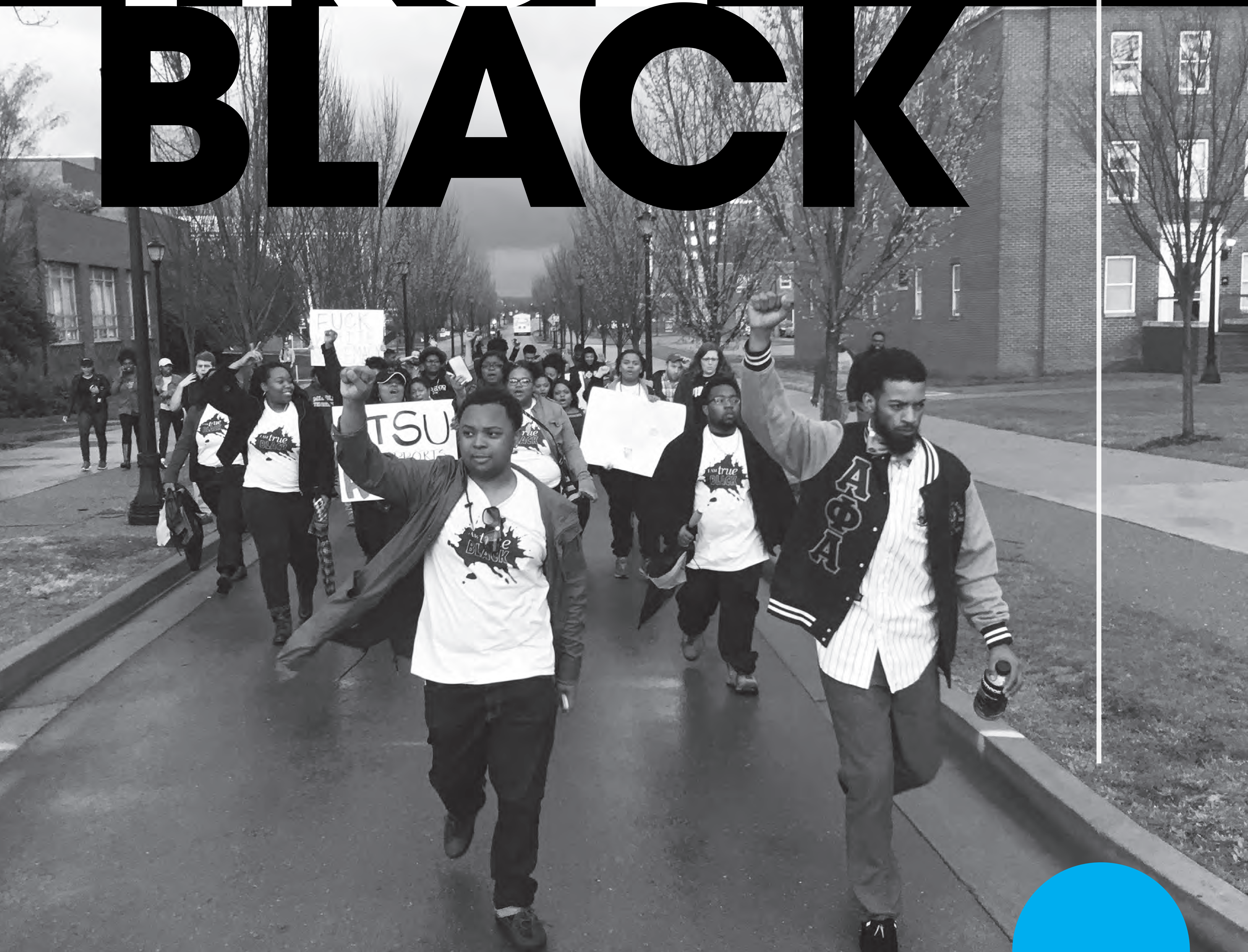
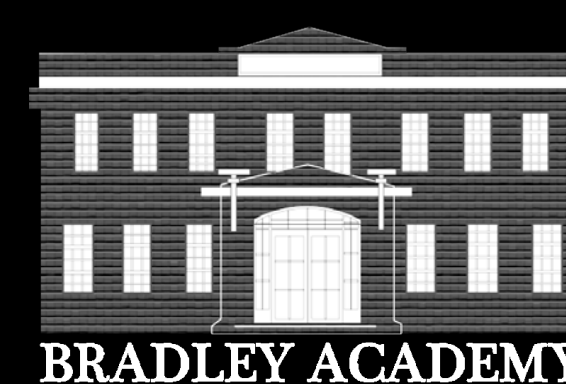


I AM TRUE BLACK



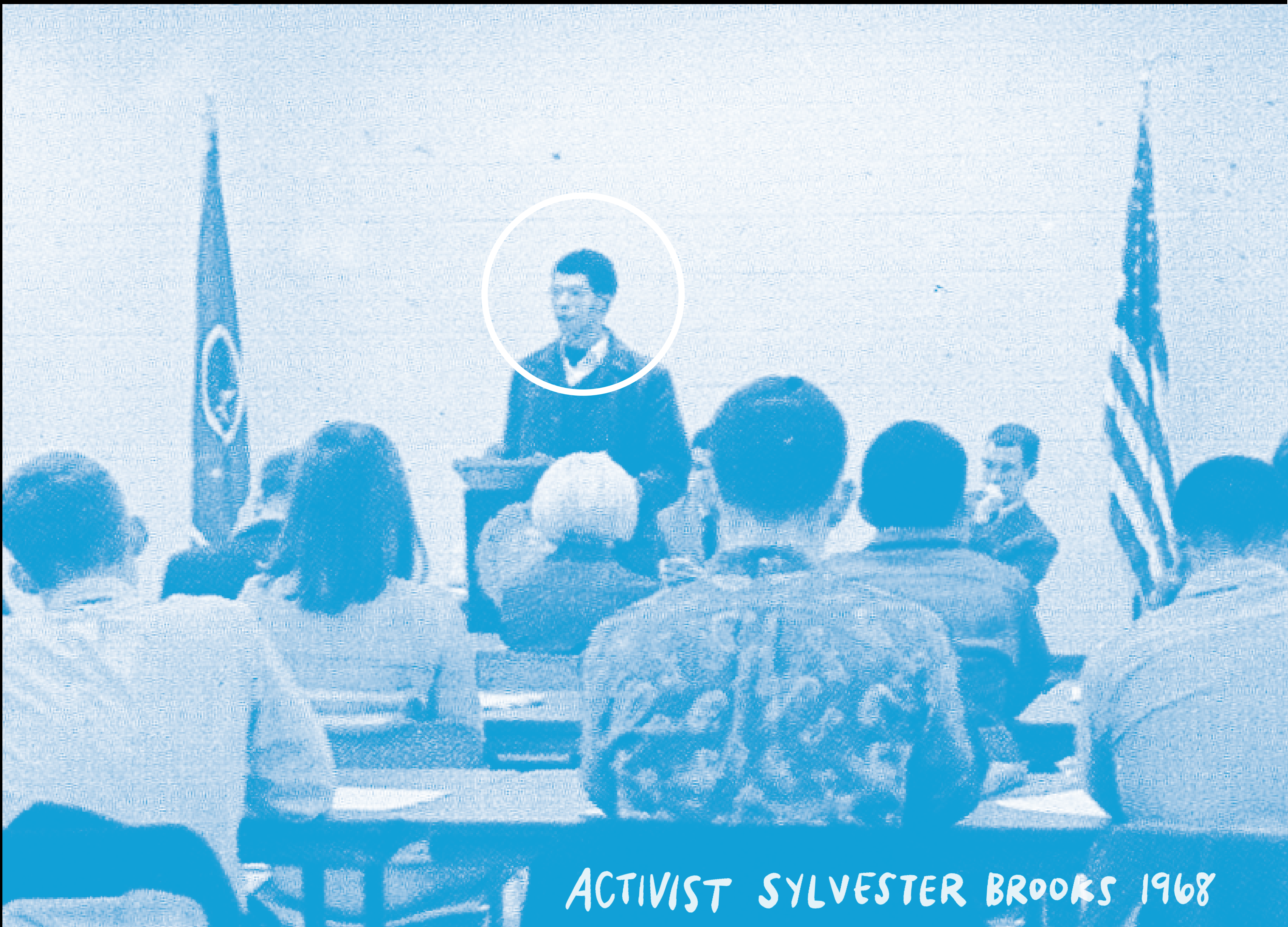
A History of Black Student Life & Activism





Students across the country are united in a Black consciousness, thus developing within the Black vanguard a means for constructive revolutionary change in American society.

—Don Coleman
Sidelines, March 1969

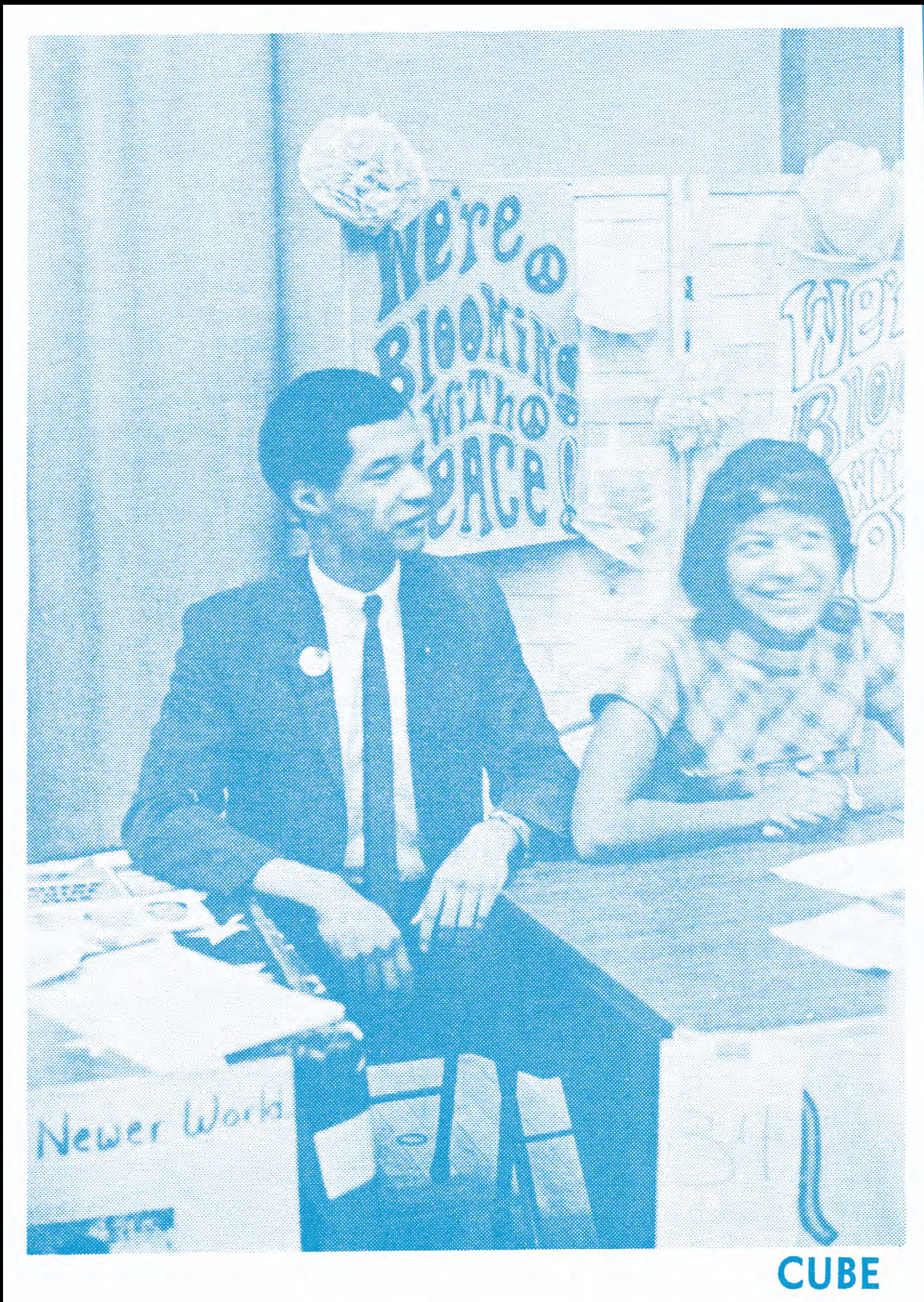


ACTIVIST SYLVESTER BROOKS 1968

MTSU student Don Coleman wrote about the importance of Black student movements in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The Black revolution on campus challenged racism and tradition at predominantly white universities and created support for Black Power and pride. Coleman proclaimed, “The Black student in America and on this campus (MTSU) is tired of waiting for whites to understand and to accept the ideas and ideals of the Black movement. Therefore, we want our own Black Student Union, our own Black courses, but most of all we want to be our own man.”

According to historian Dr. Martha Biondi, Black students organized

protests and ignited activism on nearly two hundred college campuses across the United States between 1968 and 1972. MTSU was one such campus with a Black student movement led largely by **Sylvester Brooks**, a charismatic young man from Memphis. Brooks and his allies called for a complete **ban** of Confederate symbols, the addition of **Black history courses**, increased **representation** in student government and other departments, and they **founded** Greek organizations and Black Student Union. Many of MTSU’s Black students from this era built a foundation of activism, perseverance, and community that continues today.





“

Every time I walk by that building, it reminds me that we haven't advanced that much. It's taken years for us to get this far with the petition, so if it doesn't pass, we'll just keep trying.

—Amber Perkins
Sidelines, March 2007

”



Middle Tennessee State University *Sidelines*
Vol. 40 No. 23 Murfreesboro, Tennessee 37130 December 19, 1968

FORREST TO STAY: HOUSE



SYLVESTER BROOKS + ROBERT RUCKER
FIGHT FOR FORREST HALL REMOVAL.



BLUE RAIDER MASCOT
AT THE 1968 HOMECOMING PARADE.



CONFEDERATE FLAG ADORNING A
KAPPA ALPHA ORDER'S HOMECOMING FLOAT IN 1968.

Black student activism at MTSU often centers on the abolishment of Confederate symbols, specifically the presence of slave trader and Klan leader Nathan Bedford Forrest. Brooks first spoke out against MTSU's infatuation with supporting the Lost Cause narrative back in October 1968, when he published a column in *Sidelines* called, "Dixie: What Does It Mean?" Brooks' protests brought about some change—a **new fight song and a new mascot**. In 1989, the NAACP student chapter triumphed in the removal of a Forrest plaque attached to Keathley University Center. In 2007, 2015, 2016, and 2020 students targeted **Forrest Hall** with protests, but the name remains. Over the past five decades, Black students

have chipped away at racist symbols and structures on and off campus while also excelling in leadership roles from Homecoming queen to student body president. This exhibit recognizes and honors the activism and achievements of MTSU's Black students, both past and present. We aim to explore the meaning behind the student-created phrase "I Am True Black."



MTSU'S Black History

1911 Middle Tennessee State Normal is founded

1911 Ed Turner, a Black man, is hired as first janitor, server, and water boy

1930 The Midlander yearbook features enslaved people picking cotton and an illustration of a Ku Klux Klan lynching

1940 T-Club, a booster organization, officially adopts Nathan Bedford Forrest as the school's mascot

1958 MTSU officially dedicates the ROTC building as Forrest Hall

1961 The college debuts the Nathan Bedford Forrest raider mascot at Homecoming

1962 Olivia Woods becomes first full-time Black undergraduate student

1965 Robert Mallard becomes first Black athlete, walking onto the track team in the spring

1968 In October, Sylvester Brooks writes article in Sidelines called, "Dixie: What Does It Mean?" in which he condemns the use of Confederate symbols on campus

1968 In December, the Associated Student Body votes against removing Forrest mascot, but President Scarlett demands his removal, a new fight song, and the banning of Confederate flags at sporting events

1969 In May, the Black Student Union is founded

1969 The Haynes-Turner Maintenance building is dedicated to Black custodians Ed Turner and Billy Haynes

1969 The first Black history courses are taught by Bart McCash and Roscoe Strickland

1970 December 4, the first Black cheerleaders are elected to the squad after Black students protested the lack of representation on the previous all-white squad

1970 From December 7 to 11, the Black Student Union hosts educational programming called "Get Hip Whitey Week"

1970 On December 8 and 10, two crosses are burned on campus, seemingly in response to the Black Student Union's programs

1973 Mary C. Scales becomes the first Black faculty member

1973 First officially chartered Black Greek organizations; Delta Sigma Theta is first local Black sorority and Kappa Alpha Psi is first Black fraternity

1978 Michael McDonald becomes first Black student body president

1979 Black student enrollment hits 1,000 for the first time

1991 Dr. James E. Walker becomes the first Black university president

2006 Student activists start the group Students Against Forrest Hall to get the name removed

2015 Student activists start protests against Forrest Hall once again, following the murder of nine people at Mother Emanuel church in Charleston, South Carolina

2020 Following the murder of George Floyd, students participate in a Black Lives Matter protest in Murfreesboro, which included them marching to Forrest Hall to protest its name

Olivia Woods (1962), Black Student Union founded (1969), Delta Sigma Theta (1973), Mary C. Scales (1973), protest against Forrest Hall (2016)



Mary C. Scales
Associate Dean
Cart; ext. 2462

