received hospital treatment for injuries. Other stu-



dents were treated at the college infirmary. College faculty and administrators at the scene witnessed at least two instances in which a female student was held by one officer and clubbed by another.

After two days of escalating tension, a fire truck was called to douse a bonfire lit by students on a street in front of



Tyrone Caldwell, a student at South Carolina State College, shook his finger at law officers after arrests were made when black students were barred from an all-white, private bowling alley in Orangeburg, South Carolina, February 6, 1968. Windows were smashed, cars overturned, and police hospitalized before the crowd dispersed. *Photo courtesy of The Associated Press.*

the campus. State troopers—all of them white, with little training in crowd control—moved to protect the firemen. As more than 100 students retreated inside the campus, a tossed banister rail struck one trooper in the face. He fell to the ground bleeding. Five minutes later, almost 70 law enforcement officers lined the edge of the campus. They were armed with carbines, pistols and riot guns—short-barreled shotguns that by dictionary definition are used “to disperse rioters rather than to inflict serious injury or death.” But theirs were loaded with lethal buckshot, which hunters use to kill deer. Each shell contained nine to 12 pellets the size of a .32 caliber pistol slug.

As students began returning to the front to watch their bonfire go out, a patrolman suddenly squeezed several rounds from his carbine into the air—apparently intended as warning shots. As other officers began firing, students fled in panic or dived for cover, many getting shot in their backs and sides and even the soles of their feet.

Davis recalled in his oral history interview: “The sky lit up. Boom! Boom!

Boom! Boom! Boom! Boom! And students were hollering, yelling and running. I went into a slope near the front end of the campus, and I kneeled down. I got up to run, and I took one step; that’s all I can remember. I got hit in the back.”

Later, Davis lay on the bloody floor of the campus infirmary, head to head with Hammond, a friend and quiet freshman halfback who also got shot in the back, and watched him die. Smith, a tall, slender ROTC student who had called his mother at two a.m. to tell her about the “shameful” beating of the female students by policemen, died after arriving at the hospital with five separate wounds. Middleton, a 200-pound high school football and basketball star whose mother worked as a maid at the college, died after asking her to recite the 23rd Psalm for him and then repeating it himself while lying on a hospital table with blood oozing from a chest wound over the heart.

Of 66 troopers on the scene, eight later told FBI agents they had fired their riot guns at the students after

hearing shots. Some fired more than once. A ninth patrolman said he fired his .38 caliber Colt service revolver six times as “a spontaneous reaction to the situation.” At least one city policeman—he later became police chief—fired a shotgun.

At a noon press conference the next day in Columbia, South Carolina, Governor Robert E. McNair called it “one of the saddest days in the history of South Carolina” and referred to “this unfortunate incident.” He expressed concern that the state’s “reputation for racial harmony had been blemished.” Contrary to all evidence, McNair also said the shooting occurred off campus. He placed blame on “black power advocates” and added other inaccurate embellishments.

Reporting on the Massacre and Its Aftermath

In federal court more than a year later, a jury took less than two hours to acquit nine troopers charged with imposing summary punishment without due process of law. The trial uncovered stark facts about this armed attack on a college campus, and this evidence helped immeasurably in research that a fellow Nieman, Jack Nelson, and I did in writing “The Orangeburg Massacre,” a book first published in 1970. The book has been accepted by historians as the definitive account of what happened that night and of actions that took place in its aftermath.

In the fall of 1970, two-and-a-half years after the shooting, a jury in Orangeburg convicted Cleveland L. Sellers, Jr. of “riot” because of limited activity at the bowling alley two nights before the shooting. Sellers, who had grown up 20 miles from Orangeburg, had returned from the Deep South combat zone of the civil rights struggle as national program director for the militant Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). The presiding judge threw out charges of conspiracy to riot and incitement to riot, but the charge of riot stood. “Nobody here has ever put the defendant into the area of rioting on Wednesday or Thursday [the night of the shooting]

with the exception that he was wounded and that to my mind means very little,” the judge commented. Sellers, who is profiled in the book as “the scapegoat,” served seven months of a one-year sentence in state prison, with early release for good behavior.

In a November 1970 report on the Sellers trial in the *Southern Patriot*, Dave Nolan (now a historian for civil rights and other issues in St. Augustine, Florida) wrote that had the shooting happened “earlier, there might have been a public outcry. But this was 1968, not 1964, and in the intervening years civil rights demonstrations had come to be seen as ‘riots’—and most whites seemed to feel that it was justified to put them down as brutally as possible.” He suggested that the slaughter of the Vietnam War had so brutalized the public mind as to make three black lives “seem that much less important.”

The Associated Press initially misreported the shooting as “a heavy exchange of gunfire”—and didn’t correct it. In the aftermath of major urban riots, the national media’s interest in civil rights faded, and what happened on the campus at Orangeburg, where the victims were black, was out of tune with the times and not considered “news.” Few questioned Governor McNair’s misleading account.

In his report, Nolan concluded, “A new book, ‘The Orangeburg Massacre,’ ... will hopefully prick the public conscience.” Our book was widely and positively reviewed, and it also received extensive news coverage, especially its disclosures about shoddy FBI practices that included false statements by FBI agents on the scene to Justice Department superiors to cover up for the state troopers. F.B.I. Director J. Edgar Hoover sent me a three-page letter—scalding in tone but erroneous and defensive in content. Together with my rebuttal letter to him, it generated another spate of news stories.

In many cities where the book had received rave reviews, however, it was unavailable in major bookstores. Although Hoover’s wrath scared away a syndicate that had committed to purchase rights for a series of newspaper articles, the distribution problem



Two black demonstrators killed in the Orangeburg Massacre lie on the ground at the edge of South Carolina State College in Orangeburg on February 8, 1968. Following three days of protests, which began when blacks were barred from entering a bowling alley by the proprietor, state police and national guardsmen confronted demonstrators. Three students were killed and 27 wounded. *Photo courtesy of The Associated Press.*

flowed from our editor (now deceased), who had been described to me by an author who had worked with him as “brilliant—and the most vindictive person I’ve ever met.” With us, he soon became contentious. Once, when I insisted to a sales clerk at a bookstore in Philadelphia that the book actually existed, he opened the current issue of “Books in Print,” showed me there was no entry for “The Orangeburg Massacre,” and said, “You must be mistaken. There is no such book.”

Working to Right the Wrongs

Journalism, of course, requires that reporters remain detached from events they cover. But since becoming an academic, I have been free to do what I can

to secure the Orangeburg Massacre’s place in history and to see that my native state addresses issues of truth and justice. Along the way, I have authored or coauthored six other books, including a text for a television history course on the American South since World War II—a project for which I served as director and executive editor. That project led indirectly to a 1984 reissue of “The Orangeburg Massacre” by Mercer University Press.

Subsequently, I became involved in the process that led a decade ago to the pardon of Sellers, who then received a faculty appointment at the University of South Carolina (USC). Despite a master’s degree from Harvard and PhD from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, he had been unable to

get a college teaching job in South Carolina. He remains at USC, directing the African American Studies program and teaching classes that consistently are oversubscribed. In June he received the 2003 Distinguished Service Award from the mainstream Greater Columbia Community Relations Council.

When I returned to South Carolina in 1999 as professor of humanities and social sciences at the College of Charleston, I became involved in efforts that led to a state historical marker about the Orangeburg Massacre being placed on the South Carolina State campus. The 2001 oral history program developed from a student project in a "Depth Reporting" class I taught, and Governor Hodges made his speech after I dropped off a copy of "The Orangeburg Massacre" at his office. He later told me he was 11 when the shooting occurred and had never really understood what happened until he read the book.

Historian Bill Hine at South Carolina State has worked closely with me on many of these issues, as well as convening a panel on Orangeburg at last year's Southern Historical Associa-

tion annual meeting, the first such presentation at a major academic conference. It attracted an overflow crowd.

This year I produced a 35-minute video about the Orangeburg story based on the oral history interviews, which I showed to the 2003 class of Nieman Fellows. On that visit I also met with producers from Northern Lights Productions in Boston, who have begun working on a major documentary about the Orangeburg Massacre. As I write, a major religious denomination in the state is developing a plan to use the video as a mean of developing dialogue around the issue of race.

On this year's 35th anniversary, Governor Mark Sanford went a step beyond what Governor Hodges had said, issuing a statement: "I think it's appropriate to tell the African-American community in South Carolina that we don't just regret what happened in Orangeburg 35 years ago—we apologize for it." Two black state senators responded by introducing legislation calling for an official state investigation (there's never been one) and report of what happened. One of them told the

Los Angeles Times that you don't apologize for something unless you're guilty. Now there is interest in a film.

In the concluding sentence of a 2002 postscript to a new paperback edition of our book, Nelson and I wrote, "Whether the state eventually provides restitution as the final stage of reconciliation, as Florida did more than a half-century after the destruction of the all-black town of Rosewood, remains to be seen." ■

Jack Bass, a 1966 Nieman Fellow, as Columbia, South Carolina bureau chief for The Charlotte Observer covered the tragedy as it unfolded in 1968. He received the 1994 Robert F. Kennedy Book Award grand prize for "Taming the Storm," a biography of Judge Frank M. Johnson, Jr. of Alabama. Bass spent 12 years as professor of journalism at the University of Mississippi, received a PhD at Emory University, and is now a professor of humanities and social sciences at the College of Charleston.

✉ BassJ@cofc.edu

The Work and Struggles of Black Reporters

Covering the Black Power revolution 'was the only time that mainstream media put an important story entirely in the hands of black reporters.'

By Dori J. Maynard

It was an era unlike any other. It came on the heels of the civil rights movement. First came the urban explosions of the mid-1960's known as "the riots" and then the calls of "Black Power" and the emergence of "the black consciousness movement." What took place became known as "the black revolution," and it was a revolution that changed the country and changed the way the media covered issues involving race in this country.

White journalists, many of whom

risked their lives and made their careers, covered the civil rights movement. But as civil rights morphed into Black Power, white journalists could not cover all aspects of the emerging story. Suddenly, white editors hired black journalists who had been repeatedly rejected from scores of newspapers.

The Maynard Institute History Project and its Robert C. Maynard Oral History Collection document and preserve the stories of those courageous

African-American journalists who broke into general circulation media during the turbulent 1960's and 1970's. The two-part project includes The Caldwell Journals. Written by former New York Times reporter and Daily News columnist Earl Caldwell, the serialized account of those stormy years captures the dramatic tale of the journalist behind the words, the journalist as player. The Robert C. Maynard Oral History Collection captures the voices of journalists telling their own stories. Those