

Mississippi Landmark Significance Report

Alexander Hall
Jackson State University
prepared by Jennifer Baughn
Chief Architectural Historian, MDAH
August 5, 2011

ML log #: 07-013-11

1. Date considered by committee:
August 11, 2011
2. Name of property:
Alexander Hall, JSU
3. County: Hinds
4. Address of property:
Jackson State University
5. Owner of property:
Jackson State University
6. National Register Status:
Eligible, not listed



Situation Summary: This designation request is by MDAH architectural historians and comes in response to a Notice of Intent from JSU (dated July 1, 2011) to renovate Alexander Hall. MDAH staff identified the building in a survey of the campus conducted in January 2009 as National Register eligible due to its historical significance.

Resource Description: Alexander Hall is a five-story H-shaped building in a Modernist style. The original U-shaped section opening to the south, designed by the Jackson architectural firm Overstreet, Ware & Ware, was built in 1963; the two north-facing wings, built in 1967, were designed by Frank E. Rice. The building's plain buff-brick walls are punctuated by aluminum windows and vivid blue Masonite spandrels. The main entrance lobby extends the full depth and width of the central cross-wing and is fully glazed, allowing the visitor to see through the building to the opposite courtyard. Glazed staircases at the end of the southern wings played an important role in the May 1970 shootings. A memorial to the two victims of the Jackson State shootings in 1970 is located in the green space between the two south wings.

Historical Significance: Alexander Hall was the scene of a somewhat confused Civil Rights/Anti-Vietnam War protest beginning on May 13, 1970, that turned deadly when police opened fire on demonstrators on May 14. The original protest included students frustrated by intimidation from white passersby on Lynch Street—which then divided the campus—as well as those wishing to express solidarity with the Kent State anti-war protesters killed in the riot of May 4. Police and state troopers responded to the scene in force on the second night of protests (May 14) after reports of gunfire, rock-throwing at white drivers, and vandalism. Following a tense and confused standoff, police began firing on the protesters in reaction to supposed gunfire from Alexander Hall. Two people were killed, one a Jackson State student and the other a senior at nearby Jim Hill High School, and at least a dozen were seriously wounded. FBI investigators later found that every window on the south façade had been broken, and they identified over 150 bullet holes in the brick walls of the building. Alexander Hall still bears these marks in its bricks.

Architectural Significance: While a good example of the 1960s interpretation of Modernist design, with its emphasis on angular forms and accents of color, Alexander Hall's primary significance lies in its historical association with the events of May 13-15, 1970.

Integrity: Since Alexander Hall is being nominated for designation based on its historical rather than its architectural significance, the primary question becomes whether participants in the historical event would recognize the building as the same place they remember. Alexander Hall easily meets this standard, with the obvious exception of repairs made after the shootings. Many original spandrels on the southern elevations were probably replaced due to extreme damage from the bullets, and of course, window glass was also replaced. It also appears that the original entrance to the lobby has been altered, perhaps with a new glass wall on the south side of the lobby. Photos of the building from the 1960s also show a neon-type sign over the entrance, now also removed. However, these are all minor and relatively insignificant changes to an otherwise highly intact building.

Designation Intent/Property Description: This designation applies to both the exterior and the interior of Alexander Hall, including the courtyard space and memorial on the south side of the building where the primary action occurred on May 14, 1970. Since the building is still a functioning dormitory, the primary interior spaces that should be considered of high priority for preservation in any future renovations are the lobby and hallways, while more thorough renovation might occur in dorm rooms and ancillary spaces.

Property/Legal Description:



20 The Clanton-Ledger JACKSON DAILY NEWS
SECTION A Sunday, May 24, 1970



REMOVE EVIDENCE — Workmen remove a bullet-riddled panel from Jackson State College where two young Negroes were killed last week. The evidence was removed from the scene Saturday by the state and turned over to the FBI. — AP Wirephoto.

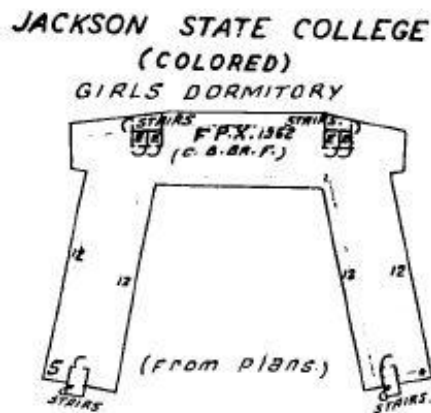


Figure 1: Original section of Alexander Hall shown on 1962 Sanborn map as "From Plans"