

### ON THIS DAY IN WEST VIRGINIA HISTORY NOVEMBER 21

*Bluefield State Phys Ed Building Ripped By Explosion*



**On November 21, 1968, a bomb exploded in the Physical Education at Bluefield State College.**

**CSO: SS.8.25, ELA.8.1**

**Investigate the Document:** *(State Papers and Public Addresses of Hulett C. Smith: 1965-69)*

1. What agency was requested by Governor Smith to investigate at Bluefield State College after a series of disturbances between blacks and whites at football games resulted in the suspension of several students?
2. What was the reward, offered by Governor Smith, for information leading to the arrest of those responsible for the bombing? Where on campus did the bomb explode?
3. How many people did Governor Smith speculate were in the vicinity of the explosion and could have potentially lost their lives?
4. How did Governor Smith describe the college administration's response to student demonstrators?

**Think Critically:** Were violent altercations and hostilities a common occurrence between whites and blacks on college campuses during the 1960s? What do you think it was like for African Americans in the late-1960s, shortly after the Jim Crow laws were removed? What do you think it felt like for people to live under a Jim Crow system?

## SPECIAL SECTION

## BLUEFIELD STATE COLLEGE

*During 1967 and 1968, unrest manifested itself in several ways at Bluefield State College, a formerly all-Negro institution in Bluefield.*

*In 1967, disturbances between whites and blacks at football games, and various disturbances on campus, resulted in the suspension of several students.*

*The West Virginia Human Rights Commission was requested, by Governor Smith, to conduct an investigation into the situation there, and to provide him with a report on the situation, so that he might have information available with which he could go to work on the problem at the college, specifically, and in the community, generally.*

*The Commission held public hearings on the Bluefield campus, and in the months that followed, there was a clamor from many sources for release of the full report and conclusions of the Commission.*

*The Governor, early in 1968, released that part of the report that dealt specifically with the college. He withheld releasing the entire report, however, until later that year, for reasons he outlined at that time.*

*The Bluefield College situation developed into a crisis stage in November of 1968, when the gymnasium at the college was bombed, and several persons narrowly escaped injury or death. This was followed by an immediate suspension of classes and closing of the dormitories by the administration and the Board of Education, and by an increase in apprehension on the campus.*

*Governor Smith offered a \$5,000 reward for information leading to the arrest of those responsible for the bombing. He further urged the college to reopen dormitories quickly, once the tensions eased.*

*Throughout the entire controversy at Bluefield, Smith was meeting, publicly and privately, with representatives of both sides in an effort to keep matters as calm as possible and to achieve some understanding, dialogue and conciliation between the two sides.*

*Although the West Virginia public generally feels the Governor has control over all things, in fact Smith was hampered from direct action and intervention in the Bluefield case because the State Board of Education, which has jurisdiction over colleges, is not answerable to the Governor and operates as an independent agency.*

*His efforts were further hampered by what appeared to be a mutual distrust between black students and the administration.*

*—The Editor*

3. To answer what has become a constant challenge to this Commission as to the "public's right to know" the results of the public hearings at Bluefield State College.
4. To have the "Report" serve as valuable information to those educational institutions and communities which are struggling with similar problems related to formerly all-Negro educational institutions.

Finally, the Commission has learned the Federal court has now issued its opinion justifying and upholding the suspensions of the ten students at Bluefield State College. This decision would seem to remove any inhibition that publication of our "Bluefield Report" might be seen as an attempt to influence the Federal court. Inasmuch as the court decision has not dealt with the much broader scope of the findings and recommendations in our "Bluefield Report," the Commission feels the public should now be enlightened as to the full contents of the long awaited "Bluefield Report." This Commission is fully aware that upon publication not everyone will be in full agreement with this Commission's findings and recommendations, as they were not with the "Warren Commission Report," nor the "Kerner Commission Report," but we feel there is important educational value in the "Bluefield Report" for those who are sincerely concerned with efforts to understand, prevent, and resolve the human relations problems that created the need for this Commission's investigation, public hearing, and preparation of the "Report" itself.

We respectfully request that you do release the "Bluefield Report" to the general public and we would appreciate that your office coordinate with our staff whatever requirements there may be for its release and distribution.

Sincerely,

/s/

Rabbi Samuel Cooper  
Chairman

SC/ae

cc: All Commissioners

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April 19, 1968

STATE OF WEST VIRGINIA  
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR  
CHARLESTON 25305

Rabbi Samuel Cooper  
1706 Quarrier Street  
Charleston, West Virginia 25311

Dear Rabbi Cooper:

Thank you for your letter expressing the desire of the West Virginia Human Rights Commission to release the complete report on the investigation by the Commission at Bluefield State College.

I am continuing my efforts to resolve the problems that have been presented and the implementation of the recommendations that we have discussed. However, I feel that since this report was made at my request it would be to the best interest of all at this time that it not be made public.

I appreciate your concern and shall continue to cooperate fully with the Commission in its efforts to improve the human rights for all throughout West Virginia.

With best wishes,

Sincerely,

HULETT C. SMITH  
Governor

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Statement by the Governor

November 22, 1968

I have been deeply disturbed over the turn of events on the campus of Bluefield State College—events which climaxed last night with a criminal and irresponsible act that could have very easily taken the lives of at least nine persons who were in close proximity to the college gymnasium when a bomb exploded.

The Department of Public Safety, of course, is conducting a thorough investigation into this matter, and is making every effort, under the direction of Colonel Welty, to obtain full information relating to the explosion.

The control of State schools and colleges, as you know, does not rest with the Governor's Office under our constitution. Nonetheless, we do have, and intend to exercise, our responsibility to apprehend those responsible for this most recent, dangerous act. We *shall* enforce the law.

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The State of West Virginia, therefore, is offering a \$5,000 reward for information leading to the arrest and conviction of persons conspiring to destroy or injure life or property on the Bluefield State College campus and its environs.

I am taking this action under provisions of West Virginia's "Red Man Act," which authorizes the Governor to offer rewards and to employ any and all means in his power to secure the apprehension of any and all persons participating in an "unlawful combination," or who shall be charged with the commission of any offense mentioned in the act.

The act specifically refers to a conspiracy for the purpose of inflicting any punishment or bodily injury upon any person or persons, or for the purpose of destroying, injuring, defacing or taking and carrying away any property not their own. Any one participating in any conspiracy to carry out such acts, whether he actually commits the act or not, shall be guilty of a misdemeanor. And any person convicted of participating in the act itself shall be guilty of a felony. This is not the only area, or instance, where this act may apply, and if it seems desirable, I *shall* utilize it, wherever necessary.

There is no doubt in my mind that last night's incident comes within the provisions of this act. Our information indicates that more than one person has been involved in this most recent disturbance.

The State Board of Education, of course, has the responsibility of supervising the operation of the college, and is meeting its responsibilities. I conferred with Board officials earlier this afternoon. The responsibility we have, and which we fully accept, is to do everything possible to apprehend those responsible for the explosion and other acts of violence, and to make certain it does not happen again. I understand that members of the Board of Education are in Bluefield at this time, meeting with officials of Bluefield State.

By way of background, let me point out that at the time of the explosion, security on the campus was being maintained by at least two State Policemen, two Bluefield City policemen, and six privately-employed guards. This security system was placed in effect after a meeting I had yesterday morning with Colonel Welty, and after officials of the State Board of Education and Colonel Welty had agreed to additional security measures.

As soon as the first tip arrived that there might be a bomb planted on the campus, the City and State Policemen initiated a search of the campus. They had just completed a search of the Administration Building, and were heading for the gymnasium to conduct a search there, when the explosion occurred. They narrowly escaped death, or serious injury.

There were five persons in the gymnasium moments before the explosion—a watchman, two janitors, and two student workers. One of these persons saw the bomb fizzling and evacuated the building immediately, also narrowly escaping death.

Had it not been for the curtailed activities necessitated by the situation on the campus, even a larger number of people would have been in the building at the time of the explosion.

The Department of Public Safety is following all leads, and will follow this investigation through to its inevitable conclusion.

Classes at the college have been suspended today, while the investigation is continuing.

We hope the offer of this \$5,000 reward will bring forth some additional information that will lead to the arrest and conviction of those responsible.

Colonel Welty and Attorney General Robertson are present, and all of us will be happy to answer any questions you may have.

**December 7, 1968**

MERCER COUNTY COUNCIL ON HUMAN RELATIONS

The Honorable Hulett C. Smith  
Governor of the State of West Virginia  
Governor's Mansion  
Charleston, West Virginia

Dear Governor Smith:

Please be assured of the gratitude and pleasure of the Mercer County Council on Human Relations at your gracious and generous reception of our representatives, Mr. David Kee and the Reverend William Galbreath, on Friday, December 6.

As those gentlemen stated, there is a growing concern here that agencies of the government be sensitive to the needs of the people to participate in decisions affecting their lives. There has been for some time a feeling on the part of many people here, and especially black people, that government has not been aware of, nor responsive to, their legitimate needs and desires. Certainly much of the difficulty at Bluefield State College reflects this situation.

There was little mutual confidence between the present college administration and a large part of the student body to begin with, and the response of the college administration to student demonstrators has been no more productive of a will to cooperate among students than the increasing militance of students has produced a feeling of charity in the college administration.