

# State of Louisiana



## EXECUTIVE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL STATEMENT

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### *AMENDE HONORABLE* *to the Families of Leonard Brown and Denver Smith,* *Students United,* *& the Community of Southern University*

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- WHEREAS,** fifty years since the tragic deaths of Southern University students Leonard Brown and Denver Smith, it is appropriate to recognize and attempt to rectify the historic injustice perpetrated on November 16, 1972;
- WHEREAS,** in 1972, during a national movement to advance Civil Rights for Black Americans, students at Southern University heroically demonstrated and protested against a system which had long denied citizens like themselves inalienable rights and fair treatment due to them under the laws and constitution of a civilized society;
- WHEREAS,** on the morning of November 16, 1972, after weeks of ongoing protests, students at Southern University and A&M College bravely and peacefully gathered in Baton Rouge to protest the disparity of educational opportunities in Louisiana;
- WHEREAS,** on that fateful morning, Leonard Brown and Denver Smith—both just twenty years old—were senselessly and unjustly killed when a law enforcement officer, who was never identified or prosecuted, fired into a crowd of students fleeing from tear gas;
- WHEREAS,** in the aftermath of the tragic killings of Brown and Smith, the Louisiana State Board of Education unjustly and unduly punished nine student leaders involved in that protest, who comprised the leadership of Students United at Southern University: Louis J. Anthony, Charlene Hardnett, Frederick Prejean, Donald Mills, Herget Harris, Paul Shivers, Willie T. Henderson, Ricky Hill, and Nathaniel Howard;
- WHEREAS,** it is right and just for the state of Louisiana, by and through its duly-elected Governor, John Bel Edwards, to make amends to those who were victims of injustices perpetrated by the State;
- WHEREAS,** in keeping with ancient French Civilian tradition, it is proper and prudent for this State to formally and openly acknowledge the sins and wrongs of its past in an *amende honorable*, which is a historical form of formal reparation for an offense or injury, done by making an open and humbling acknowledgment and apology to restore the victim's honor; and
- WHEREAS,** Louisiana seeks to make amends for the wrongs perpetrated in its name against Leonard Brown and Denver Smith, Louis J. Anthony, Charlene Hardnett, Frederick Prejean, Donald Mills, Herget Harris, Paul Shivers, Willie T. Henderson, Ricky Hill, and Nathaniel Howard, and the community of Southern University.

**NOW THEREFORE, I, JOHN BEL EDWARDS,** Governor of the state of Louisiana, by virtue of the authority vested by the Constitution and the traditions and laws of the State of Louisiana, do hereby declare as follows:

Fifty years after the senseless tragedy of November 16, 1972, when officers wielding the power and authority of the state of Louisiana unjustly killed Leonard Brown and Denver Smith of Southern University, it is right and just for Louisiana to try to make amends. In those dark times, our State failed to uphold its highest ideals. And in the aftermath of that senseless tragedy, the harm to our State and to the Southern University community was exacerbated by the punishment of those students who endeavored to fight against the unjust treatment of the Black citizens of our State.

On this day, we recognize the lost potential and promise of the lives of Leonard Brown and Denver Smith, who were so unjustly taken from their community and families at such a young age, as well as those nine leaders of Students United who were unfairly punished for their activism in the struggle for justice.

For these reasons, the state of Louisiana offers today its *Amende Honorable* to the families of Leonard Brown and Denver Smith and all those who hold their memory dear, and to Students United and Louis J. Anthony, Charlene Hardnett, Frederick Prejean, Donald Mills, Herget Harris, Paul Shivers, Willie T. Henderson, Ricky Hill, and Nathaniel Howard, their families and all those who keep their memory, and to the community of Southern University.

**IN WITNESS WHEREOF,** I have set my hand officially and caused to be affixed the Great Seal of Louisiana in the City of Baton Rouge, on this 16<sup>th</sup> day of November, 2022.



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GOVERNOR OF LOUISIANA